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Fun run ends for SJSU basketball

Mercury News

Posted: 03/15/2011 07:50:39 PM PDT

Updated: 03/15/2011 10:47:58 PM PDT

OMAHA, Neb. -- San Jose State's finest season in 30 years came to an end Tuesday night with an 85-74 loss to Creighton in the first round of the College Basketball Invitational.

The Spartans, making their first postseason appearance since the 1996 NCAA tournament, ran out of gas after leading 43-40 at halftime. Still, SJSU (17-16) finished with a winning record for the first time since 1994 and posted more victories than any Spartans team since the 1981 team that went to the National Invitational Tournament with a 21-9 record under coach Bill Berry.

"From an outsider's view, you don't understand the progress we've made as a program the past couple of years," SJSU coach George Nessman said. "For us to advance to the postseason is big for our program, and I'm proud of our players."

Seniors Justin Graham and Adrian Oliver both said they would treasure getting an opportunity to play in March.

"I had never played in the postseason before, and I had never played on a team with a winning record in college," Graham said. "It was definitely a special experience."

Oliver added, "It's tough knowing that you can't play anymore. It was a good season, though. We broke a lot of school records and we went places where our school hasn't been in awhile. Justin and I know how hard that's been, and I'm just fortunate that in Justin I had someone to do this with."

Leading the Spartans on Tuesday night was Keith Shamburger with 23 points.

Oliver, the nation's No. 3 scorer with a 24-point average, was held to 14 and finished 18 points short of surpassing Ricky Berry on the school's all-time scoring list.

SJSU's season ended, in large part, because of Creighton's 6-foot-9, 270-pound center, Gregory Echenique. Echenique had 14 of his 18 points in the final 20 minutes in the game that drew 3,086 to Omaha Qwest Center. As important as his points, his presence inside opened up shots on the perimeter.

"They broke our zone down better than anyone has in many weeks," Nessman said. "They can put so many shooters on the floor that it's hard to guard them all."

"I thought it was a heck of a game for the first 30 minutes, but we just didn't have enough in the last 10 minutes to stay with them."

Shamburger, Oliver and Graham combined for 30 points in helping San Jose take a 43-40 halftime lead. Will Carter had a double-double with 15 points and 11 rebounds, and Graham finished with 13 points.

Creighton (20-14) advances to a second-round game against Davidson.

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