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Sonics' employees stuffing ballot box

SEATTLE (AP) — Both the president and coach of the Seattle SuperSonics say the team did nothing unethical when it orchestrated stuffing tens of thousands of NBA All-Star ballots in support of Sonics guard Dale Ellis.

"It is a procedure being done by every team in the league," President Bob Whitsitt said of the Sonics' practice of having people associated with the team submit multiple ballots.

"Why all the sudden is this something unique?" coach Bernie Bickerstaff asked. "How do you think some of these guys got to play (in All-Star games) all these years?"

The extra ballots — as many as 50,000 to 60,000 — helped Ellis take a 30,448-vote lead over Portland's Clyde Drexler for the No. 2 position among Western Conference guards, behind Magic Johnson.

"Last year, Denver did it to help Fat Lever," Drexler said. This year, Seattle is helping Dale. But each time, I'm the guy who gets kicked in the rear."

No NBA rule says teams cannot use employees to vote. NBA spokesman Brian McIntyre said Ellis was unlikely to lose his starting position for the game, and the Sonics probably would not be penalized.

One contest among the team's "giveaway crew" awarded a basketball, gym bag and \$50 to the first two members of the crew who turned in 10,000 ballots, the Times said. Monahan, 16, said he and at least three or four others turned in 10,000 ballots, the newspaper said.

The "giveaway crew" is a group of high-school-age boys who help the promotions department at games and with other functions.

Aggies

(Continued from page 9)

Metcalf said.

A&M was led by Thompson who eventually turned around his shooting to hit for 17 points. He also pulled down 13 rebounds and played every minute until he collected his fifth foul with one second remaining.

Senior forward Doug Dennis also turned a strong performance with 17 points of his own and seven rebounds.

Dennis said the quality play for the Aggies is bittersweet.

"It's tough to go down to the end and not have a chance to at least tie and make a mistake."

In addition to Upchurch's career outing the Cougars received a strong performance from guard Richard Hollis. The senior scored 13 points and had 12 rebounds to lead the Cougars.

The Aggies suffered from a lack of free-throw attempts. A&M had only 17 tries from the line to Houston's 27. The Cougars were able to hit 22 while A&M hit 14.

Houston led at the half, 38-37, when a point was taken off the board for A&M when the officials changed their ruling on three-point shot by Thompson. They concluded that he had his foot on the three-point line when shooting.

Houston began the second half by adding to their lead. The Cougars eventually led by seven, 48-41, before A&M responded with nine straight points to lead 50-48 with 12:06 to go.

The run began with a fast-break layup by Ricks and Dennis hit an eight-foot baseline jumper. A free-throw by Thompson was followed by a tip-in by Dennis when Thompson missed his second free-throw attempt to tie the game.

The teams traded scores until Upchurch broke a 60-60 tie by scoring on a layup and a free-throw with 4:28 remaining.

Metcalf

(Continued from page 9)

inside game.

Donald Thompson has assumed that role in the past two seasons. However, the Aggies have been hurt by the changes because of a lack of depth and a down cycle in recruiting.

The advent of the three-point shot and the shot clock neutralized any size advantage a team may have. Metcalf stuck by his policy of moving the offense inside.

He now says he was late in realizing the impact of the changes.

"I grew up with the philosophy that basketball is played in the paint," Metcalf said. "I did not realize the impact the three-point shot was gonna have."

"Then, when we did, it was hard to get (three-point shooters). It's kinda hard to leave somethin' that's good to you."

Metcalf had decided he would change the A&M offense following this season. He is redshirting three players and planned on instituting the new offense with the arrival of those players.

Coming after shattering losses to Nevada-Las Vegas and Oklahoma, the TCU loss left A&M winless in SWC play after two games. Metcalf and his staff decided to go ahead and change the offense right then.

"The main reason was to get ourselves in a position to play more up-tempo," Metcalf said. "Nowadays you need a great ball handler, a three-point shooter at the second guard and some 6-10 block players."

"We chagned our offense to one very similar to what Vegas and O.U. are runnin'."

The objective of the new scheme is to speed up the tempo of the game while looking for a fast break or only passing three to five times before shooting on a set play.

The Aggies had success early in the season in the transition game and lately have been much more aggressive — occasionally scoring fast break points after made free throws by the opposition.

Metcalf bases much of his optimism for this year on the way his players have picked up the offense after only a few weeks.

"We've improved each game since the TCU game," he said. "We just can't get over the hump. The guys have adapted to (the offense). If we play hard, some good things will happen to us."

While he believes good things will happen for his team this year, he's more positive about the next two years. Metcalf expects his redshirts to contribute immediately next year and hopes to return to national prominence within the next two seasons.

Metcalf has had an influx of junior college recruits in recent years. He believes the program has been hurt by it because of a lack of continuity.

"The thing that hurts with bringin' in JUCO players is you have to wear out a pair of shoes around here before you feel comfortable," Metcalf said. "Once you do, you get a special feeling about a place."

"I think all athletes get a lot better their second year here because they start to develop that loyalty to the university."

With help from second-year recruiting coordinator Larry Cockrum, Metcalf has begun to concentrate on high school signees to regain stability in the program.

"Larry's the best recruiting coordinator we've ever had," he said.

Metcalf signed a pair of players out of high school last year and is redshirting both of them this year. One was a 6'10" center — the other was a 6'4" sharp-shooting guard.

Chris Finley, the 6'10" center, was an All-State selection in Mississippi as a junior on a state championship team.

"We've improved each game since the TCU game. We just can't get over the hump."

— Shelby Metcalf, A&M basketball coach

"(Finley) may play by next year," Metcalf said. "He's a good shooter."

Cody Blake, the 6'4" guard, averaged 17.7 points and 8.5 assists as a senior at Alabama Consolidated High School. Metcalf thinks Blake is the ideal size to run the offense recently implemented.

Metcalf's concentration on high school prospects doesn't mean he's abandoning the JUCO talent.

"We've signed a 6-9 forward, Carlos Marrero from Puerto Rico, who played at Alabama A&M," he said. "Another early signing is James Cooper. He's a 6-2 guard from Mississippi County Junior College in Arkansas."

Cooper was the Arkansas Junior College Player of the Year last year. Another prospect is 6-10 center James Harris of Memphis Junior College. Harris weighs 235 pounds and reminds Metcalf of Akeem Olajuwon.

"(Harris) and Olajuwon would make bookends," he said. "He's big and strong and has quick feet like Olajuwon."

Metcalf hopes to improve drastically in the next two years mainly because of these prospects. He thinks the recruiting emphasis will begin to take effect next season.

"I think next year it'll really show," he said. "We only have two seniors on this year's squad. We have three redshirts, two transfers and another signed — that's six quality players."

"I think within the next two years we can get back to where we were — at the top of the league."

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