

Pitt's season ends on high note with CBI win

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By Ray Fittipaldo, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Pam Panchak/Post-Gazette

Pitt's Talib Zanna battles Washington State's Marcus Capers Friday in the College Basketball Invitational championship game at the Petersen Events Center.

Some things have to happen over the summer in order for Pitt to regain its status as a Big East heavyweight. But if the Panthers learned one thing during their participation in the College Basketball Invitational, it's that sophomore forward Lamar Patterson has a chance to be a difference-maker next season.

Patterson was named most valuable player in the CBI following Pitt's 71-65 victory against Washington State in the third game of the best-of-three championship series Friday at Petersen Events Center.

Patterson capped his strong postseason performance with 14 points, 8 rebounds and 5 assists. For the tournament, he averaged 13.3 points, 6.0 rebounds and 4.5 assists per game.

"Lamar was tremendous this tournament," Pitt coach Jamie Dixon said.

"He's been real confident," point guard Tray Woodall said. "He's a Brad Wanamaker-type player. He instills confidence in the rest of his teammates. Guys are confident he'll make the right plays. Coach Dixon calls sets for him knowing he'll make the right play all the time."

Patterson earned a starting position as a sophomore, but he did not assert himself the way he did in this tournament. He was often in the background as Ashton Gibbs and Woodall dominated the offensive touches.

But in this tournament, Patterson was the focal point of the offense, and it provided a glimpse of what the Panthers will look like next season.

"I feel like coach trusted me a lot more, depended on me a lot more," Patterson said. "It feels good going into next year."

Woodall had 17 points, seven assists and no turnovers for the Panthers, who committed just three turnovers for the game. It was the fewest number of turnovers in the Dixon era.

Sophomore center Talib Zanna scored all 12 of his points after halftime, J.J. Moore added 11 and Nasir Robinson had 10.

Gibbs sat out a second consecutive game with a right ankle injury. He finished his career in eighth place on the school's all-time scoring list with 1,748 points, five shy of Ricardo Greer for seventh.

Pitt finished the season 22-17. This was the first season in a decade that the Panthers did not compete in the NCAA tournament. They were 6-14 in Big East games.

"It's great to finish out the [tournament with a victory]," Dixon said. "It's not the tournament we're used to being in, but the guys battled. The kids wanted to do more this year. They didn't feel they had done what they set out to do."

Patterson wasn't the only player to gain valuable experience in the CBI. Zanna also stepped up his game. He averaged 11.6 points and 7.0 rebounds per game.

Zanna will be in the mix for a starting position next season at power forward.

"It's an interesting time," Dixon said. "We got some good things out of this. We still have to figure out some things this offseason, but to us, this was part of the offseason."

Woodall, who was skeptical of Pitt's participation in the CBI before it started, said he now sees the value the tournament provided.

"I'll be completely honest," Woodall said. "When I first learned about it, I thought it was a lose-lose situation for us. We're Pitt. We're not supposed to be in a tournament like this.

"We looked at it like we wanted to keep getting better. This wasn't a great season for us. We wanted to finish on a high note. We wanted to get guys experience. We have to keep working for next year, keep preparing for next year to become better players."

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