

Ex-Syracuse assistant Tim O'Toole, now at Pitt, calls Jim Boeheim a second father

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Tim O'Toole, who has had two coaching stints with Syracuse and Jim Boeheim, returns to the Carrier Dome on Saturday as an assistant with Pittsburgh. (Photo by Pete Madia, courtesy of Pittsburgh basketball) (PETE MADIA)

By [Mike Waters | mwaters@syracuse.com](#)

Syracuse, N.Y. – On Saturday, Tim O'Toole will return to the Carrier Dome as an assistant to first-year Pitt coach Jeff Capel.

It's a homecoming game of sorts for O'Toole, who has served two separate stints on Jim Boeheim's coaching staff – and both came at times when O'Toole was out of coaching.

“Coach Boeheim's been a second father to me,” O'Toole said. “He's given me incredible opportunities. Twice. I'd be nowhere without him.”

In 1991, Gary Brokaw resigned as the head coach at Iona. Brokaw's departure left his staff without jobs. That included a young assistant named Tim O'Toole, who just four years earlier had been a senior at Fairfield University.

Then O'Toole got a call from Boeheim.

“Coach Boeheim offered me an opportunity,” O’Toole recalled. It wasn’t much of an opportunity, but it was a chance to stay in the game at a big-time program.

O’Toole became a volunteer assistant, which evolved into a restricted earnings coach position. He spent four years at Syracuse before Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, acting on a recommendation from Boeheim, hired O’Toole as an assistant.

Fast forward to 2012. O’Toole, who had gone from Duke to Seton Hall before finally getting a head coaching opportunity at his alma mater, has been out of basketball for six years since leaving Fairfield after eight seasons.

He had done some work for ESPN and radio broadcasts of St. John’s games, plus an online education company, but he missed the game. Then Syracuse assistant Mike Hopkins called.

“I’d been out of coaching for six years,” O’Toole said. “Hop called me and said Coach Boeheim had an opening for the director of operations. He said, would I come back and work for Bay? Of course.”

The one year as the director of basketball operations at Syracuse jump-started O’Toole’s coaching career. He spent the next five years in the Bay Area; three years as an assistant at Stanford and then two more at California.



Tim O’Toole, here with Lazarus Sims in 1995, joined the Pittsburgh staff this season. (Stephen D. Cannerelli | syracuse.com archive) *Stephen D. Cannerelli* | scannerelli@syracuse.com

Last spring, O'Toole joined Capel, who he had coached at Duke. Now, O'Toole will face Syracuse twice a year in the ACC, with the first meeting on Saturday at the Dome.

"It's always hard when you play against each other," O'Toole said. "In the 37 games they're going to play, I'm going to root for them in 35 of them. There's an unbelievable level of gratitude there. I've been super-blessed."

O'Toole said similarity and familiarity had a lot to do with his decision to leave Cal and join Capel at Pitt.

In terms of familiarity, O'Toole knew Capel, the ACC and the Pitt program's history.

Capel had been brought in to resuscitate the Pitt program, which had gone winless in the ACC during the 2017-18 season, after which Pitt officials fired head coach Kevin Stallings.

"I was fortunate to coach Jeff a long time ago," O'Toole said. "I've known him. The opportunity to come back to ACC and work for Cape was too good. I thought with Cape and the right people, this could be a lot of fun."



Tim O'Toole, center, is part of a coaching staff that is trying to turn things around in Pittsburgh. (Photo by Pete Madia, courtesy of Pittsburgh basketball) *PETE MADIA*

As far as similarity, O'Toole said Pittsburgh reminds him of a big-city version of Syracuse, with a knowledgeable and loyal fan base.

"The people here are incredibly loyal to Pitt. No different than the Cuse," O'Toole said. "At Cuse, you've got people coming from Rah-cha-cha in a blizzard. Same at Pitt. You're talking about a blue-collar town, and they love what they've got."

Pitt fans are loving the Panthers more this season than in the past two years. Pitt is off to a 12-5 start, including a 2-2 record in the ACC.

O'Toole said Capel has wasted no time in changing the culture at Pitt.

"The whole idea is this is Cape," O'Toole said. "He's always been at a high-level in the game. When he played at Duke, he played in the final game as a freshman. He won at VCU. He won at Oklahoma. He went back to Duke and saw what it took to win there.

"He understands what it takes to be at a high level," he added. "Leaders like Cape create the culture."

O'Toole said it was hard for him to think of Pitt as anything less than a successful program.

"Jamie Dixon was in the tournament two years ago," O'Toole said. "When I was at Cuse, they had Steven Adams here and the place was jumping. It was a quick fall, but then it was like there's still a lot of great things in the foundation here."

Saturday's game at the Dome is more than just the average return of a former assistant coach.

O'Toole's wife, Joanie, grew up in Auburn, N.Y. O'Toole is a native of White Plains.

"It's such a special, special place," O'Toole said of Syracuse. "The Carrier Dome in the wintertime, playing Syracuse hoop. It's a great atmosphere. It's fun to be part of it, even on the other side."



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Despite snow, Syracuse basketball attracts season's biggest crowd for Pittsburgh game

Updated Jan 19, 6:32 PM; Posted Jan 19, 5:44 PM



Despite forecasts for over a foot of snow, Syracuse fans filled all three levels of the Carrier Dome and set a new season-best attendance mark. Dennis Nett | dnett@syracuse.com

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By [Chris Carlson](#)

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Syracuse, N.Y. -- Syracuse fans showed a lot of loyalty -- and perhaps a little bit of insanity -- during [the team's 74-63 win](#) over Pittsburgh on Saturday, creating an announced crowd of 24,466 on a weekend when forecasts called for up to two feet of snow.

The crowd set a new standard for the biggest on-campus crowd this season, a milestone that goes to Syracuse annually thanks, in large part, to the country's largest on-campus arena. The Pittsburgh attendance eclipsed Syracuse's game against Georgetown on Dec. 8, when the school announced a crowd of 24,082.

Syracuse will beat that mark at least one more time this season when it hosts Duke on Feb. 23. The number of actual fans in attendance didn't look substantially off the announced number despite weather issues that caused [the cancellation of the Syracuse Crunch game](#) at Binghamton and [travel advisories throughout Onondaga County](#).

The snow appeared to have relatively little impact on fan arriving to the game thanks in part to a friendly forecast and the hard work of Syracuse's vice president and chief facilities officer Pete Sala and the workers at the Carrier Dome. The worst of the storm was supposed to come late in the evening and into Sunday morning, so the 2 p.m. start time was helpful. Syracuse University staff ensured the walkways were in good shape for fans arriving to the game. While the heat was turned on to keep snow from accumulating on the roof, temperatures in the building never became uncomfortable.

Rather than hunkering down for the weekend, the assortment of Orange fans that took advantage of a final opportunity to escape the house went home happy thanks to the Orange winning for the sixth time in seven games.

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1. [ORANGE BASKETBALL](#)

Buddy Boenheim's growing process picks up with season-best against Pittsburgh

Updated Jan 19, 7:31 PM; Posted Jan 19, 5:09 PM



Syracuse's Buddy Boenheim had the best shooting performance of his freshman season on Saturday, continuing to put a difficult start behind him. Dennis Nett | dnett@syracuse.com

1.1kshares

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Syracuse, N.Y. -- Syracuse guard Buddy Boeheim was born into a basketball family. He wasn't born a basketball star.

Growing up the son of head coach Jim Boeheim, he'd heard his whole life how improvement was a process. And he'd lived that process already, coming off the bench for small parts of his career before earning his way to Syracuse.

The freshman guard, then, was as well-equipped as he could be to handle the difficult start to his freshman year of college, one that included making just two of his first 18 3-point shots and looking overwhelmed at the speed of the game.

Boeheim continued his climb back on Saturday with his best performance yet, a 13-point blitz on five shots during a 74-63 win over Pittsburgh.

"It's tough when you want to make all your shots and they aren't falling at first," Buddy said. "I've learned it's a process my whole life. ... Growing up, I didn't start some games in sixth and seventh grade. My sophomore year playing AAU I didn't play much. It's helped me dealing with struggles, to keep improving and playing hard."

He made his first four shots, all 3-pointers. He made Pittsburgh pay for a miscommunication on one. He shot the Panthers out of a zone defense on another. And he scored the final two against man-to-man defenses and the pesky defenders that have posed the biggest challenge as he has adjusted to the college level.

Doing it against Pittsburgh, a high-end defensive team, was a stark contrast from how the season began. Boeheim made just 1 of 11 shots against a bad Eastern Washington team, then connected on just two of his first 18 3-point tries over his first five games. Entering last night, he was shooting just 25.5 percent from the perimeter.

While basketball hasn't always been easy, Boeheim also struggled to remember a time when it had felt so difficult.

"Shoot, it's been a while," Boeheim said. "I had stretches last year where I was shooting probably lower 30 percent from 3. I'd get out of it. It happens. I think it's getting used to the speed on this level. I've never struggled with that before. I think that's the biggest difference for me as I progress."

While it has come in fits and starts, that progress has ramped up as Syracuse has won six of seven games. Boeheim scored 12 points against St. Bonaventure while going 4-for-8 from the field. He was forced into duty against Georgia Tech on an abysmal day for the Orange offense,

making 3-of-8 3-point tries. That was probably as close as Syracuse came to a bright side against a stingy zone defense.

Two games later, after Boeheim's best shooting night of the season, he grinned at the mention that his shot with 10 minutes left in the first half put Syracuse ahead 18-11 and forced Pittsburgh out of its own zone.

"It was nice," Boeheim said. "A zone is always a tough defense. Making those threes, making them get out of that defense, always helps."

"He had probably the best week of practice that he's had all year, so I was going to get him in there," Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim said. "He made everything. He literally made everything. There were some weeks he didn't. He made everything so I was going to get him in there. We need to be able to see him better and find him better."

Along with his well-documented shooting skills, Buddy's coaches and teammates went out of their way to applaud him for efforts that are more difficult to pick up on. They praised him for his defensive play against Pittsburgh and noted the way that his 3-point shooting creates slivers of space for Syracuse's stars.

Jim Boeheim said he felt it created space for Tyus Battle to drive his way to 22 points. Buddy said he noticed it when Syracuse tried to get the ball to Oshae Brissett at the elbow and defenders were a little more hesitant to swipe down as he dribbled.

"He's a good shooter, good defender, he made a great steal," Jim Boeheim said. "He doesn't hurt us when he's in there and he gives us the threat to shoot from the outside. A couple times when Tyus was driving they were staying with (Buddy) and he got room to drive."

More than anything, though, they credited him with handling the most difficult part of his process without drama. He kept his head down. He took instruction. He took shots when they were open in games. Then he took hundreds more in practice to prepare for the ones still to come.

"In my opinion, his struggle is nothing like mine," Syracuse point guard Frank Howard said. "He came in mature, ready to go. He's been there. People don't understand as a shooter, when you're shooting with feel, it's hard to come off the bench. He's done a great job. I'm most surprised by his defense. He's been a good defender for us. He's still learning, but he's a perfect freshman to ask for. He works, keeps his head down, doesn't cause any problem. We tell him to shoot because we see the work he puts in every day."

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