

## St. Johns defense casts a shadow on Georgetown's shooting troubles

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In one of the last games fans can experience at Madison Square Garden this year, the Big East men's basketball tournament commenced with a fierce matchup between St. John's and Georgetown.

The crowd erupted throughout St. John's astounding comeback that featured a 23-0 run late in the second half to steal the first round of the tournament with a 74-62 victory. The win moves the Red Storm to the second round of the tournament, where they were set to play top seed Creighton, who also ranks No. 7 nationally.

The apparent home-court advantage for the Queens-based university proved to have an irritating effect on the Georgetown players who saw both the ball and their grasp for the game slip through their hands after being forced to 21 turnovers on the night.

"It tested my patience, I had to constantly preach to these guys don't let go, we're close guys, we're close...we started getting contributions from some guys who hadn't played at all last year," said St. John's head coach Mike Anderson. "I don't think anybody on the court knew we were on a 23-0 and it just felt like we were out there having fun and that's how it's supposed to feel."

The Red Storm's thunderous charge was led by Marcellus Earlington, who scored 17 points in the second half, 10 of them during St. John's scoring rout in the final stretch of the game. He finished the night with a double-double as he added 10 rebounds to the stat sheet as well.

"I work on my shot every day so that didn't surprise me as much and my teammates did a great job of finding my spots," Earlington said. "We translated what we did in practice into the game and the outcome was great."

The two teams battled from the opening tip exchanging baskets on each of the opposition's end. St. Johns for a brief spell maintained the lead around the midpoint of the first half after forcing Georgetown to commit turnovers while the Red Storm consistently pestered the Hoya's offense.

Despite the miscues, the Hoya's defense was steadfast by preventing St. John's from capitalizing off their mistakes, only allowing the Red Storm to score four points from Georgetown's nine turnovers in the first half.

Georgetown's shooting did not falter, as it was the Hoya's accuracy from the field that gave them the lead at the end opening frame. They shot 40% from the field and 46% from the three-point line.

The Red Storm's defense cast a harsh overcast over the Hoyas forcing their shooting to drop to an abysmal depth that they could not tread their way out of. Georgetown scored only a mere 20 points in the second half, less than half of the 42 points they tallied in the first.

"We had no answer for them in the first half; in the second half we did a much better job making them feel that pressure defense," Anderson said. "Fatigue was a factor in this game ... it started with our defense."

Georgetown's loss caps a seven-game losing streak to conclude their season that dates back to Feb. 19 against Providence. Terrell Allen scored 21 points in his final game suiting up for the Hoyas. Georgetown's leading scorer Omer Yurseven came into the contest shaken up after being injured with an ankle injury in February. Since Feb. 22, he has only been featured in one game.

Mac McClung was out as well, treating a foot injury that he endured in late September.

"We're rebuilding a team. We want to build a team with guys like these. They play hard, they practice hard, they have great basketball IQ and they're winners," said Georgetown head coach Patrick Ewing.

LJ Figueroa led all scorers on the night with 22 during his 32 minutes of play.

During the regular season against Creighton, St. Johns split their games with the Bluejays, each winning one game on their home courts. In their most recent matchup on March 1, the Red Storm took a 91-71 victory.

The game scheduled for Thursday at noon has larger implications for St. John's, who entered the tournament with a 17-15 overall record and their 5-13 conference record. Currently, they have a 1.3% chance to make the NCAA tournament.

"The next game is the biggest game on our schedule, we're going to come in and execute, play our type of basketball and live with the results," Figueroa said.

Creighton, who has stayed atop of the rankings for a large portion of the season, is a near-shoe in to qualify for the tournament based on their resume alone, boasting a 24-7 record on the season.

"As a team, we can beat anyone in the country. We're going to roll off this win, the momentum, and play the style of basketball we've been playing all year," Earlington said.

The game March 12 at noon along with the rest of the tournament will not be played in front of fans as a precautionary measure against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.