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Seton Hall returns with a rush

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Apparently, the time off did Seton Hall some good.

After shooting a season-low 23.5 percent from the field in a 44-42 loss to Northwestern 11 days earlier, the Pirates responded in their first game back from the holidays with a 52-point first half and a season-high 53 percent shooting effort as they cruised to a 93-46 victory over winless Morgan State at Continental Airlines Arena.

The 51-point improvement marked the largest one-game jump in Seton Hall basketball history.

"Sometimes when you lose a close game you want to get right back at it," said Seton Hall coach Louis Orr, whose team improved its home record to 7-1. "But in reality, I thank God that we had the opportunity for guys to be home with their families on Christmas Day.

"This is the first time, I think since I've been coaching, that I've given them off on Christmas Day."

And his players gave him a nice gift in return -- half as many turnovers (10) than they committed against the Wildcats. Twenty-four assists on 36 baskets. A 44-20 rebound advantage. And nine players who scored at least eight points.

"If we would have (gone) 11 days straight with no days off, it wears down on the body," said Seton Hall junior Jamar Nutter, who scored nine points in only 18 minutes. "It was good to give our bodies a chance to recover."

Nutter and the Pirates didn't give the Bears that opportunity, nailing six of their first eight shots and rolling off a 13-4 lead in the opening 4:12. Nutter, who scored all nine of his points on 3-pointers in the first half, combined with senior Donald Copeland for 16 of the Pirates' first 26 points.

"Our plan was to get out early," Nutter said. "Every shot that I had I was open. As soon as I saw there was enough space and I had the ball where I wanted it, I just let it go."

Copeland, the Pirates' leading scorer this season, continued his hot shooting from long range by going 3-for-5 from beyond the arc, including a 3 during Seton Hall's 20-4 run to end the first half.

"We just couldn't wait to get out here, get out and play," said Copeland, who led the Pirates with 15 points on 6-of-9 shooting. "A loss like that (to Northwestern) leaves a sour taste in your mouth."

The Bears, who were also coming off an extended break -- they hadn't played since dropping a 102-75 decision to George Washington on Dec. 10 -- converted only 24 percent (6-of-25) from the field in the first half and committed 10 turnovers.

With the lead well in Seton Hall's favor, Orr was given an opportunity to experiment with different lineups and give his bench substantial playing time.

"As a coach I was able to play my young players and let them play through a few of their mistakes," he said. "From beginning to end we kept our focus, and hopefully our young guys got a chance to learn."

Freshmen Paul Gause and David Palmer gained valuable experience in extended playing time, scoring nine and 11 points, respectively. The duo could play a key role for the Pirates, who open the conference portion of their schedule Wednesday against St. John's.

"It's good when guys can get in and contribute," junior Stan Gaines said. "It gives Coach a little bit more confidence in the bench."

Something he'll need as the Pirates face one of the most difficult conferences in the nation.