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Syracuse basketball hangs on for win over Iowa in consolation game of 2K Classic

Syracuse basketball 2014-15: Syracuse vs. Iowa

Syracuse's Rakeem Christmas hugs Michael Gbinije after the Orange's win over Iowa in the consolation game of the 2K Classic on Nov. 21, 2014, at Madison Square Garden. (*Dennis Nett | dnett@syracuse.com*)

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New York — Chris McCullough saved the Syracuse Orange from a stunning loss.

McCullough, Syracuse's 6-10 freshman, capped off an outstanding performance with a game-saving steal in the final seconds of the Orange's 66-63 victory over the Iowa Hawkeyes here at Madison Square Garden on Friday.

• **Box score**

Iowa, which trailed by 15 points in the second half, had come back to within 63-62 with less a minute remaining. The Hawkeyes had the ball and a chance to take the lead.

But as Iowa center Adam Woodbury tried to pass to forward Aaron White under the basket, McCullough stepped in front of the pass and stole the ball. McCullough's two free throws with 8.4 seconds remaining gave SU a 65-62 lead. The Orange would hold on for the win.

Syracuse basketball coach Jim Boeheim's postgame news conference (Iowa)

The Orange head coach talks about the team's win over Iowa in the consolation game of the 2K Classic on Nov. 21, 2014 at Madison Square Garden.

McCullough finished the game with a team-high 20 points, which is a high for his short college career. Syracuse, which lost to California here on Thursday, improved to 3-1. Iowa fell to 2-2.

The Orange's biggest lead came at 52-37 after Rakeem Christmas scored with 11:30 left in the game.

The Orange still held a 57-43 advantage with 8:30 remaining. But Christmas picked up his fourth foul with 9:44 left in the game. Syracuse led 54-42 as Christmas headed to the bench. It was his second foul in a 2-minute span.

Just like that, the momentum shifted and the Hawkeyes mounted their comeback.

Jarrold Uthoff hit a pair of 3-pointers to key the rally, but Iowa's three-quarter court trap really flummoxed the Orange. Syracuse guards Kaleb Joseph and Trevor Cooney made critical turnovers against the trapping defense.

Iowa closed to within one point twice in the final minutes. Both times were on Aaron White dunks. White scored with 3:31 left to cut SU's lead to 59-58. The teams traded possessions before Chris McCullough dunked off a feed from Kaleb Joseph to make it 61-58.

White got a tip-slam off a Uthoff missed 3-pointer as Iowa got back to 61-60 with 1:51 left.

Christmas found Cooney cutting backdoor for a layup at the 1:24 mark, but Iowa center Adam Woodbury got an offensive put-back and Iowa narrowed it to 63-62 as the clock ticked under a minute.

Joseph missed a jumper just inside the foul line with 41 seconds left and Iowa called timeout with 36.8 seconds on the clock.

Iowa worked the ball around, but couldn't find a shot. Uthoff finally called timeout with 14.4 seconds left and 8 seconds on the shot-clock.

Then McCullough came up with his game-saving steal.

Christmas came early

Christmas bounced back from a mediocre performance in SU's loss to California on Thursday with a solid game on Friday against Iowa.

Christmas, who had just eight points on 3-for-10 shooting against Cal, scored 13 first-half points in Friday's game. His strong play in the first half helped Syracuse to a 34-29 halftime lead. Christmas was 5-of-8 from the floor and 3-of-4 from the foul line.

Christmas got into foul trouble in the second half, but he still finished with 18 points for the Orange.

Early losses

Syracuse barely avoided losing twice in the month of November, which is a rarity for the Orange.

Syracuse had lost twice before Dec. 1 just three times in Jim Boeheim's 39-year tenure.

The last time came in the 2007-08 season when the Orange suffered losses to Ohio State and UMass. The Ohio State loss was in the PreSeason NIT at Madison Square Garden. The UMass loss was at the Carrier Dome.

The loss to UMass on Nov. 28, 2007, marked the last time that Syracuse lost a game in November.

In 2005-06, Syracuse lost to Florida in the 2K Sports Classic at the Garden and then dropped its next game at home to Bucknell. That's the only other time that Syracuse lost back-to-back November games.

The only other time that Syracuse suffered two losses in the month of November was in 1987-88. Syracuse started the year ranked No. 1 in the country, but lost its season-opener to No. 3 North Carolina in the Hall of Fame Tip-Off in Springfield, Mass., and then lost to No. 17 Arizona in the finals of the Great Alaska Shootout.

Orange notes

The two games in the 2K Classic meant Syracuse has played at Madison Square Garden in each of the last 33 seasons.

Syracuse and Iowa were meeting for the first time since Iowa beat SU, 88-77, in the 1980 NCAA tournament's East Region in Philadelphia. That was the final game in the Syracuse careers of Roosevelt Bouie, Louis Orr and Hal Cohen. Those three players were Jim Boeheim's first recruiting class as head coach at Syracuse.

Iowa's Jarrod Uthoff was opposite Syracuse for the second time in his college career. Uthoff began his career at Wisconsin and was on the Badgers' team that lost to Syracuse in the Sweet 16 of the 2012 NCAA tournament in Boston.

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