

Sports

A&M falters in final minute to hand Baylor win Aggies' six-point lead dissipates after missing 3 free throws

By Ed Bodde
Assistant Sports Editor

Baylor's 71-70 victory over the Texas A&M men's basketball team Wednesday night in G. Rollie White Coliseum was just about as an emotional a game as any fan, coach or player will go through.

A&M led almost the entire game, twice by eight points, but could never put the Bears away.

"We shouldn't have been in this situation in the first place," Winston Crite said. "They outplayed us in the end."

Aggie forward Tadd Thomas agreed that the game could have been put away earlier.

"We'd get up by three or four points and we'd turn around and not play defense a couple of times," he said.

After Michael Williams' winning jumper with nine seconds left made the score 71-70, the Bears had their first lead since the 11-minute mark of the first half.

And when Winston Crite's 17-footer bounced off the side of the rim as time ran out, the surprising Bears had escaped with a hard-fought road win.

"Everyone knew Michael was going to take the last shot," Coach Shelby Metcalf said. "Crawford had him but he (Williams) is a difficult kid to cover."

A&M fell to 12-7 overall and 4-4 in the SWC conference, while Baylor improved to 10-7 and 6-2.

Both teams needed a win to stay within range of first-place TCU, and the pressure finally erupted into a bench-clearing brawl.

Leading 67-62 with 1:44 left in the game, A&M in-bounded the ball and Keron Graves was fouled by Mark Buchanan. Both players exchanged words but they were quickly separated and Graves went to the line for a one-and-one.

Graves missed and Buchanan scored on a nice drive and layup at the other end to make it 67-64.

With 51 seconds left in the game A&M's Darryl McDonald was aggressively fouled by Robert McLemore.

Both players then got into a shoving match and the bench-clearing fight ensued.

Both McLemore and McDonald were ejected, and both teams were assessed technical fouls. Crawford replaced McDonald and sank three out of four free throws to put A&M on top 70-64. With the crowd of 5,007 roaring, Buchanan then stepped to the line for Baylor and calmly sank both shots to bring the Bears within four.

After the brawl, it was Baylor who reacted positively. The Bears scored the final five points.

"We had the game in our hands but something like that (the brawl) just ruined it for us," Thomas said.

"We didn't want to fight, we had the game," Metcalf said.

McDonald said he also thought Baylor got the momentum back as a result of the brawl.

Graves missed the front end of another one-and-one opportunity with 49 seconds left, and when Buchanan went down and drilled a 3-pointer, the scoreboard read 70-69.

A&M trailed only once in the first half 15-14 but slowly edged out in front, and when Thomas hit two free throws, A&M had its largest lead at 30-22. Both teams traded baskets and a tip-in by Baylor's James Francis with two seconds left in the half made it 38-32.

In the second half, Baylor often cut into A&M's lead, narrowing it to two points on several occasions, but the Aggies would pull out in front again by six or seven.

Darryl Middleton scored all of his 14 points in the second half and Frank Williams pulled down 10 rebounds for the Bears. Todd Holloway led the Aggies with 14 points.

A&M next plays SMU in Dallas Feb. 5, and with four of the five remaining games on the road, the Aggies now face an uphill struggle to repeat as SWC champions.



Texas A&M's Todd Holloway (right) knocks the ball out of the hands of Baylor's Mark Buchanan during the Aggies' 71-70 loss to

the Bears Wednesday night in G. Rollie White Coliseum. The loss was the third in a row for A&M, which falls to 4-4 in the SWC.

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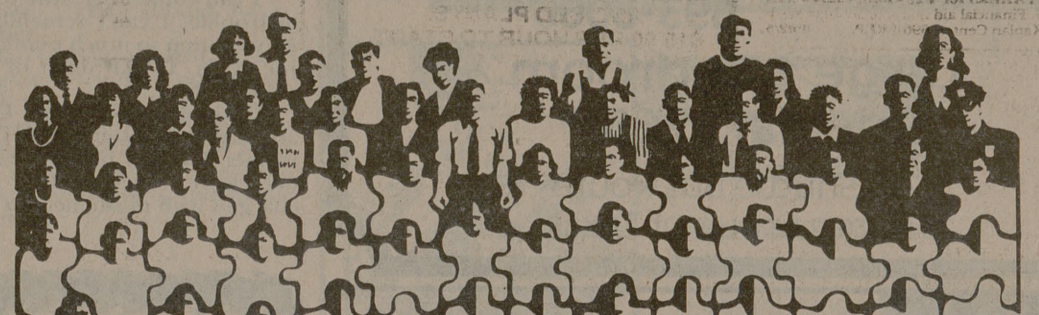
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