

No. 3 Villanova Beats No. 18 ASU 83-74 To Win Empire Classic

UNCASVILLE, Conn. (AP) — Coming into this season, Villanova coach Jay Wright wondered who might replace Saddiq Bey as the Wildcats' go-to player.

After two games, Wright thinks Jeremiah Robinson-Earl may have answered that question for him.

Robinson-Earl followed up an 18-point performance in the season opener with a career-high 28 points on Thursday night to lead No. 3 Villanova over No. 18 Arizona State 83-74 in the championship game of the Empire Classic.

“He wanted to be in that role last year and he just wasn’t there yet,” Wright said. “He did all the dirty work last year and he still does the dirty work. But, I think he has developed.”

The 6-foot-9 sophomore forward hit 11 of his 17 shots and pulled down eight rebounds.

Justin Moore added 16 points and 12 boards for the Wildcats (2-0), and Caleb Daniels chipped in with 14 points — 10 in the second half. Daniels spent the final eight minutes of the first half on the bench after picking up his third foul, but wasn’t whistled again.

The Wildcats dictated the pace of the game and dominated on the glass, outrebounding Arizona State 43-27.

Freshman guard Josh Christopher had 28 points and Alonzo Verge Jr. scored 22 for the Sun Devils (1-1). Villanova held ASU star Remy Martin to just five first-half points on 2-of-8 shooting.

The Wildcats led by nine at halftime and took their first double-digit lead at 49-38 on a 3-pointer by Robinson-Earl that capped an 8-0 spurt in the second half.

They stretched that to 66-49 on a 3 by Daniels before ASU made a little run.

The Sun Devils cut the deficit to 70-60 on a jumper by Verge, but couldn't come all the way back.

The game, played as part of the 11-day “Bubbleville” event in Connecticut, was close early. Villanova led just 31-29 after a 3-pointer by Martin.

But the Wildcats closed the first half on a 10-3 surge over the final 5 1/2 minutes to lead 41-32 at the break.

“We’re kind of a new team in a way with Saddiq leaving,” Robinson-Earl said. “Guys from last year are getting new roles, so we’re just learning as we’re going.”

BIG PICTURE

Villanova: The Wildcats consistently created easy shots in their half-court offense by backing ASU players into the lane.

Arizona State: The Sun Devils got in the lane early, hitting their first five shots. But they had a hard time getting into their transition game and had just 11 fast-break points. Christopher, the program's highest-rated recruit since James Harden, made 11 of his 17 shots.

“I think he showed you a glimpse of what he's capable of,” ASU coach Bobby Hurley said. “It was just a heck of a performance by a freshman, playing against one of the best teams in the country.”

STAT OF THE DAY

Martin, who had 26 points in a 94-88 win over Rhode Island on Wednesday, took just two shots in the second half, missing both of them. He also had only two assists in the game and one steal.