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5 takeaways from the Gophers blowout win against Georgia Southern



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This was the kind of victory the Gophers needed after surviving Tuesday's game against New Jersey Institute of Technology by just six points. Friday night, they responded with a dominant 86-49 performance over Sun Belt opponent Georgia Southern (4-5).

The 36-point difference is the largest for the Gophers (9-1) this season, as they put an exclamation mark on their ninth win of the season, surpassing last year's total in that column. Afterward, Coach Richard Pitino talked about how it was a very complete game, from the shooting to rebounds to just an overall good answer to Tuesday's game.

"It was a major step forward that we needed," Pitino said. "That was a great response."

Here are a few takeaways from the game:

1. Hot start, hot hands from 3-point range

It was about as good of a start as the Gophers have had this season. They started off red-hot, especially from long range. The Gophers hit six of their first seven shots, including four 3-pointers, three of them from the hands of Nate Mason. This was good to see because if there's been any trend, it's that the Gophers have started off a bit on the slower side sometimes.

Everything seemed to fall early on. They shot 47 percent from 3-point range (8-for-17) in the first half. After Mason hit a couple in a row, Akeem Springs caught that bug a couple minutes later with a pair of treys about 30 seconds apart. He hit another one about a minute later, making him 3-for-3 before another jumper gave him 11 quick points and a 4-for-4 field goal mark. Springs had caught fire.

Springs finished with 16 points to follow-up his season-high 19 points on Tuesday.

The Gophers finished shooting 35 percent from 3-point range. Mason and Springs had four each, Dupree McBrayer added a pair and even Jordan Murphy sunk one.

2. McBrayer, Mason lead the way

For the first time this season, McBrayer was the lone leading scorer with 18 points, tying his season-high, including a pair of 3-pointers and going 4-for-5 at the line.

“It’s good to see him kind of get going,” Pitino said.

Mason finished with 14 points, nine assists, six rebounds and five steals for a stellar night on the stats sheet. His unselfish play really started to show as he started getting the ball to his teammates after he opened up some of the scoring early on.

“I think Nate set the tone, and I just followed behind him,” McBrayer said. “Once (we) get going, I think that gets everybody going.”

3. A good night by the numbers

The Gophers got points from nine different players, four of them hitting double digits. They beat Georgia Southern on the boards, 53-37.

“We really battled from a rebounding standpoint,” Pitino said.

Reggie Lynch had 10 points, six board and four blocks. On defense, the Gophers held Georgia Southern to a 30 percent shooting mark and just 21 percent from 3-point range. They held guard Ike Smith to just 12 points. He came into the game as the Sun Belt’s leading scorer with 21.4 points per game. They also managed to stay out of foul trouble with just 13 personal fouls.

4. Michael Hurt on the board

Freshman Michael Hurt came into Friday with 42 minutes in seven games and just four points on the season. He nearly doubled his season total in one night with seven points in six minutes on the floor.

One of his shots was a 3-pointer, but it took a little while. He attempted a trio of shots from beyond the arc before getting one to fall through the net. It was clear how much his teammates wanted him to get that boost. Each time he put up a shot, the bench rose up with arms poised ready to celebrate his trey. With 2:34 left in the game, the “finally!” celebration was on as Hurt sunk that elusive 3-pointer.

5. A slight hiccup

As hot as the Gophers started, the cooling off had to start sometime. Coffey, with six assists in the first half, finally got on the board with a driving lay-up with 5:09 to go in the half. Coincidentally, that was the last field goal for the Gophers until the break. McBrayer hit a couple free throws with 1:11 left.

The Gophers had nine missed field goals after that, and really it was eight because McBrayer’s half-court shot at the buzzer failed to go despite clanking the rim. It gave them a 13-point lead at the half, though it seemed like it should have been more.

Not that this mattered. They started the second half on a 9-0 run to show they weren’t letting up any time soon. The scoring drought was just a minor hiccup in a very solid victory for the Gophers.

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