

Texas downed by surging K-State squad

Written by Don Wallace

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AUSTIN (AP) — Kansas State is surging at the right time.

Texas, the team that two weeks ago looked unstoppable in the Big 12, is slipping at precisely the wrong one.

Rodney McGruder scored 22 points, Jacob Pullen scored 20 and Kansas State muscled past No. 7 Texas 75-70 on Monday night, the Wildcats' fifth straight win and first on the road over a Top Ten team since 1994.

Pullen exemplified the tough, physical nature of the game, scoring 16 points in the second half despite falling hard on his right wrist as Kansas State (21-9, 9-6 Big 12) sent the Longhorns to their second straight loss and third in four games.

"Everybody wrote us off. They cast our season down the drain," Pullen said of the Wildcats' 1-4 start in the conference. "People say we're a good team again but we can't let things like that get into our locker room and we can't let down our guard. Our morale is to the sky."

Texas is heading in the opposite direction.

An 11-0 start in conference play had the Longhorns among the top contenders for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament. Now they're trying to regroup and not worry about how far they may fall.

"We're better than what we're playing and that's the concern," Texas coach Rick Barnes said.

"You've got to stay disciplined with what you do. Kansas State did exactly what we thought they'd do and that was try to push us out of our offense."

Texas (24-6, 12-3) met its defensive match against the Wildcats, who held the Longhorns to 34 percent shooting. Freshman Tristan Thompson scored 26 points for the Longhorns but his teammates shot just 14 of 54 from the field. Kansas State shot 50 percent two days after Texas gave up a 22-point lead and let Colorado shoot 53 percent in a road loss.

Curtis Kelly scored 15 points for Kansas State, doing much of his damage in the first half when Pullen was struggling to score. McGruder was 4 of 6 on 3-pointers.

Thompson was the only Longhorn who could match Kansas State's physical play. He grabbed 10 rebounds and had several dunks but got little help on offense. Jordan Hamilton scored 14 points on 5-of-18 shooting and was a non-factor for most of the game. J'Covan Brown scored 11 points but didn't make a field goal until hitting two long 3-pointers in the final minute.

"They pressured us as well, but we just missed our shots," Texas guard Cory Joseph said.

Texas, which was used to blowing out teams at home, knew it was in for a fight when Kansas State's Jamar Samuels, who is 6-foot-7, decked 5-10 Texas guard Jai Lucas in a collision near midcourt in the early going.

But Thompson was the only one who really responded with three early dunks and tough rebounding. He scored 12 of Texas' first 20 points and Kansas State's best counterpunch was the inside scoring of Kelly and 7-footer Jordan Henriquez-Roberts.

Thompson's fourth dunk of the first half put Texas up 29-24. At that point, his six field goals were more than the rest of his team. Thompson's tough shot over Kelly put Texas up by five before a 3-pointer by McGruder pulled Kansas State within 33-31 at halftime.

Kelly made two consecutive baskets over Thompson to start the second, then blocked Hamilton as Kansas State quickly grabbed the lead. Hamilton also rimmed out a 3-pointer, his 10th miss in 11 shots.

"I try to be aggressive," Kelly said. "They're big and aggressive and try to attack me and I go back at them."

Pullen then made three consecutive baskets that put Kansas State ahead 50-42 with 12:06 to play.

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Kansas State managed to maintain that lead for the next 5 minutes, but started piling up critical fouls. Samuels and Henriquez-Roberts both picked up their fourth, sending much of the Wildcats' interior strength to the bench.

The Wildcats simply went outside for points. McGruder slipped away from Hamilton for his fourth 3-pointer and a 60-51 lead.

Kansas State seemed to have the game wrapped up when McGruder dunked on a fast break with 47 seconds left. Brown's two long 3-pointers from the right wing gave Texas some life before Pullen and the Wildcats put the game away from the free throw line.

"Some of the breakdowns are baffling to be honest with you," Barnes said. "I can't tell you why because we've proven we can be really good defensively and offensively."