

Marquette uses late free throws to nip No. 22 LSU, 81-80

NEW YORK (AP) - For three days, Marquette stewed over an ugly home loss while preparing to face the nation's top freshman.

The Golden Eagles were able to rebound by starting off well and finishing down the stretch, though the ending was hardly easy.

Jajuan Johnson hit the winning free throws with 10.8 seconds remaining and Marquette survived the frenetic finish to defeat No. 22 LSU 81-80 on Monday night in the semifinals of the Legends Classic. The Golden Eagles will face Arizona State in Tuesday's championship game after the Sun Devils beat North Carolina State 79-76.

"Our guys did a great job in preparation," Golden Eagles coach Steve Wojciechowski said. "We won this game because of what we did over the last 48 hours and the fact that they stepped up and made big plays. Everybody that was in the game for us made a winning play and that was really encouraging."

Marquette nearly blew a 10-point lead and allowed LSU freshman Ben Simmons to collect 21 points and 20 rebounds in front of 51 NBA scouts.

"A very difficult matchup," Wojciechowski said. "Obviously he's a very unique player. He's a very talented player because of his size and athleticism and his ability to handle the ball. He's a unique matchup but I thought overall our guys did a good job against him."

Simmons shot 6 of 14 and made 9 of 11 free throws as LSU shot 37 percent from the floor. Tim Quarterman scored 20 points while Antonio Blankeney added 14.

"Marquette did an excellent job of coming out and punching first, getting a 10-point lead right at the beginning of the game," LSU coach Johnny Jones said. "From there we were fighting an uphill battle."

Simmons' final points were on a reverse layup with 21.5 seconds remaining that gave the Tigers their only lead at 80-79. Ten seconds later, Johnson knocked down the winning free throws and the Golden Eagles survived a dramatic final possession.

Simmons appeared as though he was going to take the final shot or drive to get free throws but instead he passed to Jalyn Patterson. Patterson missed a 3-pointer from the right side with three seconds left and Marquette escaped.

"I came down and looked at the paint and saw a defender on my left and right," Simmons said. "They did a great job on defense making sure I couldn't get to the rim."

Luke Fischer led four players in double figures with 19 points for Marquette (2-2), which shot 54 percent and scored the game's first 10 points. Henry Ellenson was among three Golden Eagles with 16 points along with Johnson and Duane Wilson.

"It's about how we came out at the end," Fischer said. "We were able to get the ball inside to me and Henry and that helped us a lot. When we get the ball inside, we're able to kick it out and good things happen when you do that."