

No. 23 LSU gets past South Alabama, 78-66

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) - Highly regarded freshmen Ben Simmons and Antonio Blakeney are leading the way for No. 23 LSU.

Simmons had 23 points and 16 rebounds, while Blakeney scored 22 as the Tigers knocked off South Alabama 78-66 in a regional round of the Legends Classic on Thursday night.

Simmons has reached double figures in both scoring and rebounding twice in LSU's first three games. Blakeney has reached double figures in scoring in all three - twice finishing with 22 points.

Both shot the ball well. Simmons made 9 of 14 field-goal attempts, while Blakeney was 7 of 11 from the field and 4 of 8 on 3-pointers.

"I'm just trying to win, so my focus was on being aggressive and assertive the whole game," Simmons said. "As soon as I started driving, I got into a rhythm and felt comfortable."

The Tigers (3-0) needed their offensive production, as their teammates made just 13 field goals. Backup point guard Josh Gray and starting center Elbert Robinson each had five baskets. Gray scored 11 points, while Robinson finished with a career-best 10 points before leaving with an ankle injury.

"I just saw opportunities and I had open shots," Blakeney said. "I had to try and knock them down. South Alabama's guards were quick. It was a challenge to keep them out of the lane."

South Alabama (1-2) hung around for most of the game. Nick Stover was the Jaguars' leading scorer with 13 points. Don MuepoKelly came off the bench and contributed 10 points and 10 rebounds. Georgi Boyanov had 12 points, while Ken Williams scored 10.

"We got off to a good start," South Alabama coach Matthew Graves said. "We did a decent job of keeping them out of transition. The turning point in the game was with eight minutes to go in the first half. We went into a little bit of a drought and LSU extended the lead a little bit."

Simmons had 13 first-half points for the Tigers, but bench players were responsible for their 40-28 lead. Midway through the first half, South Alabama got two baskets from Tafari Whittingham to reduce its deficit to four points at 23-19.

After a field goal by Simmons, backup center Brian Bridgewater made a basket in the lane and two foul shots to give the Tigers their 12-point halftime advantage.

"We did a good job of defending South Alabama in the first half," LSU coach Johnny Jones said. "They shot better in the second half and knocked down some 3s to stay in the game. Our guys did a great job of responding to their runs in the second half. That was certainly encouraging for us."

LSU did not allow South Alabama to pull within single digits in the second half. Three 3-pointers over a 2 1/2-minute stretch by Blakeney helped the Tigers go ahead 55-36 with 14:40 remaining in the game.