

FSU hits a high note in home swan song

By Gerald Ensley
Democrat staff writer

The Florida State men's basketball team played its Tallahassee swan song Saturday before a regional television audience and the second-smallest crowd of the season at the Tallahassee-Leon County Civic Center.

For the Seminoles, the game was much like trying to kill a turtle with a big stick while standing in a muddy ditch: It took a while and the atmosphere wasn't too glorious. But there was no doubt that the turtle was a goner.

In this case, the turtle was Metro Conference opponent South Carolina, which was battered 87-75 before a crowd of 2,589 in a game that was not as close as the score might suggest.

Ahead for 35 of the game's 40 minutes, FSU led by 14 points at halftime, by 21 midway through the second half and allowed South Carolina to get no closer than eight points the rest of the way — and that only in the final minute.

The victory, coupled with Tulane's 71-67 victory over Southern Mississippi, gave FSU undisputed possession of seventh place in the Metro. As a result, FSU will play second-place Virginia Tech on Thursday at 1

p.m. in the first round of the conference tournament.

FSU will take a 12-15 record (4-10 in the conference) to Louisville for the tournament. South Carolina, 6-8 in the conference and 15-12 overall, finished fourth and plays fifth-place Louisville at 9 p.m. Thursday.

Other Thursday matchups are third-place Cincinnati against sixth-place Tulane at 3 p.m., and first-place Memphis State against eighth-place Southern Miss at 7 p.m.

FSU handed South Carolina its 19th consecutive loss on the road by repeating many of the things it did in beating Cincinnati 86-60 last Wednesday. The Seminoles shot well from the field (60 percent), played aggressive defense and blended well as a team.

It was the second game in a row — and only the fourth time this season — that the Seminoles have shot 60 percent or better from the field.

"We know it's a critical time for us," said FSU forward Maurice Myrick. "I guess we're jelling. We're playing together as a team. We know that if we want to play more than one game in the tournament, we're going to have to take our shots, and make them."

See FSU, 2F

FSU

From 1F

It didn't hurt FSU that South Carolina hit only 36 percent from the floor, though the Gamecocks did make 27 of 36 free throws.

"All of a sudden it seems our shooting, which was starting to show a lot of improvement, is on a downturn," said South Carolina coach Bill Foster.

The FSU defense also forced 19 turnovers, made 10 steals and blocked six shots.

"Florida State was loose and aggressive. They played much better than they did in Columbia (earlier in the season when South Carolina beat FSU 92-77)," said Gamecock center Mike Brittain. "They seemed more active and confident."

The Seminoles captured the victory despite early foul problems by center Al Gipson and forwards Randy Allen and Jerome Fitchett, each of whom fouled out in the final four minutes.

Doing the bulk of the fill-in work was reserve senior forward David Speights, who played 24 minutes, the most he's played in a game since his sophomore season. Speights was the game's leading rebounder with nine — his season high — and had his best offensive game of the season with 11 points.

"It felt great," said Speights, smiling broadly. "I really just came in with the idea of contributing something to the team. I was going to take my shot if I had it. But mainly I just wanted to go to the boards, and keep them (South Carolina) off them."

Speights was one of five FSU seniors who played their last home game. The others were Myrick, Gipson, Joe Farrar and Dean Shaffer.

Each of the seniors received a standing ovation before the game, and again when they left, although Speights and Farrar had to remain in the game until the end because foul problems had reduced the number of substitutes.

The other four seniors joined Speights in double-figure scoring, led by

Shaffer's team-high 18 points — eight of which came on four slam dunks. Farrar added 14 points, Myrick and Gipson 12 apiece.

Linwood Moye led the Gamecocks with 24 points.

Following a 7-7 tie with 15:57 to go in the first half, FSU never trailed in the game. Popping off a 10-1 run, FSU led 17-10 with 12:57 to play, then blew to as much as an 18-point lead before taking a 46-32 lead at halftime.

South Carolina cut the lead to 13 points on two occasions in the first 10 minutes of the second half, before an eight-point FSU run gave the Seminoles their largest lead, 74-53, with 7:57 to play in the game. A late run by the Gamecocks cut the score to 79-71 with 1:05 to play. But FSU regrouped and outscored South Carolina 8-3 in the final minute for the 12-point victory.

"We're trying to play for confidence," said FSU head coach Joe Williams. "It didn't matter to us who we played in the first round of the tournament. The main thing is we need to win.

The first game is the big one."

SOUTH CAROLINA (75)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
Move	9-15	6-6	8	0	1	35	24
Kendall	2-9	2-4	6	1	2	28	6
Brittain	2-5	4-7	4	1	0	22	8
James	3-7	2-2	3	0	1	24	8
Foster	2-5	2-3	3	1	2	23	6
Thornton	1-4	3-4	3	0	0	13	5
Hawthorne	2-7	0-0	1	2	1	23	4
Martin	2-8	6-6	4	1	0	10	10
Lewis	0-1	0-0	0	0	0	2	0
Stierle	0-3	2-2	3	2	2	15	2
Shaw	1-2	0-1	2	1	0	3	2
Totals	24-46	27-35	37	9	9	200	75

FLORIDA STATE (87)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
Allen	5-7	0-2	6	0	1	10	10
Myrick	3-6	6-6	6	4	1	31	12
Gipson	5-9	2-4	6	0	1	24	12
Shaffer	8-11	2-2	4	9	4	38	18
Farrar	7-12	0-0	3	5	2	40	14
Fitchett	1-3	2-3	3	1	0	19	4
Matry	0-0	0-0	0	1	0	4	0
Carler	2-5	0-1	2	0	0	7	4
Speights	3-4	5-8	9	1	1	24	11
Martin	0-0	2-2	0	0	0	3	2
Team							1
Totals	34-57	19-28	36	21	10	200	87

Halftime: FSU 46, S. Carolina 32; Total fouls: S. Carolina 24, FSU 25; Fouled out: Kendall (S. Carolina); Allen, Gipson, Fitchett (FSU); Technical fouls: none; Attendance: 2,589.