

NCAA TOURNAMENT: SACRAMENTO SUBREGIONAL

Bruins cruise past Weber State

BY GLENN KASSES
Staff writer

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Even if Gonzaga had managed to defeat Indiana Thursday night, things would not have become any easier in the second round of the NCAA tournament.

In fact, they would have become much, much tougher.

Second-seeded UCLA, playing just before the Bulldogs faced the Hoosiers, overwhelmed 15th-seeded Weber State 70-42 and won its first-round game going away.

The Bruins (27-5) were on track to be a top seed in this tournament, but two straight losses coming in cost them the top spot in the West Region.

It did not, however, cost them their winning ways in the NCAA tournament.

“I’m really happy with where the team is right now,” UCLA small forward Josh Shipp said. “I think we have

a great chance to make some noise in the tournament. As long as we stay together and play as a team, we’ll be OK.”

Whatever ills came out of the consecutive losses to Washington and California were nowhere to be found, as UCLA got settled in early and dominated Weber State in every way imaginable.

Nowhere was that more obvious than in the play of Pac-10 Player of the Year Arron Afflalo, who scored three points in the conference tournament loss but then had 22 against the Wildcats.

“I think all this gets blown up so much,” UCLA coach Ben Howland said. “He had a poor game in our last game. We’ve already talked about it, gone through that. I expect him to play well, and obviously he did.”

“He’ll play even better on Saturday.” UCLA even got a good game from point guard Darren Collison, who sprained an ankle in practice Tuesday

but still played and had 14 points and eight assists.

“I thought he showed a lot of character by getting treatment, doing all the right things so he was as healthy as possible to help the team,” Shipp said.

Weber State, Howland’s alma mater, was physically outmatched on the floor, and only one player managed to score in double figures – guard Dezmone Harris had 10 points.

The Wildcats were within one point, 15-14, with 8 minutes left in the first half. But once UCLA ironed out what few problems were there, it cruised. By halftime, the lead was 18.

After the game, Howland spoke confidently about his team’s prospects, knowing that in Pac-10 play it showed it could beat many styles of play.

“Whoever we play on Saturday ... we can adjust to any style we need to adjust to,” Howland said. “We can play against Washington State. We can play against Arizona.”



JOHN BLANCHETTE

Zags climbed peak but had nothing left when they arrived

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – There’s been a lot of amateur discussion this week about how the NCAA tournament needs tweaking. More teams, no play-in game, making the NIT the loser’s bracket.

Here’s another suggestion: Sometimes, one game needs to eliminate both teams.

Under the current rules, however, only one team goes and Thursday evening it was Gonzaga, and there was no debate.

The Bulldogs have played their share of thrillers in the NCAAs and, rarely, the odd turkey. Indiana’s 70-57 victory in the first round at Arco Arena was bereft not only of thrills but also of beauty, pace and expectation that either of the combatants would be much more than a speed bump in the second round for UCLA – although of course the same was said of California a week ago.

It seemed almost to be a glitch of the calendar, a November game teleported to March.

“Or like watching fall practice,” said Gonzaga coach Mark Few. “There were days like this, watching guys miss 1-inchers and not make shots.”

“It was a bad time of year to play a stinker, but we did. That wouldn’t have won a league game.”

But then, there hasn’t been a single typical thing about this Gonzaga season, and that includes the vein of character the Bulldogs mined this last month. Even the ending was abnormal – the first time the Zags have lost an NCAA opener as a lower seed.

Another lucky charm that can be stowed in a dresser drawer.

It was no trick to find the flaws in this game – the 34 percent shooting (“more easy shots than I’ve ever seen us miss,” said Few), the minus-15 licking the Bulldogs took on the boards, the poor start in defending Indiana’s 3-point shooters and a run of bricked breakaway layups early in the second half that could have changed the course of the game.

“It’s the old joke – great surgery but the patient died,” Few said. “And almost to a man, our new guys didn’t handle this NCAA game very well. They had a glazed look about them, like they were playing maybe not to make a mistake or a little passive.”

Indiana, knocked out by the Zags in the second round last year, played better and smarter, their guards more willing to make an extra pass for a better shot. And that’s just one obvious difference in having Kelvin Sampson as your coach instead of Mike Davis.

“These kids have been through a lot these last few years,” said Sampson. “To have something good happen to them has made this pleasurable.”

Few knows how he feels. One of the toughest acts in sports is reconciling a season of uncommon achievement with an ugly coda. Maybe the task is easier this time.

Yes, these Zags won the fewest games of any Gonzaga team in a decade. They also played the most abusive schedule in school history, endured the departure of the most prominent player to the NBA and survived the most disturbing emotional jolt the program has seen.

The jag the Zags went on afterward – the small-ball, band-of-brothers act to win the West Coast Conference, league tournament and NCAA berth – was as remarkable as any in Gonzaga basketball, short of that initial Elite Eight breakthrough in 1999.

“I just think when our character really, really had to shine through, it shined as bright as it ever has since I’ve been at Gonzaga,” Few said. “We’ve never had our backs pressed that hard against the wall that I can remember. It sounds kind of cheesy, but you hope and pray your team responds like that when it has to.”

“And that streak we’ve got going in the NCAAs is something we take a lot of pride in. It’s not a gimme. A Syracuse and a UConn and teams like that are finding that out. Those are some pretty storied programs that didn’t make it back this year.”

That said, this may have been the first of Gonzaga’s 10 trips to the NCAAs that came off as an anticlimax.

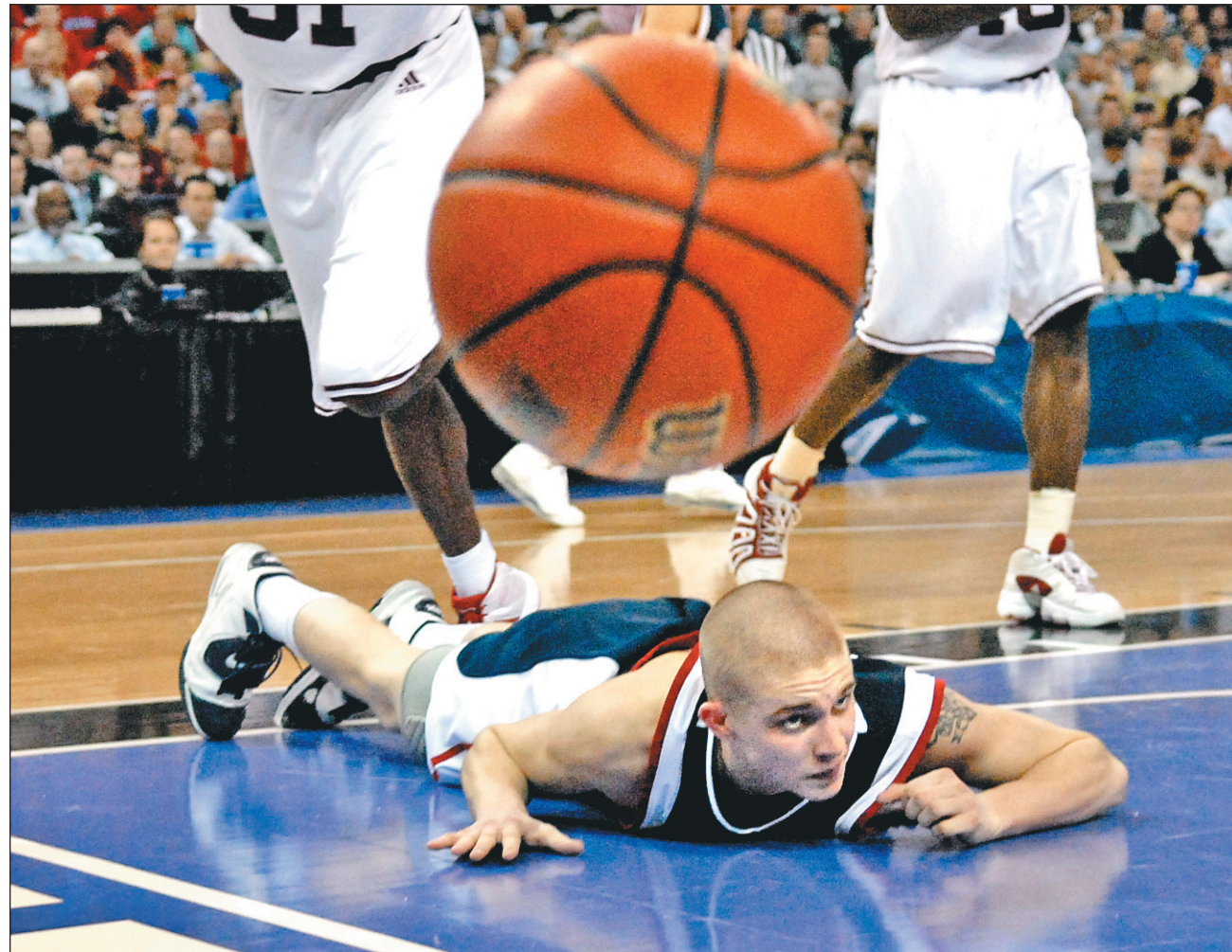
The players surely didn’t view it that way – there was never a just-happy-to-be-there feeling, nor has there been in any of their NCAA appearances. But early on Thursday night you could see the look of a team that was emotionally spent, that didn’t have another assault in it because it had scaled an Everest just to get into the bracket.

“It’s always kind of tough at the end,” said senior Sean Mallon. “When I look back on it, you have to be kind of positive about the whole thing. This year has been the toughest I’ve had by far to go through in basketball, with all the stuff we had to deal with.”

“If you look at the whole year instead of one game, you have to feel pretty good about it.”

But in the tournament, you only get to look at one game – and the next one you either get to play or you don’t.

It’s the part of the tournament that will never get tweaked.



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The ball, Indiana and the game get away from Gonzaga and senior guard Derek Raivio.

OUT OF CHARACTER

Offensive woes not common for GU

GU NOTEBOOK

BY JIM MEEHAN
Staff writer

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The Gonzaga Bulldogs weren’t themselves Thursday night – at least at the offensive end of the floor.

The Bulldogs shot a season-low 33.9 percent and scored only 57 points, their second-lowest output of the season, in a 70-57 setback to Indiana in the first round of the NCAA tournament at Arco Arena. Duke held GU to 54 points in a December contest.

“We just couldn’t get things to click,” senior forward Sean Mallon said. “We kind of got away from some of the things we’ve been doing in the past – moving the ball really well and screening for each other. We just never had any rhythm.”

GU missed a handful of open shots from close range and saw others from long distance rattle in and out. There were air balls, unforced turnovers and only a couple of fastbreak buckets.

“We missed easy layins, including myself,” said forward David Pendergraft, whose 12 points shared team-high honors with Derek Raivio. “Nothing was going for us. It was one of those days.”

Indiana concentrated on containing the Bulldogs’ guards. Raivio, Matt Bouldin and Jeremy Pargo combined for just 27 points, roughly 13 below their average.



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Joey Shaw of Indiana fights for a rebound with Gonzaga’s Micah Downs, left, and Sean Mallon during the first half.

“We had to defend Raivio, Bouldin and Pargo,” Indiana coach Kelvin Sampson said. “I thought our guards were really good. We really worked hard on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday on just defending Gonzaga. They’re not an easy team to guard with those three perimeter guys and the way they pick and pop outside. I just thought our defense was tremendous.”

Seniority

Without another practice to attend, Mallon and Raivio, Gonzaga’s two seniors, aren’t sure what they’ll do with themselves next week.

“Coach (Mark) Few talked to us at the end,” said Mallon, a fifth-year senior who had 11 points and six rebounds. “It kind of sank in a little bit, but come Monday when we don’t have practice, that’s going to be

tough.”

Raivio scored 12 points, had four assists, two steals and two rebounds in his finale.

“I haven’t really thought about it,” Raivio said. “I wish I was still playing right now because I know we can play better than that, but that’s the way sports are. That’s probably when I’ll think about it the most – when we don’t have practice in a couple of days.”

Wilmont early, White late

Guard Roderick Wilmont and forward D.J. White supplied more than half (38 points) of Indiana’s offense. Wilmont struck early, finishing with 16 first-half points, including four 3-pointers. White scored 14 of his 16 points in the second half.

White made 5 of 7 shots in the second half. He dished the ball to Wilmont for the clinching 3-pointer that boosted Indiana’s lead to 66-55 with 2:05 left.

Notes

Sampson evened his record against Gonzaga at 1-1. GU beat the Sampson-coached Washington State Cougars in 1988 in the only previous meeting. The Hoosiers also avenged a 90-80 loss to Gonzaga in the second round of last year’s NCAA tournament. ... Indiana made 15 of 16 free throws. Wilmont, who was 6 of 11 on 3-pointers, missed his only free throw attempt. ... Pendergraft was the only Bulldog to shoot at least 50 percent. He made 5 of 10 attempts.

Gonzaga senior Sean Mallon makes his way off the court after his final game as a Bulldog.



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BY THE NUMBERS

7

3-point shots Indiana made in first 14:09 of game

6

3-point shots Indiana missed in that time

0

2-point shots Indiana made in the same stretch

34

Gonzaga shooting percentage for game (19 of 56), the lowest percentage of season

57

Lowest point total of the season for Zags

15

Hoosiers’ free throws made out of 16 attempted

15

More rebounds Indiana had than Gonzaga

- 6

Previous worst rebound margin for Gonzaga this season

1992

Last time Indiana and UCLA played

THEY SAID IT



“I like the way we won. We’re not an offensive juggernaut, so we have to win games on the defensive end.”

Kelvin Sampson
Indiana coach



“This year is the toughest year by far since I’ve been playing.”

David Pendergraft
Gonzaga junior forward

BOX SCORE

Indiana 70, Gonzaga 57										
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-T	A	PF	PTS			
Gonzaga (23-11)	17	2-7	0-0	2-5	0	3	4			
Kuso	28	4-10	2-2	1-4	2	3	11			
Mallon	37	1-7	5-7	1-2	4	4	7			
Pargo	39	4-10	2-2	1-2	4	2	12			
Bouldin	28	2-6	3-4	1-4	3	1	8			
Altid-Céspedes	1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0			
Downs	19	1-5	0-0	0-3	1	1	3			
Pendergraft	31	5-10	0-1	0-5	0	2	12			
Totals	200	19-56	12-16	6-30	14	17	57			

Percentages: FG .339, FT .750. 3-Point Goals: 9-19, 36.8 (Wilmont 6-11, Ratliff 2-5, Bassett 1-3, Calloway 0-2, Stenler 0-4). Team Rebounds: 5. Blocked Shots: 2 (D. White 2, Wilmont 2, Ratliff 2, Stenler 2, M. White). Steals: 6 (Mallon 2, Raivio 2, Kuso, Bouldin). Technical Fouls: None.

Indiana (21-10)										
	Min	M-A	M-A	O-T	A	PF	PTS			
D. White	35	6-13	4-4	2-10	4	2	16			
M. White	6	0-1	0-0	2-3	0	1	0			
Bassett	38	2-8	4-4	1-3	0	9	9			
Wilmont	34	8-16	0-1	2-7	3	3	22			
Calloway	34	3-7	5-5	0-4	3	2	11			
Ratliff	16	2-6	0-0	1-3	0	2	6			
Allen	1	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0			
Stenler	30	2-6	2-2	1-8	1	3	6			
Shaw	5	0-1	0-0	0-1	1	1	0			
Keeling	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0			
Totals	200	23-58	15-16	12-45	15	14	70			

Percentages: FG .397, FT .938. 3-Point Goals: 9-25, 36.0 (Wilmont 6-11, Ratliff 2-5, Bassett 1-3, Calloway 0-2, Stenler 0-4). Team Rebounds: 5. Blocked Shots: 2 (D. White 2). Turnovers: 13 (Calloway 4, Bassett 2, Wilmont 2, Ratliff 2, Stenler 2, M. White). Steals: 3 (Stenler 2, Wilmont). Technical Fouls: None.

Halftime - Indiana 34, Gonzaga 29. A-16,338.