

A&M loses big at LSU without Jones at point



Junior forward Courtney Williams, shown above in Thursday's home loss to Missouri, scoring 19 for the Aggies in the 17-point road loss to LSU on Sunday.

By Cole Stenholm

► The Texas A&M women's basketball team concluded its regular season on a sour note Sunday, dropping its second consecutive game in an 80-63 loss at the hands of LSU.

The No. 12 Aggies, led by head coach Gary Blair, marched into the Maravich Assembly Center in Baton Rouge with one thing in mind — win and secure a bye into their conference tournament's quarterfinals for their 10th consecutive season.

But the Aggies (22-8, 10-6), playing without point guard Jordan Jones, who is out for the season with a torn ACL, didn't embody that urgency and committed 24 turnovers in the game.

"We were playing for a top-4 national seed, which we don't deserve based on how we finished our last four games," Blair said.

The Tigers (16-12, 10-6) implemented a full-court pressure defense periodically throughout the game and it gave the Aggies fits, forcing

13 turnovers in the first 13 minutes of action and preventing the Aggies from taking advantage of what was an otherwise efficient first half.

A three-minute first-half stretch saw six of seven A&M offensive possessions end in turnovers. LSU outscored A&M 13-0 during this sequence, with nine from senior guard Dashawn Harden, and broke the game open, 26-10.

Harden stole the show in the first period on senior day with 22 first-half points on perfect 5-of-5 shooting from beyond the arc. A Harden 3-pointer with nearly a minute remaining secured a 47-35 lead for the Tigers heading into the break.

Texas A&M and LSU then proceeded to exchange buckets for a large portion of the second half. The effort of junior guard Courtney Williams — who finished the game with 19 points, five assists and four rebounds — helped the Aggies stay within striking distance, but was not enough to narrow the deficit.

Harden finished with 28 points and was joined in her

scoring charge by junior guard Danielle Ballard, who also reached the 20-point mark while adding seven boards.

A&M assistant coach Bob Starkey reflected on the disappointment surrounding the A&M squad following Sunday's game.

"We're disappointed with the way we played," Starkey said. "The two things that stood out to me most in our play, is obviously we didn't take care of the ball. We turned it over, that led to points and we did a very poor job of defending their dribble penetration. The second thing I would say is certainly kudos to LSU. I thought they played incredibly well. They shot the ball as well as we've seen them all year long. But we can only be accountable for what we can control and there was some things that we just didn't do very well and we didn't do them very well from the tip."

Texas A&M now awaits the seeding for the SEC Tournament, which commences Thursday in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

ANALYSIS

Rebounding helps men's hoops find identity



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Assuming Texas A&M makes the big dance, it's hard to say how well the team will perform. But one thing is certain — it keeps improving down low.

So far, the Aggies have had to count their success on other team's failure. When Ole Miss halted their six-game winning streak, the Aggies had to wait for the Rebels to lose their last two games until they could launch back into third place.

Moreover, A&M's only two RPI top 50 wins came over LSU. However, at the time of each victory, LSU was not in the top 50, and the Aggies had to bank on the Tigers succeeding to bolster their resume. Fortunately for A&M, LSU turned around after each loss and won three straight.

Other than that, A&M has lost every game against a top-tier program. In their defense, the Aggies have been close in those defeats, losing to Kentucky in overtime, Arkansas by six and Dayton by a near buzzer-beater. The Aggies' other losses, besides Alabama, have been decided by 10 or fewer points.

But close doesn't count. The Aggies needed to improve in every facet before the season's end, and they've done just that.

There's no question that A&M's success lies with Danuel House, who has garnered more than 20 points in three of the last four matchups. He has been the guy in crunch time, but the bigs down low are contributing to the Aggies' prosperity just as much.

Looking strictly at the numbers, the Aggies usually win when they outrebound their opponent. They've won the boards in each of their last five games, and are 4-1 in that span. The SEC may not have the best athletes and shooters, but it is full of teams with grit that can punish others if they aren't tough enough. Despite the aggressive style of play in their competitors, the Aggies are 12-1 in the rebounding battle in their last 13 games.

This recent effort on the boards is



Tanner Garza — THE BATTALION

While junior guard Danuel House has carried the load offensively this season, a strong rebounding effort has helped A&M survive his off nights.

due in large part to Kourtney Roberson, who's peaking at the right time. The senior center accumulated just one double-double — which came in the Aggies' early contest against Dayton — coming into the last four games. He has since had three.

Jalen Jones adds consistency. Jones has had single-digit nights just five times. In the past five games, Jones and Roberson have each had at least six rebounds.

Second chance points are heavily needed for a team that ranks No. 167 in scoring. It allows more opportunities for the Aggies shooters. House tied his season-high for shots against Auburn with 20, despite only shooting 30 percent. Aggie fans used to fear nights when House's play is rocky, but rebounding opens up endless opportunities for other shooters like Caruso, Allen and Fitzgerald. When House was struggling against the Tigers, Caruso swooped in and went 4-for-4 from three and totaled 14 points, while House and two others also had double-digit nights.

That 80-55 victory over Auburn was A&M's biggest conference victory since 2008. A lot of that had to do with the Aggies outrebounding the Tigers by

nearly 15.

There will be longer, tougher teams the Aggies could meet if they make the NCAA tournament. A&M doesn't particularly have size on its side, but even against Kentucky, the longest and most skilled team in the country, A&M only lost the battle by one board.

So if you happen to find the Aggies in your bracket in March, think again before counting them out because of their length. Their physicality will hurt teams.

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SPRING FOOTBALL SET TO BEGIN

Among the storylines as spring practice begins Monday: New defensive coordinator John Chavis will get his first look at the A&M linebackers in a year of defensive change. See story at tx.ag/batt4.

TENNIS TOPS KENTUCKY AT HOME

In a home matchup to start the SEC season Friday, the men's tennis team swept Kentucky, 4-0. A Sunday doubleheader was suspended for weather. See story at tx.ag/batt5.



PROVIDED

Shamier Little won the 400 meter during the SEC Indoor Championships over the weekend.

Pair of 3rd-place finishes for track at SEC indoors

Indoor meet a mixed bag, says head coach

By Seth Stroupe

► The Texas A&M track and field team finished third in both the men and women's division this weekend at the SEC Indoor Championships in Lexington, Kentucky.

"There were some highs and some lows for us today," head coach Pat Henry told reporters at the conclusion of Saturday's action. "I'm disappointed with a number of people and situations today ... We can't have those kind of situations in a big meet, we all need to be prepared and on the same page. To be third here with both groups was a great meet for us, there is no question about that."

The No. 7 Aggie women finished the meet with 81.9 points, a total only bested by No. 1 Arkansas (130) and No. 3 Florida (86). The team was led by a pair of individual first place finishes on Saturday.

Senior Hillary Montgomery, who set the school record for the mile earlier in the season, jumped out to an early lead in the 5,000 meters and never looked back. Montgomery won the event with a time of 16:16.00, and had to make her way around lapped competitors to find the finish line. Teammate Grace Fletcher finished second to give the Aggies the top two spots in the event.

"It's so incredible for us to come out here and represent Texas A&M like that," Montgomery said. "It's amazing. We've all worked so incredibly hard and I'm so happy it paid off. Having Grace right behind me encouraged me to keep going

with that pace."

Sophomore Shamier Little won the women's 400 meter with a time of 51.37 seconds. Little finished third in the event at last year's SEC Indoor and first at the conference's outdoor championship as a freshman. Little's time was the third-fastest collegiate time and second-fastest American time ever posted.

Senior thrower Brea Garrett finished second in the weight toss for the third consecutive year at the SEC championship. Garrett also took fifth place in the shot put on day one of competition.

The No. 4 Aggie men also finished third, two points behind No. 3 Arkansas and 17 points behind No. 1 Florida. The men's effort was led by another title for the 4x400 meter relay team, which took first for the third consecutive year. The Aggie quartet of Gregory Coleman, Shavez Hart, Deon Hickey and Bralon Taplin chased down Florida on the final lap en route to posting a facility-best 3:03.75.

Texas A&M also medaled in the Distance Medley Relay, where the team of Cameron Villareal, Carlyle Roudette, Gaines Kinsey and Isaac Spencer took second with a time of 9:46.00, 10th-best in school history.

The Texas A&M men were unable to capture any individual titles, but Taplin (400), Hart (200) and Latio Colie (triple jump) each took second place in their respective events for the Aggies.

Next up for the Aggie track team is the NCAA Indoor Championships on March 13-14 in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

BASEBALL CONTINUED

thriller. A&M trailed 3-0 heading to the bottom of the eighth inning. The Aggies then saw heroics from Hunter Melton and Logan Taylor, as both hit two-run home runs to give the Aggies a 4-3 advantage. Ryan Hendrix came on in the ninth to record his second save of the season to keep A&M undefeated.

AJ Minter also had his longest outing of the season on the mound Friday night. Minter went six innings, allowing only one earned run while striking out seven.

On Saturday, the Aggies again trailed early, but turned it around with their bats to take an 8-1 win. In the fourth, the Aggies scored three runs to give themselves a lead they would not relinquish. Great hitting from Hunter Melton and Nick Banks sparked the Aggies. Melton went 3-for-4 with two RBIs in the game, and Banks went 2-for-4 with his first home run of the season and two RBIs on the night.

Grayson Long was key in the win. He started on the mound and went six innings, allowing only five hits, one run and struck out four Dartmouth batters on the day.

Sunday afternoon, A&M trailed for the third consecutive game of the weekend. Both teams started hot, scoring a combined 10 runs in the first three innings. However, A&M led 6-4 after three innings of play and tacked on four more runs in the fourth and fifth innings to take a 10-4 lead.

A&M saw great hitting throughout the lineup. Mitchell Nau was the story on offense, going 2-for-5 with three RBIs and a double to his name. Nau is now hitting .472 on the season with 10 RBIs. Ryne Birk, Hunter Melton and Nick Banks contributed two RBIs each in the win.

Through 12 games, Nau said the team has potential.

"I think we are relentless," Nau said. "As far as offense goes, it's tough. We don't have one guy in the lineup where a

pitcher can catch their breath. If a pitcher makes a mistake in our lineup, he will get punished."

Matt Kent was the Aggie starter on the mound, and after a tough start he ended with a solid performance. Kent went six innings, allowed eight hits, three earned runs and struck out eight.

A&M head coach Rob Childress said he was happy about his team's performance throughout the weekend, especially on Sunday.

"I thought we showed up today with a sense of urgency," Childress said. "Once this game started, I thought we were very good. [Kent] got us off to a good start. Give Dartmouth credit, they punched back. But we were able to respond."

The Aggies now need only five more wins to reach 1,000 all-time at Olsen Field.

A&M will return for the final game of its 13-game home stand against Dallas Baptist at 6:35 p.m. Tuesday night.