

# Blair Leads Panthers to 86-60 Victory Over Indiana (Pa.)

Pitt wins 100th game at Petersen Events Center

[box score](#)

**PITTSBURGH, Pa.** – DeJuan Blair made such an impact last season that he was chosen as the Big East co-rookie of the year. A warning to the rest of the conference: The early consensus among opposing coaches is he is much better as a sophomore.

Blair missed only one shot while scoring 27 points and getting 18 rebounds, and No. 6 Pittsburgh scored the first 20 points before easing to an 86-60 victory over NCAA Division II opponent Indiana (Pa.) on Saturday.

The 6-foot-7 Blair was too strong and mobile inside for the undersized Crimson Hawks (2-1) and had 20 points and 16 rebounds as Pitt led 45-17 at halftime. Blair, who made 13 of 14 shots and his only free throw, was lifted after scoring three consecutive baskets to make it 54-21 with 14:33 remaining.

"That was DeJuan? I thought that was Shaq," said IUP coach Joe Lombardi, a former Pitt assistant. "He was a man in waiting last year, but he's arrived."

The Panthers (4-0) must have, too, as they've already had players compared to Shaquille O'Neal and Cleveland Cavaliers star LeBron James. Akron coach Keith Dambrot, who coached James in high school, compared parts of Pitt forward Sam Young's game to James' after Young had 26 points during Pitt's 86-67 win Friday night.

Blair was dominating less than 24 hours later as Pittsburgh closed the first half with a 21-2 run, scoring five consecutive baskets -- four on putbacks. Several times, the 265-pound Blair grabbed a rebound at the defensive end, set up along the blocks on offense, then tapped in or followed up a teammate's miss.

"I just got on a roll, but I'm a little mad," Blair said. "I'm mad I didn't get 20 rebounds. But 18 rebounds in 20 minutes, that's almost a rebound a minute. I was just going after every one I could grab." Advertisement

Blair's big game came against a player he often faced in practice last season, former Pitt backup Maurice Polen, who had four points and four rebounds. Polen is finishing his career at IUP, but his degree will be from Pitt.

"He's phenomenal," Polen said.

While Blair isn't as tall as most dominating centers, Lombardi said, "He's immovable, and his dexterity and skills allow him to get rebounds outside of his area (on the floor)."

The game wasn't in doubt after Pitt needed slightly more than six minutes to seize a 20-0 lead over an opponent whose only previous games were wins over Thiel and Penn State-Fayette. IUP didn't score until Julian Sanders hit a 3-pointer with 13:28 remaining in the half.

That basket started a 13-2 run by IUP that made it 22-13 and forced Pitt coach Jamie Dixon to keep his starters in the game until early in the second half. No Pitt starter played longer than 24 minutes.

Levance Fields' 3-pointer began the 21-2 run that gave Pitt its 28-point halftime lead and, except for a Jermaine Dixon 3-pointer, the physical Blair scored six of the Panthers' next seven baskets.

Tyrell Biggs and freshman Ashton Gibbs scored 10 each for Pitt, and Ashton Smith had 16 for IUP, which shot 33.3 percent (21-of-63) to Pitt's 51.5 percent (34-of-66).

Jamie Dixon emptied his bench after that as Pitt won at home for the 100th time in 110 games since opening the Petersen Events Center six years ago. Pitt is 60-1 and has won its last 32 games against non-conference opponents in the on-campus arena, losing only to Bucknell in January 2005.

The game was part of the Legends Classic, a 12-team tournament being held at eight sites with a predetermined bracket in which Pitt, Texas Tech, Mississippi State and Washington State were guaranteed of appearing in next weekend's semifinals.

Pitt couldn't find a Division I opponent to round out its bracket, forcing it to play a non-major college team for the first time since it defeated Georgetown (Ky.), an NAIA team, 79-74 in December 2003 -- a game the Panthers came close to losing. IUP is 0-9 against Pitt although the schools hadn't played in 22 years until Saturday.

