

Ags beat back TCU, 59-57

Houston-A&M game now very crucial

By RICHARD OLIVER
Sports Editor

True to the form of the up and down SWC basketball season this year, Texas A&M University played an up and down ballgame Tuesday night against TCU.

Fortunately for the surging Aggies, the ups won out as they pulled out a 59-57 squeaker over the Horned Frogs in Fort Worth in front of 5,051.

The victory was a crucial one as Texas A&M raised its record to 7-5 and took over sole possession of sixth place. A victory over Houston Saturday in College Station would clinch a home berth for the Ags in the first round of the post-season SWC tournament next Monday.

The Frogs fell to a 6-9 record and a seventh place tie with Texas. It took a Rynn Wright block of a TCU shot with seven seconds left and a miss of a desperation 18-footer by the Frogs' Cuney Luke with time running out to give the Ags the win.

The Aggies came out of the blocks strong with a 7-0 lead before TCU, which missed its first four shots, could score. Using a man-on-man defense with an occasional full-court press, Texas A&M stymied the Horned Frogs for the most part during the first half and went into the locker room up by seven at the half, 34-27.

Claude Riley, who has been ill for the past week and a half, scored 10 points to pace the scoring in the first half for Texas A&M.

In the meantime, the man-on-man defense was effective, cutting down the scoring of the Frogs high-scoring duo of Darrell Browder, 6-2, and Deckery Johnson, 6-5.

In the second half, however, the fireworks began, as Wright, Riley and Woodley scored quick buckets to put the Ags up by nine with 15 minutes left, 41-32.

In a six minute span, the Frogs outscored the Aggies 14-5 to tie the ballgame at 46-46 with 9:20 left. A minute and a half later, 6-8 freshman Gilbert Collier came off the bench to score his eighth point and put TCU up by one, 50-49, the first lead it had held all night. But the physical Aggie rebounding duo of Rynn Wright and Vernon Smith began to work and control the boards once again as Texas A&M resumed the lead on a Smith bucket with 5:21 left.

With 1:10 remaining, the Aggies had increased the lead to five on a key bucket by Roy Jones and a jumper by Roberts, but a TCU surge cut the lead to 59-57 10 seconds later. Texas A&M wasted two chances to ice the game as freshman guard Roberts, who endured a pitiful shooting night (six points), failed to capitalize on two separate one-on-one bonus foul shooting situations, the last coming with seven seconds remaining.

Wright blocked a jump shot by Browder and Roberts picked up the loose ball and was fouled. He missed the free throw however, and TCU attempted a fast break. An 18-foot heave by Luke missed its mark as time expired.

Head Aggie Coach Shelby Metcalf was pleased with the performance, regardless of the erratic play.

"Nothing's been easy all season long," he said. "It's been rough, rough."

"I'm just really proud of our guys. Considering the circumstances, this may end up as being one of our all-time favorite teams."

The conference race has not

been kind to anyone this season, as every team at one time or another has been in the thick of the race and has been beaten back. Arkansas, Houston, Texas A&M and Texas all won crucial contests Tuesday night, with three of those wins leaving the race as muddled as ever going into the final games Saturday.

"It's really crucial that we win Saturday. If we can win, we will have completely reversed the first half. I think I would really be proud of this ballclub. I doubt seriously if that has ever been done."

The Aggies finished the first SWC half with a 1-7 slate, and a victory over Houston Saturday would give them a 7-1 second half finish.

Riley was high-point man for the night with 16 points, followed by Rynn Wright and TCU's Darrell Browder with 14 each.



Staff photo by Greg Gammon

Texas A&M's Roy Jones dribbles down the court last Saturday against Texas in a 108-79 rout of the Longhorns. Tuesday, Jones and the Aggies slipped past scrappy TCU, 59-57, setting up a crucial battle against Houston Saturday in C. Rollie White at 2:10 p.m.

Arkansas, Houston take wins

Here's a wrapup of other SWC action Tuesday night:

RICE (55) at HOUSTON (63)

— Guard Rob Williams scored 19 points and worked the ball to his three big men in the second half to help the Houston Cougars beat crosstown rival Rice 63-55 Tuesday and help its battle for second place in the Southwest Conference.

TEXAS TECH (54) at TEXAS (65)

— Center LaSalle Thompson scored 18 points and Ray Harper dropped in five free throws in the last two minutes to lift Texas to a 65-54 win over Texas Tech.

The win improved Texas' conference record to 6-9 and 11-14 on the year, and the Longhorns need only a win over Rice in Houston Saturday to gain a home court berth in the first round of the conference post-season tournament.

The Longhorns opened the second period with a 16-8 spurt to get up 45-33 with 11:48 left. But the Red Raiders, behind the shooting of guard Jeff Taylor, closed the gap to 49-46 with 5:33 left.

Tech fell to 8-7 in the SWC and 14-11 on the year.

SMU (33) at ARKANSAS (47)

— Arkansas foiled Southern Methodist's slowdown game in the second half on the shooting of Scott Hastings and Mike Young to down the Mustangs, 47-33, and capture the undisputed Southwest Conference championship.

The 16th-ranked Razorbacks won their 10th straight game and annexed their fourth SWC title (two shared) in the last five years, running their league mark to 12-3 and season record to 21-6.

Arkansas will be the top seeded team in the tournament and will not enter the tourney until the semifinals at San Antonio March 6.

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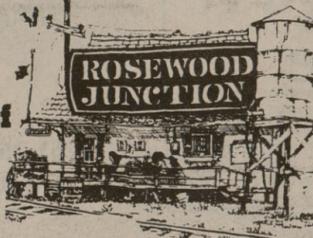
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