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Mizzou roars to tournament title 92-53

By MIKE DeARMOND
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Eleven years ago Clarence Gilbert hit a free throw with eight-tenths of a second left that gave No. 5-ranked Missouri a one-point victory over Iowa and the championship trophy of the inaugural Guardians Classic at Kemper Arena.

What Missouri did Tuesday night at the Sprint Center proved more riveting than even that high drama.

No. 21 MU demolished No. 20 California 92-53, winning the championship game of the Progressive CBE Classic, which the Guardians Classic has become.

Beating Notre Dame 87-58 in the semifinals Monday night was one thing. The way the Tigers won Tuesday — much to the delight of a raucous Missouri crowd — was a Tiger of a completely different stripe.

With 8 minutes left in the first half, MU was being outrebounded 18-3. Leading scorer Marcus Denmon was zero for three from three-point range on the way to six points in the first 20 minutes. And a Missouri team that came in hitting 47.9 percent of its three-point attempts threw in only three of 12 by halftime.

And the Tigers still led at the break 45-26.

The how and why first-year Mizzou coach Frank Haith has gotten Missouri to 5-0 is fundamental.

As in fundamental basketball.

The Tigers take good shots. They can hit from the perimeter with a four-guard offense, but they also see the value of driving to the rim. On Tuesday, they scored 20 points in the paint in the first 20 minutes.

Defense? Kim English took four charging fouls in the first half.

And while only eight players deep, Missouri is getting contributions from all eight.

Never was that more true than from 6-foot-9 senior Steve Moore on Tuesday night.

Moore, a Truman High School graduate who so often seemed no more than five fouls off the bench in the Mike Anderson Era of his freshman through junior seasons, scored a career-high 10 points in 13 minutes. He blocked two shots before halftime and, throwing himself to the floor with abandon, picked up three steals.

Perhaps there were hints before the last two games in Kansas City. But it was impossible to know how much stock to put into a 15-point victory over Southeast Missouri, an 18-point triumph over Mercer or a 31-point blowout of Niagara, all in the friendly confines of Mizzou Arena.

But consider this example of Missouri playing well even when its best player (Denmon) and its starting big man (Ricardo Ratliffe) are not. Ratliffe scored only four points and pulled down one rebound and played only 7 first-half minutes.

But Ratliffe, with 10 points and five boards, turned into a demon inside in Mizzou's second-half surge. Denmon drew oohs and aahs by finishing like Marcus Denmon, with 18 points and six rebounds. And English brought the Mizzou bench to its feet with 3 minutes to play when he rainbowed in a left-corner three that gave him 19 points.

That boosted Missouri's lead to 82-51.

And, well, a Missouri basketball team hasn't caused so much excitement in Kansas City since that Guardians Classic championship team of Gilbert, Kareem Rush, Ricky Paulding and Arthur Johnson carried coach Quin Snyder to an Elite Eight run in the 2001 NCAA Tournament.

@ Go to **KansasCity.com** for a photo gallery from Tuesday's MU, KU and K-State games.

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