

No. 16 Texas A&M pulls away from Pepperdine for 81-65 win

By DOUGLAS PILS

COLLEGE STATION, Texas (AP) — Fresh from winning the Progressive Legends Classic and thinking ahead to a Sunday matchup with No. 10 Southern Cal, Texas A&M didn't look interested in playing Pepperdine on Friday night. That lack of fire for the first 33 minutes put the Waves in position for an upset, but the Aggies woke up and pulled away for an 81-65 victory.

"I thought our energy wasn't very good at times, but when we needed it we were able to raise it up a level at the end," Texas A&M coach Billy Kennedy said. "Winning two big games (in New York) and then coming home, we didn't play like a veteran team."

It was the veterans who saved the Aggies (5-0) from potential disaster.

Junior forward DJ Hogg scored 18 points and junior forward Tyler Davis had seven of his 15 in a late second-half stretch to lead A&M past pesky Pepperdine (2-4).

Kameron Edwards scored 20 points for the Waves, who trimmed their deficit to six twice in the second half, the final time with 7:31 remaining. However, after Edwards' layup cut the Aggies' lead to 60-54, Pepperdine went 5:35 without a basket and A&M pulled away.

"We couldn't get a flow or couldn't get a shot that we wanted," Pepperdine coach Marty Wilson said.

Dunks by Hogg and Davis stretched the lead to 75-58 to cap a 15-4 run. The Waves missed nine shots during the run, four of them 3-point attempts.

A&M couldn't break inside Pepperdine's zone defense for much of the game, and the Waves were content to let the Aggies shoot 3-pointers.

"Once we got into the zone in the first half, I thought we kind of slowed them up and took some time off the clock to where it made them get out of their comfort zone," Wilson said.

Starting point guard Duane Wilson, a graduate transfer from Marquette, paced the Aggies' with 10 of his 15 points in the first half. Freshman guard Jay Jay Chandler added 10 points.

Redshirt freshman point guard J.J. Caldwell made his Aggies debut at the 10:24 mark of the first half. The pass-first guard showed the skills A&M had been waiting on with three assists in 16 minutes.

Caldwell sat out his first year on campus after the NCAA ruled him ineligible and then he was suspended for the season's first four games for violating team rules.

He was arrested on May 24 for a misdemeanor DWI charge that was dismissed on Sept. 12.

BIG PICTURE

Pepperdine: The Waves showed a good effort playing against the only ranked opponent on their schedule. Now they are set up for six non-conference games before starting West Coast Conference play.

Texas A&M: The Aggies got their big names on the court together for the first time with Caldwell, sophomore forward Robert Williams, who was playing his third game and the trio of juniors in Hogg, Admon Gilder and Davis.

STAR WATCH

A&M's 6-foot-11 Williams, who many consider an NBA lottery pick in the next draft, looked tentative like the rest of the Aggies on offense. He passed up a couple of dunks in the first half and finished with four points on a couple of second-half dunks. However, he grabbed seven rebounds, had six assists and two of his three blocks came in the stretch when A&M held Pepperdine without a basket.

POLL IMPLICATIONS

A&M clearly had the look a team with its eyes already set on getting revenge for last year's 65-63 home loss Southern Cal on Sunday. That gives Kennedy coaching fodder as the Aggies prepare to travel to Los Angeles. "If we play like we played tonight, we'll get beat," Kennedy said. "We have to play with a greater sense of urgency."