

NCAA TOURNAMENT: SPOKESMAN.COM/SPORTS

Armstead leads Wichita State in win

NEXT OPPONENT
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY – Wichita State's Tekele Cotton didn't just shut down Pitt's leading scorer, he had him in tears.

The Shockers' guard held Tray Woodall to two points while coming up with five steals and a key 3-point basket in helping ninth-seeded Wichita State to a 73-55 win over eighth-seeded Pitt on Thursday at the NCAA tournament.

At the news conference after the game, Woodall broke down

and had to be comforted by Dante Taylor, who wrapped an arm around his teammate's shoulder.

"It's a bitter taste in my mouth to end my career with one of worst games I've ever played," said Woodall, who came into the game averaging 11.8 points. "I'm sorry. I let my team down."

Cotton, a 6-2 sophomore, hit his 3-pointer to start as 12-4 run and added a fast-break dunk to put the Shockers ahead 45-35 with 10:31 remaining.

Woodall finished 1 of 12 from the field and 0 of 5 from 3-point range.

The game was a physical one, with players receiving an occasional elbow in the mouth or to the head.

Malcolm Armstead led Wichita State (27-8) with 22 points, Cleanthony Early added 21 and Carl Hall had 11.

Steven Adams led Pitt (24-9) with 13 points and 11 rebounds. Wichita State forced 15 turnovers and held the Panthers to 35

percent shooting, 1 of 17 from 3-point range.

"Our guys took the fight to them, by getting a body on them, being quicker to the ball," Wichita State coach Gregg Marshall said.

"The steals we had on them were big, big baskets and gave us a lead, and a comfortable lead as the game went on."

The game was expected to be a defensive struggle, with Pitt allowing just 55.4 points and the Shockers known for dominating the glass with 38 rebounds a game.

GONZAGA

Continued from B2

"I'd be lying if I said it didn't," Pangos said, when asked if doubt was creeping into his head. "Of course, it did a little bit, but I think we did a great job of getting rid of it quick and not thinking, 'What if we lose,' but instead saying, 'Let's go win this and be the aggressor.'"

Kelly Olynyk did most of the heavy lifting with 17 second-half points before Pangos and Bell delivered in the closing minutes. In that sense, this one had the feel of Oklahoma State in Stillwater, when Bell drained a huge 3 late in a Gonzaga win, and Washington State in Pullman, when Pangos shook off a tough shooting night with a winning bank shot just before the buzzer.

"Those were kind of daggers for (Southern)," said Olynyk, who finished with 21 points and 10 boards for his fifth career double-double.

"The fact they're both sophomores, it's kind of amazing the way they step up," Few marveled. "And they just drilled them, too."

No. 1-ranked Bulldogs (32-2) will face ninth-seeded Wichita State, a 73-55 winner over No. 8 Pittsburgh on Saturday. Gonzaga will be trying to earn its first trip to the Sweet 16 since 2009.

The Bulldogs scored the game's first seven points, but the rout many expected never materialized as Southern (23-10) responded with eight straight points. David Stockton handed out five assists as the Bulldogs led by as many six in the first half, only to see Southern rally time after time.

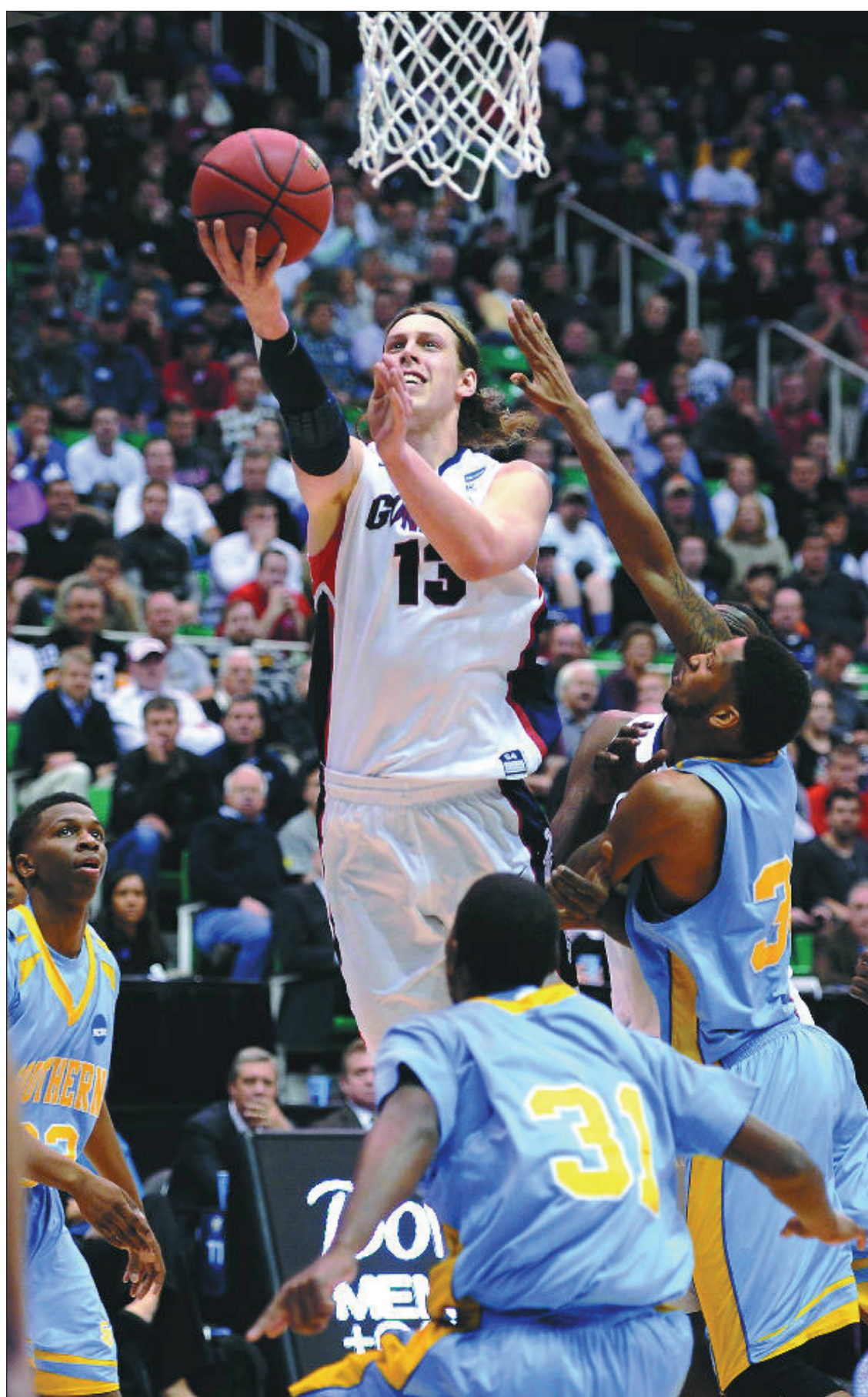
"They'd hit a big shot or make a big play," Pangos said. "That made it difficult for us to feel comfortable."

The Bulldogs, who led 34-31 at half, had little room to operate inside against Southern's sagging, paint-conscious defense.

When the Zags did get the ball close to the rim, their shots were often met with resistance. Moore and Javan Mitchell combined for seven of Southern's eight blocks.

GU was finally able to get Olynyk loose on pick-and-rolls, or by posting up a smaller defender. He scored 15 of Gonzaga's first 18 points in the second half and the Bulldogs appeared to have shaken Southern when they took a 52-41 lead with 9:31 remaining.

Not so fast. Yondarius Johnson buried a 3 and Beltran, who had 14 of his 21 points in the second half, started making every-



COLIN MULVANY colinm@spokesman.com

Gonzaga's Kelly Olynyk tries to score as Southern's Brandon Moore, right, elevates to defend.

thing, whether he was open or tightly guarded. Suddenly, GU's lead was gone and the crowd was in full throat.

Pangos and Bell made sure GU reached the finish line first. "We're not really here for

style points," said Elias Harris, who was held to five points, 10 below his average. "Everyone says we have to win by 30 and that doesn't happen and everybody is going to say, 'Do they really deserve a No. 1 seed? Is it

that good a team?'"

"But a win is a win, especially during tournament time a win is precious. We have to keep our heads high and come out with more energy in the next game. And just fight again."

BLANCHETTE

Continued from B2

little heavier than they were willing to admit. Their 64-58 victory over Southern served as the NCAA basketball tournament's first cautionary tale even without the upset finish, spawning more questions about the Bulldogs' bona fides and their new station – not that a blowout would have satisfied any.

But it might have made Thursday night's 3.2 beers go down better for those Zags fans here who spent most of the game in full pout, whether over the play of their heroes, quibbles with the officiating or the fact that the Bulldogs wound up as baddies to the rest of the 14,176 customers.

Someone should have warned them about it being lonely at the top.

"Really weird," admitted Kevin Pangos. "Especially thinking we were going to have a home crowd here. But people got behind them being a 16 seed, and I can't blame them."

"Seeing a 16 win one would be pretty cool, right?"

That's what he was saying afterward, in a locker room thick with survivor's shock. During the onslaught in the closing minute, he acknowledged, the uncool possibility of being a historical footnote was creating some pucker.

"It crossed my mind," he said. "I'm not going to lie."



DAN PELLE danp@spokesman.com

Gonzaga's Kevin Pangos tries to slip between Southern University guards Jameel Grace and Malcolm Miller in the first half.

But, as noted, the Zags are not the first No. 1 to have dodged such a live grenade, even as the 16s fell to 0-114, lifetime.

Here it was the 3-point poise of sophomore guards Pangos and Gary Bell Jr. in the final few minutes that staved off the Jaguars and their worthy dreams. The Pangos shot especially – clock nearly out of ticks, stepping back behind the line for space after a diagonal drive failed to earn the contact whistle he was hoping for – was a thing of stop-this beauty.

But it was also a thing of "They needed that to win?" wonder.

Even Few was among those who wondered.

Long after the final horn, he fingered the stat sheet and

tried to unravel it.

"We blast them by 13 on the glass," he noted. "Only turn the ball over 10 times. We hit 8 of 20 from 3, and they only shoot 39 percent. You'd think..."

It wouldn't have been that close.

Well, let's not forget that when the Zags struggle in the NCAAs, the 3-pointer is almost always involved. And the Jags threw in 10, with Derick Beltran doing damage no matter which Bulldog chased him.

But Southern also accepted the challenge at the rim, and for a Zags team so reliant on the broad shoulders up front this seems to be the most problematic moving forward. Yes, Kelly Olynyk had his 21 points and carried Gonzaga

EXPERT OPINIONS



Dan Dickau

If you watched Gonzaga's first game of the tournament, like me, you might have realized you were holding your breath for the last 5 minutes of the game ... not something we are used to doing.

There was a collective sigh of relief when the final buzzer sounded and the Zags held on to play another game.

A sigh that could be heard all the way to Spokane. So how did our Zags come so close to tournament elimination? I think there is one key word: tempo.

I'm sure Southern's plan was to control the tempo, but also to shoot well from the field and drive down Gonzaga's field goal percentage. They delivered on all three. Southern slowed Gonzaga down into more of a half-court game and didn't allow GU to get the tempo in its favor.

Southern only shot 40 percent from the field but 43 percent from 3 on 10 of 23 attempts. This effective field-goal percentage, near 50 percent, is something Gonzaga opponents have not been able to do all year long.

Southern drove down Gonzaga's field-goal percentage to 42 percent overall, one of GU's worse shooting nights of the year.

Southern played much better than anyone of us anticipated. They played great. They put Zags fans on the edge of their seats.

But all of this being said, Gonzaga did what they needed to do ... (sigh of relief) ... survive and advance.

Noteworthy

Highlight stretch of game: David Stockton sparking the Zags in the first half with some defensive deflections and then assisting on a pass to Gary Bell, scoring a tough transition layup and then making a pass (that only three people in the building could make) to Kelly Olynyk for a layup. (The other two people being his dad, John, and yours truly!) Stockton, to me, was the key factor in the game. He picked up the pace, brought energy to the team, and got the crowd on its feet. It was a new and interesting twist that I had never seen with Gonzaga and the crowd in the NCAA tournament today. With a little under 5 minutes the crowd was pro-Southern.



Richard Fox

Since Selection Sunday I have been nervous to see how the Bulldogs would handle and respond to the national expectations that come along with receiving a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament.

After watching Gonzaga squeak by Southern University it was evident that the Zags had some nerves of their own: playing tight and hesitant for long stretches after eight days off and nearly a week of building anticipation.

Give Southern a ton of credit: They played tough, loose and made difficult shots. Their athleticism would rival anyone the Zags faced in the WCC this season and it clearly bothered GU around the rim and defensively on the perimeter.

While Kelly Olynyk's second-half performance and Kevin Pangos' perimeter shooting will deservedly garner a lot of attention and credit for Gonzaga earning the win, from my perspective the difference in the game was David Stockton. From the moment Stockton entered the game he was aggressive, loose and played with swagger.

For the game, his three points and seven assists accounted for 25 percent of the Bulldogs point total while his decision to repeatedly gamble off his defensive assignment in the second half disrupted Southern's offense. Olynyk and Pangos took Gonzaga home down the stretch but they don't get there without Stockton's effort and playmaking.

Historically, most teams who make a run in the NCAA tournament have to find a way to win a game when they play poorly – Gonzaga was able to do that. Look for a more aggressive and confident group on Saturday.

much of the second half. But the Jags blocked eight shots and completely bottled up Elias Harris, taking great advantage of a loosely called game. It showed itself on other end, too: Having to contend with Javan Mitchell's big old self in the post forced GU to give Southern's shooters room.

"That's the first big guy we've had to double down on forever," said Few.

Hmm. Doesn't exactly speak to the quality of bigs in the WCC, does it?

In short, the Jags have a basketball team of which their all-world band can be proud (and the dancers, too, who do a little shaking that isn't supposed to be legal within 300 feet of schools).

"I don't know how many 16s you see with 23 wins," Few said. "What happened to the ones with 14 wins who upset someone in the conference tournament?"

Tournament history is bulging with high seeds who survived humbling starts and went on nice, long runs. As Harris pointed out, "Whether you win in the 40th minute or the first 10, there's no need to look back and be sad about how the game went."

But there's every reason to want to ratchet it up next time out.

"That wasn't our best basketball," Pangos said. "We know it. But it's a new day on Saturday."

New days being what March Madness is all about.