

Seminoles roll into Metro semifinals

By Gerald Ensley
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17 (cable 13)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The resurrection of David Speights continued. And because it did, the Florida State men's basketball team survived to play another day in the Metro Conference tournament by upsetting Virginia Tech 97-93 Thursday in the opening round.

The victory ranked as a most deft miracle by a squad of Seminoles who have been mostly down in an up-and-down season. FSU finished seventh in the eight-team Metro standings and lost twice to Virginia Tech, the season runner-up.

Thursday's victory gave the Seminoles a 13-15 overall record and sent them into tonight's 7 p.m. semifinal game against Cincinnati, a 58-44 first-round winner over Tulane.

Most miraculous for FSU was the play of Speights, a senior who had seen little action the past two seasons until last Saturday when he stepped in and played superbly in FSU's regular-season-ending victory over South Carolina.

Forced into action because of an ankle injury to second-team All-Metro forward Randy Allen, Speights responded with a career-high 23 points, 10 rebounds, five assists and a blocked shot in 30 minutes of playing time.

Speights' performance complemented that of FSU center Al Gipson, who had 33 points to lead all scorers, three blocks and seven rebounds. His dominating play inside was as crucial to FSU as was Speights' all-around game.

"I got the ball a lot in our other games against (Virginia Tech). I just missed a lot of shots. Today, I made a lot of shots," said Gipson, who fell two points short of his career high. "We knew we could beat them."

Few others did. And the fact that FSU is still alive is a tribute to Speights, who entered the game midway through the first half in relief of freshman Jerome Fitchett. Fitchett started in place of Allen and wound up fouling out with more than eight minutes remaining.

Though not as gifted as either Allen or Fitchett, Speights displayed constant hustle and a good shooting touch Thursday.

"Things have not gone so well for David the last couple of years," said FSU head coach Joe Williams, "but he never got down. He has always been one of our best practice players, and has always kept a good attitude. With his sort of attitude, he deserved to have a game like this."

Speights, who started six games as a sophomore before being relegated to mop-up duty, expressed pleasure but little surprise with his performance.

"I've had some tough luck the last couple of years. I'd come into a game and do something wrong, then be taken out. I think the coaches thought I hindered the

See FSU, 4C

team when I was in there," said Speights. "This was my chance to make up for some of that. I knew I'd get my chance because Randy was hurt."

"I knew that I was capable of scoring this well. But all I wanted was to contribute."

Allen, a 6-8 sophomore, hurt his ankle in practice on Monday.

Nothing came easy for FSU as it won in Freedom Hall for the first time since a victory over former Metro member St. Louis in the opening round of the 1981 conference tournament.

Ahead 44-43 at halftime and by 13 points with 5:49 to play, the Seminoles had to withstand a late rally by the Hokies that whittled FSU's lead to three points with 22 seconds to play.

But with 16 seconds left, guard Dean Shaffer hit one of two free throws to give FSU a 95-91 lead. On the ensuing trip upcourt, Virginia Tech's Dell Curry fumbled away his dribble, and FSU's Joe Farrar grabbed the loose ball. Farrar was immediately fouled by Keith Colbert, and sank two free throws with 10 seconds remaining for a 97-91 lead. Then the Seminoles got out of the way as Ron Everhart drove the length of the court for the Hokies' last basket.

"We never did anything on defense. No pressure on the perimeter, and nothing inside," said a disappointed Virginia Tech coach Charlie Moir. "Anytime you don't play good defense, then your offense tends to fall off."

"Ours did today. We got too far down, and were too far gone."

Most damaging was Virginia Tech's shooting. Harassed constantly by FSU defenders, the Hokies managed to make only 43 percent of their field goal attempts compared to FSU's 55 percent — though the Hokies did out-rebound (51-41) the Seminoles and committed fewer turnovers (13 to 19).

Forwards Perry Young and Colbert each scored 20 points to lead the Hokies, but the usually dangerous Curry scored but 14 points, connecting on only six of 18 field goal attempts.

"I tried not to let him get hot. I knew if he hits two or three shots in a row, he can go on a tear and get unlimited points," said Shaffer, who guarded Curry much of the game. "His first two or three shots, I tried to make sure I got a hand in his face and let him know I was going to be there every time he tried to shoot."

FSU, after an early 6-4 lead, trailed for most of the first half. With 7:08 remaining in the half, Virginia Tech led 30-22.

But the Seminoles steadily edged back, led by Gipson and Speights, who combined for 27 first-half points.

Two Speights baskets and two

free throws by Fitchett reduced Virginia Tech's lead to 33-31 with 4:48 left in the half. A seven-point spree by Gipson helped FSU to a 40-39 lead with 2:34 to play in the half. The lead then switched hands three times before a long jumper by Maurice Myrick gave FSU a 44-43 lead with 1:27 to go. Cautious play by both teams, as each used all of the shot clock on its final possession of the half, kept the score 44-43 at intermission.

Twice in the first minutes of the second half, Virginia Tech tied the game. But with 17:20 to go, Farrar hit a jumper for a 51-49 lead. The Seminoles then went on to outscore Virginia Tech 14-4 over the next six minutes, and despite the Hokies' late rally, the Seminoles never relinquished the lead.

"We came in knowing we had to stop their fast break," said Williams, who made judicious use of three defenses and a couple of second-half timeouts. "We managed to do that pretty well, and that was a key."

The Hokies, 20-8, still figure to get an NCAA tournament bid when they are issued Sunday, despite the loss Thursday. That expectation, combined with the absence of Allen, had some speculating that the Hokies were not terribly motivated for Thursday's game.

"I'm not going to make those kind of excuses," said Moir. "You have to be ready every time you go out on that court. Today, for whatever reason, we just weren't ready to play."

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"We did not want to end the season on a losing note. We knew we could win. We said that before we left Tallahassee," said Shaffer, who had a single-game 12 assists. He is now within 10 assists sixth place on the FSU career list. "We've played without Randy before, like against South Carolina when he was in foul trouble. We knew David could do the job. It was just a matter of getting him the time."

FLORIDA STATE (97)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
Fitchett	3-4	2-3	3	0	0	16	8
Myrick	4-9	3-3	11	2	5	39	11
Gipson	12-22	9-11	7	1	0	37	33
Farrar	5-7	2-2	5	3	1	39	12
Shaffer	2-5	4-10	3	12	3	38	10
Speights	9-16	5-8	10	5	0	30	23
Martin	0-1	0-0	0	0	0	1	0
Team			2				
Totals	35-64	27-37	41	23	9	200	97

VIRGINIA TECH (93)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
P. Young	8-22	4-6	15	3	3	37	20
Colbert	7-14	6-6	9	2	1	40	20
Beecher	5-8	2-3	6	2	1	26	12
A. Young	3-13	4-4	6	4	4	36	10
Curry	6-18	2-2	2	3	2	31	14
Everhart	2-2	0-0	0	0	0	3	4
Lewis	2-4	0-0	1	0	0	10	4
Burgess	3-5	1-3	5	0	0	11	7
Williams	1-1	0-0	3	0	0	3	2
Brow	0-0	0-0	1	0	0	3	0
Team			3				
Totals	37-87	19-24	51	14	11	200	93

Halftime: FSU 44, Virginia Tech 43;
Total fouls: FSU 20, Virginia Tech 32;
Fouled out: Fitchett (FSU); P. Young, Colbert, A. Young (Virginia Tech);
Technical fouls: none; A—10, 113.