

Ponies drop first home game

Written by Administrator
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DALLAS (AP) — Hall of Fame coach Larry Brown was in no mood to talk about what No. 18 SMU has accomplished this season.

While the Mustangs have produced plenty of magic and mania at renovated Moody Coliseum, and seem a sure bet for their first NCAA tournament appearance since 1993, they had just lost at home for the first time this season.

"We weren't prepared the way they were, didn't handle the press, didn't handle their intensity at all," Brown said after SMU's 84-71 loss to No. 11 Louisville on Wednesday night.

SMU (23-7, 12-5 American Athletic Conference) jumped out to a 14-point lead in the first half before another raucous sellout crowd, but trailed by halftime in its first home game since 1985 matching ranked teams. And then Louisville scoring leader Russ Smith fought through a stomach bug to make all six of his 3-point attempts while scoring 22 of his 26 points after halftime.

Smith hit three straight 3s right after his alley-oop pass on the go-ahead dunk by Montrezl Harrell midway through the second half for the AAC-leading and defending national champion Cardinals (25-5, 14-3).

"Russ Smith was phenomenal," Brown said. "Some of his shots were defended. You have to give it to him. He was remarkable."

Rick Pitino won the matchup of Hall of Fame coaches, as SMU and Brown lost for the first time in 10 games since moving back into their campus home in January.

SMU had already defeated three Top 25 teams at home this season, with decisive wins over UConn, Memphis and Cincinnati.

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The Mustangs couldn't add to that list against the Cardinals, who had four players score in double figures.

Chris Jones added 21 points, while Harrell had 19 and Luke Hancock 15. Louisville is guaranteed at least a share of the first AAC title with a victory at home Saturday against No. 19 UConn. No. 15 Cincinnati (24-5, 13-3) has two games left, at home Thursday against No. 20 Memphis before going to Rutgers on Saturday.

Nick Russell had a season-high 18 points in his final home game for SMU. Markus Kennedy had 14 points and Sterling Brown added 10.

The Mustangs close the regular season Saturday at Memphis.

"We need to win that game. Hopefully we've got a couple of more games after that," Russell said. "We have to move forward, just have to keep our heads up."

SMU was even at 41 after Russell got a bounce pass from Kennedy and made a layup despite being fouled by Harrell.

Russell missed the free throw and Harrell quickly made amends with that rebound, and then a reverse slam on the pass from Smith before a barrage of long-range shots.

Smith made only one of his five shots before halftime, none from 3-point range. He took six 3-point attempts after halftime — and made them all, including three in a span of 72 seconds after the go-ahead dunk. He later had 3s on consecutive possessions with defenders in his face.

Just because he was making all those shots didn't mean he was suddenly feeling better physically.

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"That was crazy. It was happening right when we were in the huddle. You know you get that nasty little belch and then after that I just had to excuse myself," Smith said. "I was trying to play through it. But I realized we had a pretty decent lead so I didn't want to force the issue to make things worse."

SMU led 26-12 when Kennedy made a jumper with 7:04 left, but the Mustangs didn't make another field goal before halftime.

The Mustangs had nine turnovers during that span, four by Russell. And they missed their only three shots.

Jones hit two 3s when Louisville scored 15 consecutive points over a 2½-minute span, his second long-range shot in that span putting the Cardinals up for the first time at 27-26. He had a steal before halftime that he converted into a breakaway layup.

It was the sixth consecutive sellout, and seventh overall this season for the Mustangs. The crowd included Hall of Fame and three-time Super Bowl champion quarterback Troy Aikman, current Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo and former President George W. Bush, who lives in the neighborhood and whose presidential library is adjacent to Moody.