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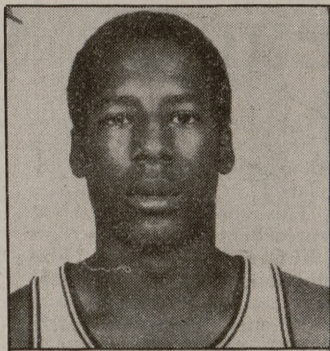
probably be reached today. He also said that if Thomas is dropped from the team, it could have a "detrimental effect" and could end up hurting the team.

Thomas said Wednesday night that he didn't understand why Metcalf removed him from the game.

"I had misunderstood what I was supposed to do," Thomas said. "We were pressing and I thought I was doing what I was supposed to do. I guess I wasn't, and he snatched me out."

"I kind of thought he (Metcalf) really didn't give me enough time to get into the (flow of) the game."

Thomas said Metcalf talked to him at lunch in Cain Hall



Mike Thomas

Wednesday, but said that Metcalf "really didn't say anything to me."

However, Thomas later said: "He (Metcalf) said I was

through." Metcalf said Wednesday night that he had no comment on the matter, but said that a decision will be reached today.

Thomas didn't participate in Wednesday's team workout, and a University source said that Thomas' locker in the coliseum was cleaned out during the day.

Forward Claude Riley said he didn't know why Thomas was taken out of the game or why he reacted like he did.

"I've heard conflicting reports about what happened, so I'd rather not comment on it now," Riley said.

"I'm sure something's going to come out of it, but I don't know what."

Aggie center Rudy Woods, Thomas' roommate, said that he

wasn't aware of the situation when it occurred, and was surprised to find Thomas in their dorm room after the game. Not only had Thomas left the coliseum floor, but he had left the building as well.

Metcalf has emphasized all season that the Aggies don't have a great deal of depth. Without Thomas, they would have only 6-8 Lonnie Bluntson as a reserve forward/center. After losing forward Roy Jones to a knee injury earlier in the season, the Aggies have had to turn more to Thomas and Bluntson as the top reserve big men.

Metcalf lately has praised the play of Thomas, who contributed several key baskets during recent victories over Houston and SMU.

Leavell scores career-high 32 points as Rockets top Nuggets

United Press International DENVER — Denver's 120-110 loss to Houston dimmed the Nuggets' playoff hopes, and head coach Doug Moe said it might be just as well, the way the team has been playing lately.

"Right now, we're not even close to being a playoff team," Moe said after Wednesday's loss.

That's the fourth game in a row against Houston we've played very poorly. We're not the same team we were earlier. We don't have any life or intensity out there, and there's no way we can win without it."

Allen Leavell scored a career-high 32 points to help Houston

deal slumping Denver its fourth straight defeat. Houston coach Del Harris said the performance by Leavell, whose previous high was 29 points at Denver in November, was "fantastic."

"Moses (Malone) is so great, everybody has to pay attention to him," said Leavell. "That gave me some open shots, and fortunately I was able to put them in."

"We've been down all season," he said. "We hadn't beaten Denver yet, and we really wanted to win. We're just going out and playing it game by game."

Houston, which won for the 10th time in its last 12 outings to

move to 31-24, also got 27 points from Elvin Hayes and 23 from Malone, who was held below 30 points for the first time in 14 games.

"Denver was not going to beat us forever," Harris said. "They've beaten us three in a row, and we responded well to the challenge. We ran our type of ball game and used our people well both inside and outside."

Denver, which dropped to 28-27, got a brilliant effort from Kiki Vandeweghe, who scored 17 of the Nuggets' 19 fourth-quarter points and totaled 34.

Dan Issel added 24, but Alex English, the NBA's fourth leading scorer with a 26.2 average, scored only 10 under tight guarding by Robert Reid.

"I bet Robert a steak dinner before the game if he could hold English below his average," said Leavell, who hit 11 of 13 shots in the second half.

"That's the first time we did a good job on Alex," Harris said. "Reid played him real tough. The real difference in tonight's game was that we were disciplined. The standings are making it a battle of nerves."

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