

Tanner's 3-pointers help Radford stun Notre Dame, 63-60

By John Fineran

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Radford is closer to Tobacco Road than Notre Dame is but that didn't stop senior guard Caleb Tanner and the Highlanders from making a point to their Atlantic Coast Conference neighbors Wednesday night.

"Coming in here and beating an ACC team is huge," said the 6-foot-1 Tanner, who scored 20 points, 18 of them from beyond the 3-point line, as Radford moved to 3-0 with a 63-60 victory over Notre Dame.

Coach Mike Jones' Highlanders, who earned an NCAA bid last March by winning the Big South Tournament, beating LIU Brooklyn in the first round before losing to eventual champ Villanova, also got a double-double from Ed Polite Jr. - 16 points and 11 rebounds - and 11 from Travis Fields Jr.

"The guys came out with the right mentality - we fought hard on the defensive end," Jones said. "It's a huge accomplishment for them."

Junior forward John Mooney had career highs in points (24) and rebounds (12) and T.J. Gibbs added 11 points for coach Mike Brey's Irish (2-1).

"I've been worried about this one for about four days because they (the Highlanders) are old and good and they're way better than us right now," said Brey, whose team missed the NCAA tournament last season, lost in the second round of the NIT and is rebuilding with four freshmen.

Tanner, who had 14 points at halftime thanks to four 3-pointers, and his teammates overcame a 34-28 halftime deficit and led by as many as six points late. The Irish had a chance to send it into overtime, but Gibbs couldn't get a shot off from mid-court as time expired.

"We never get worried," said Tanner, who hit 7 of 11 from the field, including 6 of 9 3-pointers. "We're a very confident team. We love adversity so when it hits, this team rises up."

Mooney finished 8-of-16 shooting from the field, including 6 of 9 from beyond the arc. Gibbs' 11 points came on 5-of-16 shooting, including a 0-of-7 effort from long distance.

"It really doesn't (mean anything)," Mooney said of his performance after the loss. "We didn't get it done at the end."

Mooney was on fire from the start and ended the first half with 18 points, tying his previous best of 18 at North Carolina last Feb. 12. His start wasn't what he wanted - Mooney went up for a dunk and it was denied by Radford's Mawdo Sallah with the game scoreless less than two minutes in.

Tanner got going with the first of his four 3-pointers in the half, but Notre Dame pulled out to its biggest lead of the first half, 17-7, when Gibbs scored Notre Dame's first 2-pointer of the half with 10:54 remaining.

Tanner, who had 14 points in the first 20 minutes, later outscored the Irish 8-2 with the help of two 3-pointers to pull his team within one, 24-23, with 4:24 to play. The Irish then closed with a 10-5 run for a 34-28 lead at the intermission.

The Highlanders started the second half on a 6-1 run before Gibbs hit a jumper in the lane and Brey called a timeout with 18:05 remaining and the Irish up 37-34. But a 7-3 run after play resumed, ending with Fields' 3-pointer, gave Radford a 41-40 lead with 15:57 to play. It was the first time in three games that Notre Dame had trailed.

A 7-0 Radford run, the final two on Devonnte Holland's put-back, made it 54-52 with 8:02 to play. The lead grew to six, 59-53, after Tanner's sixth 3-pointer and Brey called another timeout with 4:47 to play.

BIG PICTURE

Radford: The Highlanders were picked to win the Big South this season. Against the Irish, who were one of the last teams out of the NCAA field and are rebuilding, Radford managed just 10-of-32 shooting (31 percent) from the field. But the Highlanders turned it around in the second half, shooting a sizzling 56 percent (14 of 25) while holding Notre Dame to just 32 percent (10 of 31) in the final 20 minutes and outrebounding the Irish 41-34.

"We knew it was going to be a 40-minute battle; we knew we weren't going to knock them out," Jones said. "This is something we're going to feel good about. Caleb (Tanner) is not physically imposing-looking. I was proud of him stepping up in the starting lineup."

Notre Dame: With 3:43 to go in the half, the Irish were 9-of-23 shooting from the field with only two 2-pointers. They started by hitting their first five 3-pointers - four by Mooney and another by freshman Robby Carmody. They were 8 of 18 from beyond the arc - six by Mooney (on eight tries) and one each by Carmody and D.J. Harvey, who had two 2-pointers along with Gibbs.

But Notre Dame only got 25 points from its other seven players, including 12 from three freshmen - Prentiss Hubb and Carmody had five points each, Nate Laszewski two and Dane Goodwin zero. The Irish shot 32 percent (10 of 31) in the second half, including 1 of 11 from long distance.

"William & Mary (Notre Dame's opponent Saturday) can beat us; Duquesne can beat us," Brey said of Notre Dame's next two opponents at home in the on-campus Gotham Classic. "Everybody can beat us. That's who we are right now. We just have to get back to work."

UP NEXT

Radford: Saturday at Duquesne in second of three-game road trip.

Notre Dame: Saturday at home against William & Mary.