

SFA's 29-game winning streak ended by UCLA

Written by Administrator
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SAN DIEGO (AP) — For the first time since before Thanksgiving, the Stephen F. Austin Lumberjacks felt the sting of a loss.

They were outmanned in both tradition and talent in losing 77-60 to the fourth-seeded UCLA Bruins in the third round of the NCAA tournament on Sunday.

Their 29-game winning streak, which for about three hours was the longest in the country, was ended by a program that has won 11 national championships.

The 12th-seeded Lumberjacks (32-3) were playing in just the third NCAA tournament game in their history.

"This is going to make us more hungry. That's what it's all about," said guard Thomas Walkup, who had 22 points and 11 rebounds for the Lumberjacks (32-3). "Getting to the third round and not being able to advance to the Sweet 16, that is what we want now. WE were close and that's what we are hungry for.

"Coach told us this is the culture now. The winning culture is the only thing that is acceptable and losing is not going to be acceptable."

The Lumberjacks hadn't lost since Nov. 23, a 66-58 defeat at East Tennessee State. After Wichita State lost to Kentucky to have its 35-game winning streak snapped, SFA's 29-game streak became the nation's longest, for about 3 hours.

"I'll say what I told the team — I couldn't be prouder," SFA coach Brad Underwood said. "We didn't have a great year. We had a year for the history books. ... A 29-game winning streak, they don't know how good that really is. That's very, very special."

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The Lumberjacks head back to Nacogdoches, Texas, having earned the first NCAA tournament victory in school history, an overtime upset against VCU on Friday. They are 1-2 overall in the tournament.

"When a coach can wake up every single morning and enjoy going to work every single day because he knows he gets to work with guys like this, that's pretty special," Underwood said.

Jordan Adams scored 19 points for the Bruins (28-8), who will play Florida, the tournament's overall top seed, in the South Regional semifinals on Thursday in Memphis. First-year coach Steve Alford has won as many NCAA tournament games in three days as the Bruins had in the previous five seasons combined.

Alford replaced Ben Howland, who was fired a year ago after the Bruins lost to Minnesota in their NCAA tournament opener. This is UCLA's first trip to the regionals since Howland got the Bruins to their third straight Final Four in 2008.

Florida beat UCLA in the national championship game in 2006 and again in the national semifinals the following season.

The Bruins have won five straight and seven of eight overall.

UCLA's Norman Powell, who played at San Diego's Lincoln High, scored 16 points and Kyle Anderson had 15 points and eight rebounds.

Desmond Haymon had 17 points and Nikola Gajic added 10 for the Lumberjacks. Haymon's four-point play sent the Lumberjacks into overtime against fifth-seeded VCU on Friday night and SFA won 77-75.

The Lumberjacks stayed with the Bruins through much of the first half before the mismatch in talent and pedigree became obvious.

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The Bruins, in the NCAA tournament for the 46th time and winners of 11 national titles, went on a 12-2 run in just less than 3 minutes, starting with a runner in the lane by Alford's son, Bryce. Alford also had a 3-pointer that helped UCLA take a 32-21 lead with 5:44 left.

Three-pointers by Deshaunt Walker and Haymon closed the gap to five points before the Bruins finished the half on a 10-5 run to lead 42-32. Tony Parker had two layups and Adams a 3-pointer to help keep the lead in double digits.

Powell opened the second half with two big plays, a slam dunk and then a coast-to-coast drive with a behind-the-back move followed by a layup for a 46-32 lead.

"They annihilated us in transition," Underwood said.