

Aggies downed by 8th-ranked Jayhawks

Kansas defeats Aggies 78-57 in front of largest crowd to ever see an A&M game

BY JASON LINCOLN
The Battalion

It may be only the start of conference action, but for the Aggie freshmen, Monday's game against the University of Kansas was the culmination of a season of hard work with disappointing results.

While the Texas A&M men's basketball team lost 78-57 to the Jayhawks, the Aggies showed everything that had been missing in its nine previous losses.

Coach Melvin Watkins' young Aggies were anything but intimidated by ESPN's "Big Monday" telecast and the No. 8 Jayhawks. Instead the Aggies took the opportunity to show the future of A&M hoops.

"I thought it was great. Big time college basketball at its best and it was on our campus. We haven't heard that in a long time," Watkins said. "That's what we're building towards. Once we put this team together and have all the pieces in place, we can come out and not only be in these games, but have a chance to win these games."

Highlighting that future was a packed house at Reed Arena with a record crowd of 12,175 and an Aggie squad capable of hanging with the nation's elite.

"I've been looking forward to this night all my life," freshman guard Jamaal Gilchrist said about his first nationally televised game featuring a top-10 opponent. "It just doesn't get any better than this."

The only thing Watkins' Aggies were unable to do was maintain their strengths for a complete 40 minutes. Kansas took advantage of its depth and height advantage to outlast the Aggies.

The Jayhawks featured a consistent 12-man rotation, compared to A&M's nine man rotation with five true-freshmen. That alone was enough to wear A&M down in the second half. Added to that was Kansas' overwhelming reach advantage inside, which created a 55-30 rebounding advantage, including 21 offensive boards.

"Defensively, rebounding and depth were the biggest factors," Kansas coach Roy Williams said. "They played really hard but so did we."

The Aggies showed their excitement early, staying step for step with the Jayhawks. Sophomore guard Andy Leatherman tied it up with a pair of free-throws to throw the Aggies into overdrive.

In the next 20 seconds, A&M would showcase its talent creating back-to-back turnovers resulting in a layup by junior forward Carlton Brown and a dunk by freshman guard Bernard King. The six-point, half-minute run put Texas A&M up 14-10.

The run caused a shift in the Kansas pressure as the Jayhawks looked for ways to throw A&M out of its rhythm. Texas A&M gave little room, making the Jayhawks earn every point.

Kansas would stretch out to a nine-point lead by halftime, but not before senior forward Aaron Jack slammed it home, to return the excitement to a tired Aggie squad.

The Aggies were just as determined for the final 20 minutes.

For the first eight minutes of the second half, Texas A&M kept Kansas within striking distance.

A&M's momentum would be short-lived as Kansas showed why it was one of the nation's best. The Jayhawks' defense shut down the Aggies going into the final ten minutes.

"We had a spell where we didn't score and they did," Watkins said. "Once you do that they don't let you get back in."

The Aggies would go six minutes and three seconds without scoring and another two minutes before actually hitting a field goal. The lapse was all the Jayhawks needed to break away and put the finishing touches on Texas A&M. Going into the final two minutes Kansas had stretched itself into an insurmountable 24-point lead.

"When you play a team that's really up to play you, you want to try and bury them as soon as possible," Kansas' Kenny Gregory said. "We just tried to extend the lead as much as possible to hurry up and get the game over."

Kansas did just that down the stretch, putting the conclusion on the biggest game thus far for Watkins' Aggies. With the win, Kansas extends its record to 15-2 with a 4-0 conference record. The Aggies are now 1-3 in conference with a 5-10 overall record.



SALLIE TURNER/THE BATTALION

Junior forward Carlton Brown tries to avoid pressure from Jayhawks guard Kirk Hinrich.



GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION

Freshman guard Bernard King slams the ball home after a steal in the first half of the Aggies' 78-57 loss to the University of Kansas Jayhawks last night at Reed Arena.

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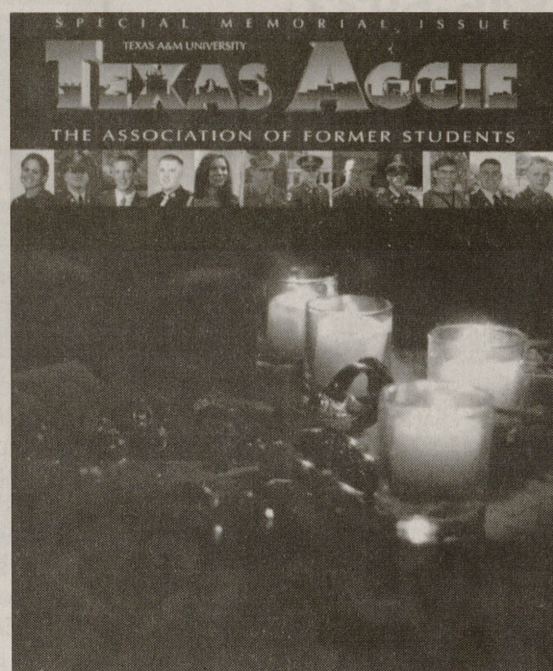
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