Balanced Attack Leads Men's Hoops Over Rutgers, 77-71

box score

PISCATAWAY, N.J. – Four Catamounts reached double figures led by a career-high 19 points from junior Evan Fjeld (Durham, N.C.) as the Vermont men's basketball team earned only its second victory over a Big East team in school history, downing Rutgers on the road 77-71. Seniors Marqus Blakely (Metuchen, N.J.) and Maurice Joseph (Montreal, Quebec) each added 17 apiece in the first game of the Legends Classic on Sunday, as the Cats improve to 2-1 on the year.

With the game tied 70-70 after a lay-up by Rutgers Hamady Ndiaye, the Catamounts scored seven of the final eight points of the game to earn the win. Joseph knocked down four straight free throws and Blakely hit three of four during the stretch.

"We are very happy to come out of here with a win. I felt we played pretty hard even though it wasn't a pretty game," said Vermont head coach Mike Lonergan. "I am just happy for our guys because we challenged them with a tough schedule and 10 in a row on the road and it's not easy. Happy for Marqus playing well with him being from New Jersey and proud of our guys overall to get a win over a Big East team."

In the first half the Scarlet Knights opened the game by taking a 7-2 lead. The Catamounts would answer with the next 10 straight, as sophomore Garvey Young (Washington, D.C.) scored a pair of buckets and Blakely added two steals that led to two dunks to give Vermont a 12-7 advantage. With UVM leading 25-24 after a pair of free throws from senior Nick Vier (Franklin Lakes, N.J.), Rutgers scored the next six as part of a 12-3 run that gave the home team a 36-28 lead with 4:23 left in the stanza.

Rutgers (2-1) shot 51.7 percent from the floor in the opening half and were led by 11 points from Mike Rosario as it took a 38-32 lead into the half.

Vermont opened the second half with six straight to tie the score at 38-38. The Scarlet Knights pushed their lead back to seven with a 9-2 push that made it 47-40 just 3:31 in. Gregory Echenique converted a lay-up with 11:12 left to give Rutgers a 55-49 lead, but the Catamounts would not go away and bounced back with an 11-0 run over the next 3:50 to take a 60-55 lead, as they would not trail again. Young opened the run with a two-handed dunk, Blakely added a lay-up and Fjeld scored the final seven, which included his first career three-pointer.

Following Ndiaye's lay-up that tied it at 70-70, Blakely got fouled on the other end and made the first, but Young came up with a huge rebound after the second was missed to keep possession and Joseph was later fouled.

Fjeld went 8-for-12 for the game, added five rebounds and a career-high four steals. Blakely finished one rebound shy of his second straight double-double and added five blocks and four steals. After being held scoreless in the first two games of the season, Young erupted for 10 points. Rosario, a Big East All-Rookie selection last year, led all scorers with 22, while Jonathan Mitchell added 15 and Mike Coburn chipped in with 13.

The Catamounts out-rebounded a bigger Big East team, 37-32 and held a 42-36 scoring edge in the paint. Vermont hit 15-of-16 free throws in the second half and 18-of-22 (81.8 percent) for the game.

Vermont returns to action on Tuesday when it travels to face its second straight Big East opponent in Providence, starting at 7 p.m. The game can be heard live on 96.7 DOT-FM, The Zone 960 AM and WSTJ-1320 AM (Randolph), and on the internet at www.UVMathletics.com with the audio stream provided by SportsJuice.com.

NOTES: Vermont is now 11-64 all-time against teams in the Big East, but only one of those victories had come since the conference was formed, as the Cats knocked off fourth-seeded Syracuse in overtime in the first round of the 2005 NCAA Tournament, 60-57 … Sunday marked the first meeting between the two teams … Vermont plays its first 10 games of the season on the road … The game was a homecoming of sorts for Catamount seniors Vier and Blakely, as both call the Garden State home … Blakely was featured in a story on CentralJersey.com on Sunday: click here to read it … Vermont wore its black uniforms for the first time this year … With 17 points Blakely moved into 11th place on UVM's all-time list and now has 1,328 for his career … Vermont converted 20 Rutgers turnovers into 26 points.