

## NCAA TOURNAMENT: SYRACUSE 87, GONZAGA 65



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON chrisa@spokesman.com

Gonzaga's Steven Gray has the ball knocked away from him by Syracuse's Wes Johnson during their second-round game in Buffalo, N.Y.

# Orange crush

## Hot-shooting Syracuse ends Gonzaga's season

By Jim Meehan

jim@spokesman.com; (208) 765-7131

BUFFALO, N.Y. — New York was no kinder to Gonzaga in the NCAA tournament than it was in the regular season. Same goes for Gonzaga's ongoing struggle against No. 1 seeds.

The Bulldogs made two trips to the Empire State this season and got bludgeoned both times. No. 1-seeded Syracuse ended No. 8 Gonzaga's season with a decisive 87-65 victory Sunday in the second round of the NCAA tournament in front of 18,934 at HSBC Arena. Coupled with Duke's 76-41 rout of GU in New York City in December, the two losses were the Zags' most lopsided of the season.

Gonzaga (27-7) dropped to 0-5 against No. 1 seeds. Much like last year's loss to eventual national champion North Carolina, Gonzaga was powerless to stop a prolific offense.

It wasn't Syracuse's vaunted zone defense or the partisan Orange crowd that did in the Bulldogs. It was the fact that Syracuse made shot after shot and Gonzaga, despite a decent amount of open looks, watched perimeter shot after perimeter shot bounce off the rim.

Syracuse made 12 of 25 3-pointers. The Orange, who came into the game No. 1 nationally in field-goal percentage (51.7), drained 54.7 of their shots, the highest percentage against the Zags this season. Only one of GU's last 18 opponents had reached 50 percent.

"When they're going like that, they're better than anybody in the country," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "They're still going to have to make shots to win this thing. If they shoot it like they did today, nobody will beat them."

Meanwhile, Gonzaga's Matt Bouldin and Steven Gray were a combined 6 of 24 from the field. Add in third guard Demetri Goodson and that figure dropped to 6 of 29. Gray was 3 of 9 on 3-pointers; the rest of the Bulldogs 0 of 12.

Syracuse (30-4) will face No. 5 Butler in the West Regional semifinal Thursday in Salt Lake City.

"I told Mark this is as well as we played all year," Syracuse coach Jim Boheim said.



Gonzaga's Matt Bouldin (15) and Steven Gray (32) try to prevent Syracuse's Brandon Triche from getting to the basket during first-half action Sunday.

The way this one started out, it appeared a shootout was brewing. Gonzaga scored on its first three possessions, all three baskets on assists by Bouldin. Syracuse warmed up and led 22-21 with 10:10 left after GU's Elias Harris, who had a huge game with 24 points, connected from 13 feet.

But Gonzaga didn't score again until a Harris layup four-plus minutes later, which ended a 9-0 Syracuse run. The Bulldogs clawed back within 32-28, but the Orange rattled off the next 11 points as Andy Rautins and Brandon Triche each scored four points and smooth junior forward Wes Johnson buried a 3-pointer. The Orange led 47-32 at intermission.

"That was the game, that last 4 minutes," Few said.

If it wasn't out of reach at half, Rautins made the deficit insurmountable by

scoring 11 of his 24 points in a two-minute flurry as Syracuse extended its lead to 58-34. The Orange led by as many as 32. Gonzaga needed a late rush to avoid its largest NCAA loss (Maryland 87-63 in 1995).

"It's disappointing to get knocked out of the tournament so early," Harris said. "We couldn't show everybody how we can really play or how much potential we have."

Harris did, and he had company in sophomore center Robert Sacre. Harris had 24 points and eight rebounds and Sacre added 17 points and eight boards, but the Bulldogs had few other sources for points. Bouldin didn't break into the scoring column until hitting a midrange jumper four minutes into the second half.

"I thought we attacked the zone pretty well," said Bouldin, who was 0 of 6 on 3s. "We just weren't knocking down shots."

And the thing about them, you miss a few and they're going to make a run. Steven and I didn't shoot nearly as well as we have all year."

Gonzaga took pretty good care of the ball (11 turnovers) and had a chance to stretch a modest lead early, but Syracuse cashed in on four offensive rebounds in the first half with nine second-chance points.

From there, the Orange put on a shooting clinic. Johnson hit four 3s and scored a team-high 31 points to go with 14 rebounds. He played all 40 minutes. Rautins had five 3s and 24 points. Triche had all 13 of his points in the first half and Scoop Jardine had seven of his nine in the opening 20 minutes.

"Once they got started with a couple of easy ones, it just got them going," Gray said. "And it didn't seem like they really missed."

## Loss doesn't define season for Few

VINCE GRIPPI



BUFFALO, N.Y. — Mark Few stood off to the side of a hallway at HSBC Arena. The walls were drab, the air stale.

The Gonzaga head basketball coach had already said goodbye to Syracuse coach Jim Boheim and his wife, Juli. He had complimented Andy Rautins on his 24-point effort and Wes Johnson on his career-best 31-point game.

Now he was asked to reflect. He did. He talked about the game just past, the 87-65 whacking his Gonzaga Bulldogs had

suffered at the hands of top-seeded Syracuse in what was basically a home game for the Orange.

He talked about the season just past, and how the near-record NCAA defeat shouldn't color it.

But he left the talk about the Bulldogs' future to others.

"I don't really start now," he said. "I need some time off."

He's earned it.

It was a long journey for Few and the Zags.

Six months of molding a team from a group that included six newcomers, a few returning players not counted on in the past and two veterans. From those ingredients, Few and his staff cooked a 27-win soufflé.

"More than any team than I've ever been associated with, from Day 1 to now," Few said of the Zags' growth. "We had a lot of questions we needed answers for in October. To these guys credit, they stepped up and solved them."

But there would be no solving the Orange's riddle Sunday. Other than to say they were the better team.

"When we play like that, when we shoot the

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