

Houston-N.C. State final helps basketball's popularity

United Press International
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — College basketball is riding a crest of popularity unmatched in its history and contests such as the one which decided the NCAA championship can only serve to enhance the sport's reputation.

For the second straight year the NCAA final provided high drama for the nation's television viewers and the collegiate game again demonstrated why it has such appeal.

On the day before his North Carolina State Wolfpack took on the Houston Cougars in the title game, coach Jim Valvano sounded as if he had embarked on a crusade.

"We aren't playing for just North Carolina State and the Atlantic Coast Conference," said Valvano. "We are playing for all of college basketball."

And when the Wolfpack outscrapped the Cougars, 54-52, it showed once more that college basketball is not always dominated by the giants who slam into each other under the hoop.

When nerve endings get raw and the outcome is in doubt, poise on the floor and on the bench often have more to do with the outcome than the height of the player.

"To beat us you're going to have to do some good things," said Valvano in summing up his team's play. "This team has a lot of heart."

It wasn't the ferocious slam dunks preferred by the huge Houston front line that helped decide the game last Monday. Instead, the big shots were the artistic, long-range jumpers that seemed to stay in the air for three or four seconds — shots launched by 6-1 Dereck Whitteburg, 6-0 Sidney Lowe and 6-0 Terry Gannon.

The long distance shot had become so commonplace during the second half of the championship game that when Whitteburg tossed up a 30-footer in the final seconds, no one seemed to consider what might happen if it didn't go in.

At least no one considered it except Lorenzo Charles, who grabbed the short shot and stuffed it through for the winning points.

The two competing teams left

Rangers win 2nd over Sox

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ARLINGTON — The chill of a second loss in as many efforts for Chicago this season remained on the Arlington Stadium field, where temperatures had fallen to the mid-40s by the end of the game.

In the White Sox locker room, catcher and team leader Carlton Fisk, said he had "no excuses" for the heads down play which has allowed baseball's best team in the preseason to start regular play 0-2.

"I think we're over trying," he said after Chicago's 4-1 loss to Texas Tuesday night. But there is no reason to panic. We're getting good pitching and there's 160 games left this year. We can't panic over two losses."

Fisk said errors (four in the two games), missed double plays and general sloppy play had given Texas game-winning runs.

In Tuesday's game, for example, Fisk had a pitch ricochet off him toward the Ranger dugout. Bucky Dent on second base broke for third, but then held up. Billy Sample at first broke for second and was caught in the middle of the baseline.

Fisk threw the ball to second baseman Tony Bernazard who charged Sample back toward first, flipped the ball to first baseman Tom Paciorek who chased Sample back toward second before throwing the ball again to Bernazard.

Sample made a quick pivot and ran past Paciorek back to first base which was uncovered. In the confusion, Dent moved up to third and scored on Buddy Bell's two-out single.

"I don't know. You can go to the chalkboard to figure out how that should have been played. (Pitcher Floyd) Bannister should have been at first, but he thought the play was going to third and he was backing up there. We ended up giving up a run when we should have had an out," Fisk said.

The unseasonably cold temperatures, supported by 20 mph winds, was far from the sunny, warm weather of spring season.

Albuquerque Monday for their respective homes, the Wolfpack basking in its upset decision and Houston still in a mild state of shock.

And in the aftermath of the championship game, the bricks were quickly hurled at Houston

coach Guy Lewis.

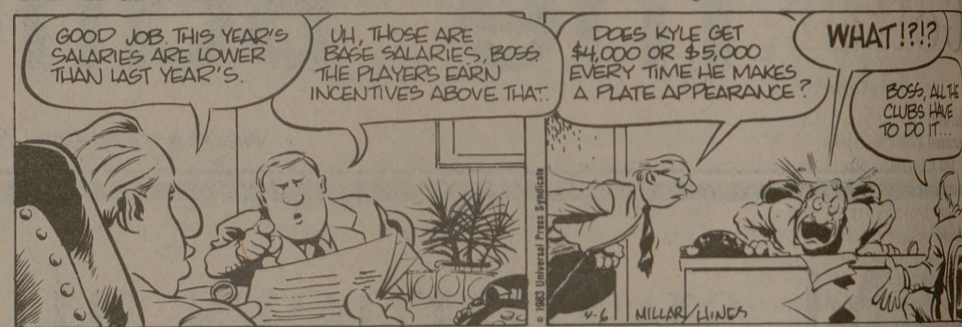
Lewis' team had won 26 games in a row going into the meeting with North Carolina State and had — in the course of a few weeks — risen dramatically in stature. But the coach's decision to go into a delay game

midway through the second half was roundly criticized by media and players alike.

North Carolina State, which lost an eight-point halftime lead and trailed by seven at one point, rallied during Houston's slowdown attempt.

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