

# Sports

## UA-Birmingham edges A&M

### No. 16 Blazers eliminate Ags early from NIT, 71-68

By BRANDON BERRY  
Sports Writer

HOUSTON — The Texas A&M men's basketball team shot 35 percent the first half. Alabama-Birmingham shot 60. The Aggies had 13 rebounds and a 50 percent free throw average. The Blazers ripped 20 boards and netted 90 percent of their free throws.

The game was over at the half, right? Well, not quite.

UAB senior point guard Steve Mitchell, and All-American on most preseason lists, hit four clutch free throws in the last 18 seconds to lead the No. 16 Blazers to a 71-68 win over the Aggies in the first round of the NIT Big Apple Tournament at the Houston Summit Thursday night.

A&M, down by 16 points at halftime, 39-23, regrouped around senior guard Don Marbury's 22 second half points and an unexpected appearance by junior forward Winston Crite, who was supposed to miss the game with a severely sprained ankle.

"I wasn't trying to pull a fast one on anybody," A&M Coach Shelby Metcalf said. "I had no intention of playing Crite as much as I did..."

"Taking the ball game as a whole, there were some pluses. We played poorly in the first half. We didn't run our offense, we didn't shoot from where we usually do and so we were out of position on the rebounds. I think they were a little tight.

"In the second half, what you saw out there from Donnie Marbury (22 points, three steals) was more of the real Donnie than what you saw in the first half (zero points, three fouls). He's a real winner. There's no choke in him."

The Aggies fell behind by 20 points early in the second half before mounting a rally that saw them outscore the Blazers, 34-14, in a 10-minute period.

During that run, Metcalf was forced to use 6-foot-7 Mike Clifford at the point guard position because of foul trouble.

"We have not worked Mike at the point at all," Metcalf said. "But he probably ran our offense better than any of the three people we tried out there. Mike's a steady player."

"The biggest problem with the

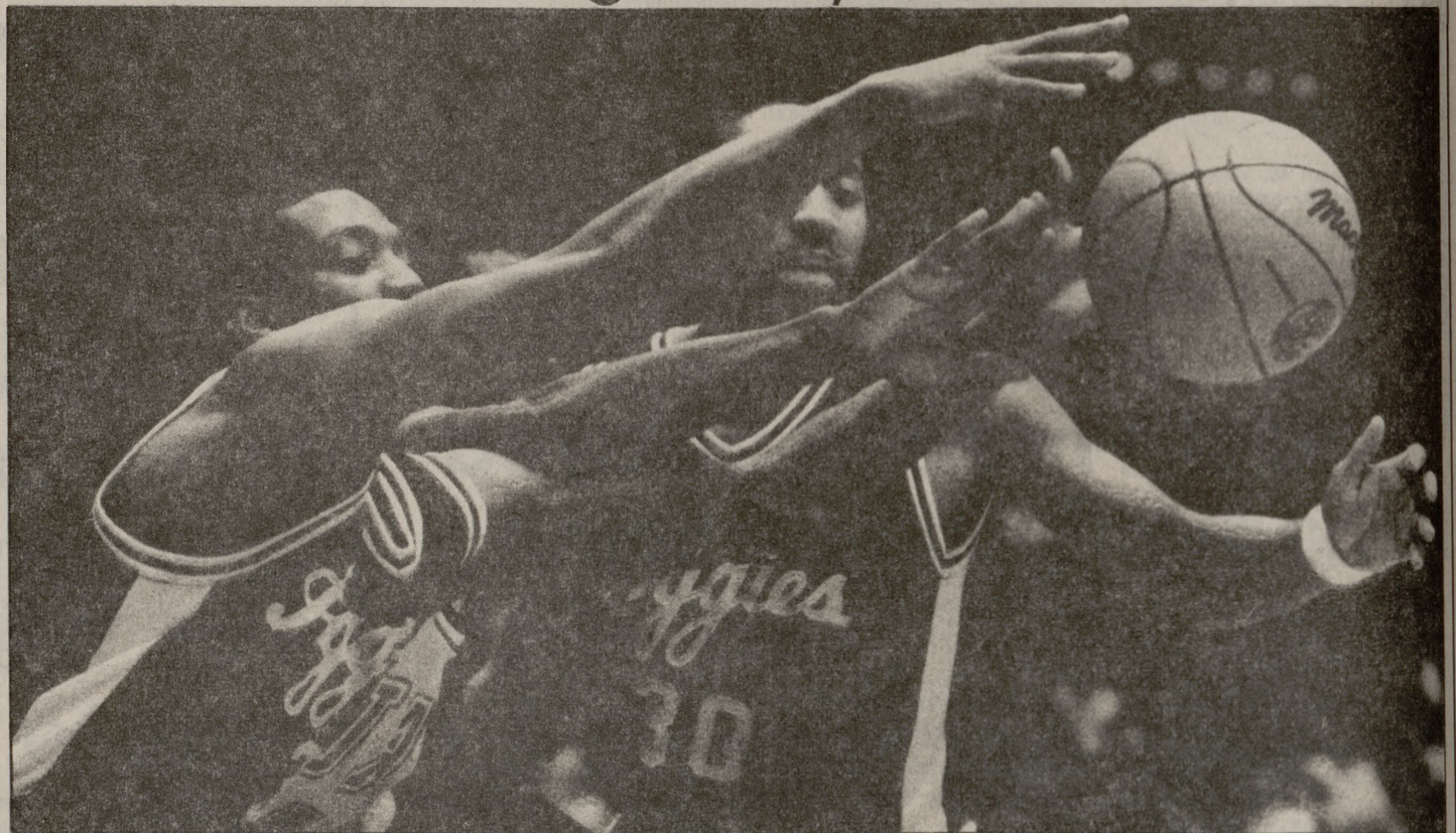


Photo by JOHN MAKELY

Texas A&M's Don Marbury (left) and Jimmie Gilbert (30) battle a UAB player for a loose ball in the Houston Summit Thursday night.

Marbury led the Ags in scoring with 22 points, all of which came in the second half. UAB plays Duke in the NIT regional final Sunday.

Texas A&M basketball team right now is depth, and we've got to keep working at it. David Thompson (10 points, six rebounds) was a plus. He's got some talent, and he could start for us before the year is over."

The Aggies tied the score at 56-56 with 5:25 remaining, but two back-to-back three-point plays by UAB forward Jerome Mincy, who finished with 16 points, put A&M back into a hole it never climbed out of.

Mincy's second three point play came on a controversial foul off a controversial goal tend by Crite.

"That goal tending call, well, I just don't know," Metcalf said. "Maybe that ball would have hit the bottom of the rim, rolled over and clanged through, but I doubt it."

The Aggies, with the clock working against them, were forced to foul Mitchell, who finished with a game-high 24 points. The rest was as easy as 1-2-3-4.

"That Mitchell was just as good as he was advertised," Metcalf said. "If he has aspiration of playing after college, then Texas A&M sure helped him."

"But we lost this game in the paint. Down the stretch we just let them get the inside position: We fouled their players and we were lucky enough to have them miss some, but then we didn't get the rebounds. We just didn't make the plays or get the breaks."

Marbury, the Aggies' leading scorer last season, agreed.

"I don't think we were too far behind to win it," he said. "We came back. We just didn't get the breaks at the end. I came out in

the second half and played my heart out. They beat us — there's not much I can say. We did prove tonight we can play with anybody in the country."

UAB Coach Gene Bartow said of Aggies:

"They've got some players who could play for anybody in the country. We're really happy to get that one behind us. It was just a phenomenal game by Don Marbury down the stretch, but we played a near flawless first half. That was enough to get us over the hump."

For the game, the Blazers hit 50 percent of their shots from the field, almost all of which came via medium or long range jump shots. UAB also hit 76 percent of their free throws and out-rebounded A&M, 34-32.

A&M shot only 45 percent

from the field and 61 percent from the line for the game.

"We've got to start taking our free throws more seriously in practice," said Marbury, who missed four of his eight attempts. "They were probably the difference out there."

So after the smoke cleared underneath the boards, where do the Blazers and Aggies stand?

"It would have been disappointing if we would have lost tonight, but we could've handled it," Bartow said. "We've got a team that's won 48 games over the last two years."

The Aggies, meanwhile, travel back up Highway 6 with their visions of an early season upset deflated.

"It's a loss, but you can find some good things in a loss," Metcalf said.

## A&M swimmers to host LSU in dual match

By KEN SURY  
Sports Writer

Although injuries and sickness have sidelined three Texas A&M swimmers, the Aggie men's and women's swim teams will host Louisiana State today at 5 p.m. in a dual meet at the P.L. Downs Natatorium.

A&M women swimmers Meegan Wright, Britt Hoefs and Kelley Johnston will not see action against LSU.

A&M Head Swimming Coach Mel Nash said that Wright will be out about three weeks after she has sur-

gery to repair torn knee ligaments. Hoefs is hampered by a recent illness and Johnston dislocated a shoulder in A&M's Nov. 9 meet against Southern Methodist in Dallas.

That leaves the Aggie women's team with only five swimmers and diver Terri Hurley.

"There's no way we can win (the women's meet against LSU with so few swimmers)," Nash said.

Nash said the only bright spot is that the injuries and sicknesses are occurring now instead of in the spring when the Aggies compete

against Southwest Conference opponents and prepare for the NCAA Championships.

A&M assistant coach Tracy Johnston said the men's contest should be close.

"LSU has practically a brand-new squad — lots of freshmen and sophomores," Johnston said. "But they're swimming very well so far this semester. They upset Nebraska, which was ranked in the Top 20 and has beaten some good teams and recorded some fast times. On paper, it looks like a very even match, it's just

going to be who's swimming hot that day."

"We know LSU is going to come in here looking for the upset and I wouldn't even call it an upset, because they're very good. They should be ranked, but the polls don't say anything when you've only had one ranking and that was preseason."

Johnston said the A&M men are looking to challenge LSU, but they'll be at a disadvantage.

"We don't have any divers for the diving competition," Johnston said.

"So we're going into the meet 16 points to zero. That's hard to make up since you only need 56 points to win the meet. That's a big deficit to make up. But we feel that we can do it and we're planning on doing it. So we'll just see how they respond."

The men's team will be anchored by seniors Chris O'Neil, Clark McDonald, Jeff Marx and junior Chris Emig. O'Neil is an All-American in the butterfly, while Marx and Emig were honorable mention All-Americans at the NCAA Championships last year.

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