

Seminoles rally from 17-point deficit to win

By Gerald Ensley
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ORLANDO — James Naismith invented basketball as a game to be played in the winter. So perhaps it was fitting that on Friday, the first day of winter, the Florida State men's basketball team finally jelled, staging a furious comeback to beat Pittsburgh 83-76.

FSU trailed by as many as 17 points in the first half, by 14 at halftime, and did not take its first lead until 8:22 remained to play.

Paced by the super play of freshman forward Jerome Fitchett and senior guard Dean Shaffer, the Seminoles improved their season record to 5-1 and beat Pittsburgh for the first time in five meetings.

Fitchett, in his longest outing of the season (31 minutes), scored 19 points and had eight rebounds.

"I feel more confident every game," said Fitchett. "I've never been involved in combat like this, and the more I play the more confident I'll get."

Shaffer, with 11 points, eight rebounds and two steals, led all players with eight timely assists, despite playing with a cast on his right leg to protect an injured ankle.

Leading all scorers was 6-foot-11 FSU center Al Gipson with 24 points. Teammate Randy Allen, playing a quietly brilliant game, had 21 points.

Pittsburgh, 5-2, a young but impressive team, was led in scoring by 6-10 freshman forward Charles Smith with 18 points.

FSU's rally was in the same league with its two victories over Virginia Tech last season — comebacks of 12 and 18 points — and with FSU's surge from 13 points down to beat Louisville last season.

The crowd was a reported 1,866 in the Orange County Civic Center — a figure that represented tickets sold rather than an actual count of a living-room size crowd that nonetheless made considerable noise in FSU's behalf.

"It seems like Pitt always brings the worst out in us," said a relieved FSU head coach Joe Williams. "The thing is, when a team practices well, it eventually plays well. In the second half, yes, I think we began to play as well as we have practiced."

The game actually consisted of two distinctly different halves.

The first half was all Pittsburgh as the Panthers took advantage of FSU's sloppy — 13 turnovers — and angry — three technical and several purposeful fouls — play.

Ahead 10-8 five minutes into the game, Pittsburgh

reeled off 15 straight points to lead by its biggest margin, 25-8, with 10:12 to go in the half. FSU rallied briefly, scoring nine straight points to narrow the margin to 25-17, before the last of FSU's technical fouls — assessed against FSU assistant coach Rex Morgan — started Pitt on its way again. The Panthers then pushed to a 48-34 lead at halftime.

After regrouping at intermission, FSU dominated just about the entire second half. With 14:36 to play, FSU still trailed 58-48. But over the next six minutes — with Fitchett, Gipson and Allen seeming to grab every rebound — the Seminoles outscored Pitt 19-7, taking their first lead, 67-65, with 8:22 to play. FSU never trailed again, leading by as many as 10 points, and walked off with its fourth victory in a row.

See FSU, 3C

Crucial to the victory was a change in defense, which in turn led to better rebounding by the Seminoles, who busted out of a 17-17 deadlock in rebounds at halftime to win the battle of the boards 43-29.

"We switched to a matchup zone in the second half," said Williams. "In the first half, we were allowing them to get a bunch of open shots and allowing them to penetrate. But when we matched up in the second half, we denied them those open shots, and got in the passing lanes."

"Last year, they (Pitt) attacked the matchup zone real well. This year, they didn't."

"Sometimes, a simple change in defense helps."

It did Friday.

"When they changed to the 1-3-1, we knew what we wanted to do," said Pittsburgh head coach Roy Chipman. "But we just didn't execute."

"Obviously, Florida State did a job on us. But I really think we just lost our poise."

Perhaps a bigger key for FSU was something usually described as "the intangibles." Playing for all the world like a group of strangers in the first half — complaining, loafing and with little cooperation — FSU played as a team in the second half.

"This was the first game all year that we really had to come back. I think we figured out we weren't going to do it individually," said Shaffer. "This was the first time all year that we've huddled at the free-throw line, and called out the defenses to each other. We have to do that if we want to be a team, be a good team."

That attitude was most noticeable on Gipson, who, as he has done in previous games, had a lack-luster first half — 12 points but only one rebound — before sparkling in the second half with 12 points, eight rebounds and two blocked shots.

It was even more noticeable because last season Gipson had his two worst games of the season when playing Pittsburgh, scoring a total of 19 points in the two games and leaving the court in anger midway through the first half of the second game against the Panthers.

"This is my senior year and I didn't want to end my career with one team having beat me every time," said Gipson. "I am getting tired of people beating on me all the time. But I'm trying to be calmer. I've been talking with a psychologist, and reading the things he gives me. I think it's helping."

Gipson's second-half resurgence was typical of all the Seminoles.

"The main thing we said at halftime was the only way we could lose was if we quit," said Williams. "In the second half, we just refused to quit."

FSU's next game is Dec. 29 at Furman.

PITTSBURGH (76)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
Smith	7-12	4-4	5	0	1	28	18
Watkins	0-1	2-2	3	0	1	12	2

Armstrong	3-6	0-0	10	0	1	29	6
Aiken	5-11	0-0	4	2	1	32	10
Thompson	4-9	3-4	4	2	4	23	11
Williams	1-5	0-0	1	0	2	24	2
David	1-3	4-4	0	0	0	7	6
Shepherd	2-6	2-3	1	1	3	14	6
Miklasvch	2-4	2-4	3	0	0	9	6
Ferguson	0-1	0-0	0	0	0	2	0
Gore	1-8	3-4	0	0	0	16	5
Lewis	1-3	2-4	0	0	0	4	4
Team			2				
Totals	27-69	22-29	33	4	13	200	76

FLORIDA STATE (83)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
Allen	6-10	9-13	9	0	1	36	21
Arnold	0-0	1-2	2	1	0	10	1
Gipson	10-23	4-10	9	2	0	39	24
Farrar	2-5	2-3	2	1	2	30	6
Myrick	0-0	1-2	5	0	1	22	1
Shaffer	4-8	3-5	8	8	2	32	11
Fitchett	6-8	7-8	8	0	1	31	19
Team			4				
Totals	28-54	27-43	47	12	7	200	83

Halftime — Pittsburgh 48, Florida St. 34; Fouled out — Pittsburgh: none, Florida St.: Farrar; Tech. fouls — Pittsburgh: none, Florida St.: bench, Allen, Arnold; Total fouls — Pittsburgh 30, Florida St. 19; Attd.: 1,866