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Nothing Can Keep Oturu Down in Gophers Upset of No. 19 Michigan



Please Credit: David Berding-USA TODAY Sports



By [Heather Rule](#) - January 12, 2020

Daniel Oturu started the game by losing the jump ball at midcourt. Thirty-two seconds later he racked up a foul. Then he missed a pair of free throws about a minute later that would have gotten the Minnesota Gophers men's basketball team on the board.

Those weren't even the worst moments of the day for the sophomore center, so maybe it was going to be a long afternoon against No. 19 Michigan.

Or not. Oturu is too good of a player to be kept down for long, something that was tested when he briefly left the court with what appeared to be a shoulder injury early in the second half. He returned to finish off his monster game with a career-high 30 points in a 75-67 Gophers upset over Michigan in front of 10,453 fans at Williams Arena on Sunday afternoon.

"It felt like three, four different games," said head coach Richard Pitino. "Where Daniel was the first game, or maybe them jumping us was the first game. Then it turned to Daniel just absolutely taking over. Then he gets hurt. Then Marcus (Carr) takes over. Then Alihan (Demir) takes over.

"So overall, a great team effort and huge win for his players over a really good Michigan team," Pitino said.

This game was Oturu's nearly from the start, after some early momentum from the Wolverines (11-5, 2-3 Big Ten). While the rest of his teammates struggled with their shooting – or to even get shots off – Oturu handled the bulk of the scoring early and single-handedly kept the Gophers (9-7, 3-3) in the game. Not only did he have his ninth game with 20-plus points this season, but he reached that mark by the end of the first half.

While Oturu scored 20 of the team's 30 first-half points, shooting 9-for-12, his teammates combined to shoot 4-for-16 from the field.

Oturu dominated in a variety of ways, scoring a 3-pointer, making hard-working spin moves to the hoop and finishing a nice pass from redshirt-sophomore guard Carr with a two-handed dunk. He finished the game shooting 13-for-18 and 7 rebounds.

Five-and-a-half minutes into the second half with the Gophers up 45-41, Oturu went up for the ball and ended up down on the floor writhing in pain as play continued down the floor.



Jan 12, 2020; Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA; Minnesota Golden Gophers center Daniel Oturu (25) is attended to by medical staff after getting injured against the Michigan Wolverines. Oturu later returned in the second half at Williams Arena. Mandatory Credit: David Berding-USA TODAY Sports

“I got the rebound and tried to go back up and I felt like I just got dumped to the ground really hard on my shoulder,” Oturu said. “It felt like it slipped in and out, and so I was in a lot of pain.

“Regardless of what injury or whatever I was feeling, I was going to go back out there to help my team win this game. That was the most important thing.”

He was back on the floor having missed only about three minutes of game time; he said he felt alright after the game, though “it still kind of hurts.” But when he left, it created an immediate void for the Gophers. Who was going to step up in his absence, even if it was to be short-lived?

The answer was Carr, who was already off to a hot start in the second half, and Demir, who scored 16 of his 21 points in the second half.

“I always try to stay aggressive,” Carr said. “Dan was getting whatever he wanted down there, so also just to take the pressure off him.”

Demir stepped up as well, scoring all of his 13 points in the second half. He went 4-for-6 shooting, made 5-of-6 free throws and added 3 rebounds and 2 assists. He’s playing great basketball right now, Pitino said, showing great patience down low and showcasing some good footwork. He used that footwork for a spin move down low to extend the Gophers’ lead to 68-65 late. Before that, it was a pair of successful free throws and a basket in quick succession to put the Gophers up 61-57 in what was a back-and-forth second half during a game with 13 total lead changes.

Michigan first-year coach Juwan Howard was impressed with Oturu's mental toughness to come back into the game after the injury.



Jan 12, 2020; Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA; Minnesota Golden Gophers center Daniel Oturu (25) pumps up the crowd against the Michigan Wolverines in the second half at Williams Arena. Please Credit: David Berding-USA

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"Showed that the game meant a lot to him," Howard said. "He came back and gave his team a big lift in the second half with his energy.

"The kid is special. He's not only doing it to us, but he's been playing very well throughout the season."

Part of the Gophers' success Sunday came with strong finishes to each half. Down by 11 points at one point early in the game, the Gophers came back to get within one at the half for just a 31-30 deficit. That came as a result of a Gophers 9-0 run and a Michigan scoring drought in the final 4:35 of the first half.

With exactly three minutes left in the game, Oturu hit his 30 points with a basket underneath with a spin move for a 66-65 Gophers lead. Minnesota outscored the Wolverines 9-2 the rest of the way, which could have been a bigger margin had it not been for some missed free throws. A Payton Willis shot from long range for a 73-65 lead with 1:01 left to play really sealed the deal.

It's the second Gophers victory over a top-25 opponent this season, the other coming against No. 3 Ohio State in mid-December. Sunday was a nice bounce-back win after having lost 74-58 at No. 8 Michigan State.