

TEXAS TECH 71, GONZAGA 69

Blanchette: Turiaf glad he returned

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Few, "no matter where you are or how far you've been or what your expectations were."

The expectation about noon Mountain Time on Saturday was that the Zags would have to parry with their professors about a few more days of missed classes because of a date in the Albuquerque regional this week. They had run Bob Knight's greyhounds up and down the court, punished them on the glass, put the brakes on their motion offense - leaving Knight to try and find satisfaction by scarring the eardrums of the three referees.

Then - and it seemed to happen in mere seconds - the Zags' 13-point lead was gone and their fate rested on the dangerous proposition of punch-and-counterpunch.

And the Zags absorbed too many of the former and missed too many of the latter.

They couldn't keep Tech guards Ronald Ross and Jarrius Jackson - or the unsung forwards - out of the seams and pockets of their zone. They couldn't get center J.P. Batista to finish like the monster he'd been all season. They saw Derek Raivio suffer through another shooting funk with overtones of Blake Stepp's haunted NCAA performances. And they watched in disbelief as Turiaf missed 6 of 9 free throws.

Finally, Adam Morrison - who had come up with every big bucket this month - actually missed one.

Which left Turiaf on the floor, his college career over, being consoled by a gracious Ross.



Ronny Turiaf and his teammates acknowledge Gonzaga fans who traveled with the Bulldogs to Tucson, Ariz. Turiaf was saying goodbye after playing his final collegiate game.

"Last year I let my team down because of some freaking - excuse me - some foul trouble," Turiaf said. "This year, I couldn't make free throws. I did the same things I've done all year and it just kept going in and out, long, in and out, long. I try to rebound, try to block shots, play defense and score down low. I wish I could have had that extra step, that extra effort and made those free throws.

"It was just awful." And still it was almost within Turiaf's grasp. When Morrison's 3-pointer with 12 seconds left missed, it was Turiaf grappling with Tech's Devonne Giles for the rebound. Giles managed to control it enough to call timeout while he was falling out of bounds, though every Zag will forever believe

otherwise. "But that's college basketball," Turiaf said. "You play hard and the game comes down to some quick plays."

And quick resolutions - good and bad - to some long-held dreams.

The bummer of the finish to the 2003-04 season was one incidental reason in the rucksack of more substantial ones Turiaf had for returning to Gonzaga for his senior season and not opting for an early stab at the NBA draft.

That the journey ended at the same milestone will not fill him with regrets. Indeed, he could even manage a small joke about it.

"I'm not going to miss basketball that much because basketball sucks right now,"

he said. "I wish I was playing soccer or something."

But what he insisted Saturday was that his feeling would have been the same whether the Zags had lost in the first round or the championship game. It wasn't the increments in the bracket that mattered, but that he wouldn't share all the important and goofy moments with his 13 teammates.

"I didn't just come back to go to the Sweet 16 by myself," is how he put it.

Was it worth coming back?

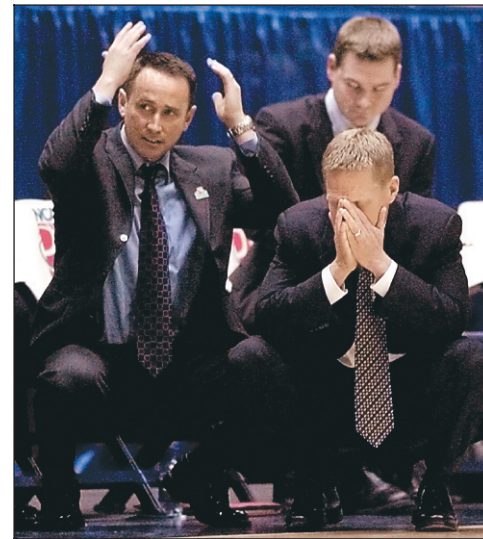
"Can you find a word that's more than 'worth it?'" he said. "It was way more than that. I can't even put it into words. People say, OK, you come back for your senior year and you put that cash aside and whatever, but people don't understand that the money matters to me but that's not what I'm looking for. So many people have that striving to get more money, to do this, do that. When I'm going to die, I'm not going to need that money. I'm not going to go in heaven and buy myself a pair of sneakers. I'm just trying to have some fun with the people I love the most."

"Being around these guys and sharing life together - that's a part of me. I'm going to leave a part of me in Spokane and I'm not looking forward to it."

Nor will any of the Zags look forward to the inevitable hangover of this. Three of their last four trips to the NCAAs have ended with them victims of teams seeded lower than they were. There is the germ of a stigma there, fair or not.

It's mostly not. People are comforted by - and remain steadfast to - the absolutes of mathematics, but there is no math fuzziest than the seeding of the NCAA Tournament. The "good old days" of Gonzaga in the tournament should be evidence enough of that.

"That's just crazy," said Few of the notion



Gonzaga coaches Billy Grier, left, Mark Few and Tommy Lloyd, rear, watch the game turn for the worse in the second half.

that he needed to be disappointed beyond the sheer emptiness of losing. "You can never feel bad for getting this far."

"We represented ourselves very well all year. We deserved a three seed - and we played like a three seed today. Tech had to play great to beat us and they did down the stretch. That's the tournament. People don't realize how hard it is to get to and to win games in. There are just so many good basketball teams out there."

And all but one will have something in common.

"There's going to be one team left that gets to feel like a champion," said Erroll Knight. "There's 62 other teams out there who are all going to feel like we feel. And you have to be a great program, with great players, just to experience it."

"I thought both teams played really, really well. They did a great job of making a couple of plays down the stretch - maybe only one play, and that was the difference."

Mark Few
Gonzaga coach

GU: Had 42-29 lead early in second half

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this year's tournament, where they will face seventh-seeded West Virginia on Thursday in Albuquerque, N.M., and sent the Zags back to Spokane, where they will try to sort out what went wrong in the finals stages of a game that had started so favorably.

"We lost a great basketball game today," Bulldogs coach Mark Few said. "I thought both teams played really, really well. They did a great job of making a couple of plays down the stretch - maybe only one play, and that was the difference."

The Zags, behind the inspired effort and jaw-dropping athleticism of junior guard Erroll Knight, put together an 11-2 run about 14 minutes into the game and carved out a 38-29 halftime lead that they increased to 42-29 by scoring four unanswered points immediately following intermission.

Knight, who finished the half with 12 points of his 14 points and all five of his rebounds, ignited GU's big run with a stirring left-handed tip-in from directly under the basket and a nifty drive down the lane that resulted in another bucket.

The Bulldogs, who got a 13-point, 13-rebound double-double (the 26th in his career) from Turiaf in his last game for the Zags, were still leading 46-36 when Tech suddenly seemed to figure out Gonzaga's varied assortment of zone defenses and put together a remarkably efficient offensive run that saw the Red Raiders hit 10 of their first 15 second-half shots.

In addition, GU seemed to lose the energy edge it had in the opening 20 minutes when it built a huge 27-14 rebound advantage that included 10 offensive boards and seemed to chase down every loose ball.



Pierre Marie Altidor-Cespedes frustrated Tech's Jarrius Jackson in the first half.



A pumped Erroll Knight charges back to the defensive end of the floor after scoring in a first half when he gave the Bulldogs a boost. Knight had 14 points in the game.

"The offensive glass really hurt us more than any other aspect in the second half," Few said, "because we had done such a great job in the first half of getting them to one (shot) and out. They got the break going in the second half, did a better job on the glass and made up the difference."

"Their guards did a great job of stepping up and making plays down the stretch - as did my guys. We're

proud of how we came out and proud of how we played. We just came up a little bit short."

Few said the screen-and-roll play he called with Turiaf and Morrison that freed up Morrison for his late 3-point attempt that could have put the Zags in the lead, worked about as well as could be expected.

"Those two had been delivering all game, so we ran a pick and roll with any option that would come off that," Few explained. "Their big didn't show, so I think Adam saw that he was open initially coming right off the screen and didn't have to explore any other options."

"He got a good look. And we almost had that offensive rebound, but didn't quite get it done."

Instead, Tech's Devonne Giles ran down the loose ball and called a timeout while falling out of bounds with 10.8 second remaining. The Bulldogs fouled immediately after the timeout and Ross hit a pair of free throws that rendered a short fallaway jumper by Raivio - only his second basket of the game - meaningless.

The Red Raiders' LucQuente White missed the first of a one-and-one free-throw chance with 1.4 seconds remaining, but a full-court heave by Turiaf at the buzzer fell well short.

"The first half we did a great job of flying around, getting to spots and



Gonzaga's Ronny Turiaf rejects Texas Tech's Martin Zeno.

denying them from getting points in the paint," said Turiaf of GU's early defensive dominance. "In the second half we didn't do a good enough job.

"Those guys are good, so when you do a good job in the first half, you have to sustain the defensive effort for 40 minutes. Maybe we did it for 36, and

the last four minutes, or whatever, they made us pay for it."

Tech, after shooting a respectable 41.9 percent in the first half, made 16 of its 28 second-half basket tries.

"Fifty-seven percent in the second half is too good," Few said, "and that's what eventually won the game."

Bob Knight called his Red Raiders' second-half effort "a hell of lot better than it was in the first half."

"In the first half, Gonzaga was at a higher level," Bob Knight added. "In the second half, we stepped up to that level."

Texas Tech 71, Gonzaga 69

TEXAS TECH (22-10)	Min	M-A	M-A	O-T	A	PF	PTS
Giles	33	3-6	2-2	5-5	3	4	8
Dora	40	5-11	0-0	1-3	3	4	10
Zeno	35	5-9	1-2	1-4	5	3	11
Jackson	40	7-9	2-5	0-5	3	1	18
Ross	40	9-21	4-5	2-9	4	2	24
Marshall	5	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Night	36	7-8	0-0	3-5	2	1	14
White	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Subjagic	5	0-2	0-1	1-2	0	0	0
Hawkins	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	200	29-59	9-16	8-32	18	14	71

Percentages: FG .492, FT .563, 3-Point Goals: 4-11, 364 (Jackson 2-3, Ross 2-6, Dora 0-1, Marshall 0-1). Team Rebounds: 1. Blocked Shots: 1 (Giles). Turnovers: 7 (Giles 2, Ross 2, Dora, Jackson, TEAH). Steals: 7 (Ross 3, Giles 2, Zeno, Subjagic). Technical Fouls: None.

GONZAGA (26-5)	Min	M-A	M-A	O-T	A	PF	PTS
Morrison	38	10-22	4-6	4-9	2	2	25
Battista	31	4-13	0-1	4-8	0	3	8
Turiaf	36	5-9	3-9	3-13	3	3	13
Raivio	30	2-7	0-0	0-2	5	3	5
Night	36	4-8	0-0	2-9	2	1	8
Altidor-Cespedes	15	0-0	0-0	0-1	2	2	0
Pendergalt	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Mallon	13	1-3	2-2	3-5	0	4	4
Totals	200	29-62	9-18	17-44	14	17	69

Percentages: FG .468, FT .500, 3-Point Goals: 2-13, 154 (Raivio 1-5, Morrison 1-6, Battista 0-1, Mallon 0-1). Team Rebounds: 1. Blocked Shots: 1 (Turiaf). Turnovers: 13 (Battista 4, Morrison 2, Turiaf 2, Raivio 2, Mallon 2, Knight). Steals: 2 (Battista, Raivio). Technical Fouls: None.

Halftime-Gonzaga 38, Texas Tech 29. A-13,751.