

Lionel, La Salle keep FSU losing

Explorers hold on to dump slumping Seminoles 101-100

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PHILADELPHIA — If ever there was a game Florida State wanted to win, it was held Thursday night at the Palestra.

The ancient gym is one of basket-

ball's holy temples, and the Seminoles went there seeking fulfillment.

They came away with only frustration.

La Salle beat FSU 101-100 after George McCloud missed a 3-pointer with four seconds left that would have sent the game into overtime.

Tharon Mayes put in the rebound, but all that did was let the final score more accurately reflect the game's intensity, La Salle's relief and the Seminoles' disappointment.

It was their fourth straight loss, a first under Pat Kennedy, who grew up

dreaming of playing in the 62-year-old Palestra and had two busloads of friends and relatives over from New Jersey for the game.

FSU is now 19-6. La Salle improved to 23-5 as an ESPN audience saw FSU lose for the third time in a week.

"It seems like ESPN is our jinx," said McCloud, who put on a 3-point show to bring FSU back from a 17-point halftime deficit.

He made 10 of 17 3-pointers on his way to a career-high 36 points, but he had to share center stage with La Salle's unstoppable forward Lionel Simmons,

who also had 36.

"It just wasn't our night," said McCloud. "We fell behind in the first half, but we showed our character by coming back. But you can't fall behind like that on the other team's floor."

That's something FSU has learned the hard way lately. La Salle had a 12-0 lead before FSU made a shot.

"We really can't put our finger on it," said Irving Thomas. "I think we're coming out ready to play."

La Salle, itself hoping to prove to the

Please see FSU, 3C

FSU

From 1C

national audience that it's a legitimate power, got a quick, irreversible shot of confidence with the good start. And the crowd was definitely thrust into a whoop-it-up mood.

FSU settled down and cut it to 29-27 on a 3-pointer by Mayes with 7:40 left. Considering its start, FSU was in great shape. It quickly deteriorated.

Essentially, the Seminoles just fell apart. They stopped working the ball inside. When they did get it inside, they'd usually miss. The last five minutes of the first half were some of the worst of the worst FSU has been through lately.

"We just got away from our style of play," said Mayes. "We weren't playing defense hard, weren't hitting our shots or getting the inside-outside combination we were getting earlier this year."

La Salle was, and it was coming from an unlikely source. You've heard of Harpo, Groucho and Zeppo, meet Milko.

Until Thursday, Milko Lieverst had played more like a Marx brother than a college center. The freshman from Amsterdam came into the game averaging 1.8 points and 1.6 rebounds.

He chose the first half to ex-

plode for nine points and seven rebounds. A little help like that was all Simmons needed. The Explorers went on a 19-6 run and took a 50-33 halftime lead.

"That really hurt us," said Kennedy. "They were getting a lot of loose balls and laying them in for points."

The Seminoles were again looking at a tall mountain, though out of necessity they've become pretty good climbers of late.

They almost overcame double-digit deficits in losses to Memphis

State and New Orleans, but neither one of those teams had Simmons.

FSU thought a man-to-man defense was a better approach because of La Salle's good outside shooting. Thomas, McCloud, Tat Hunter, David White all took a shot at stopping the nation's third-leading scorer. But when the 6-6 junior gets into his rhythm and decides he wants to score, he's probably going to score.

"We knew we weren't going to stop him," said McCloud. "But we had to contain him. Tonight, we didn't."

La Salle didn't exactly contain McCloud either. His 3-point bombing brought FSU within seven points with 16 minutes to play, but the Explorers wouldn't let FSU get closer until there were three minutes left.

His sixth of seven second-half 3-pointers made it 91-89 with 2:56 left. A minute later, FSU had its one chance to take the lead after a La Salle turnover. McCloud got the ball under the basket but was jostled and lost it out of bounds.

"I got bumped, but it's hard for me to tell whether the ball went off my hand," he said. "But that one play didn't lose the game for us."

It wasn't so much that FSU lost it down the stretch and La Salle won it. The Seminoles scored 67 points in the second half. Many of the points came via defensive pressure from Mayes, who had 24 points, 10 assists and looks completely recovered from his broken hand.

The Seminoles broke out of their slump in the second half. It just wasn't enough as they again brought out the best in an opponent.

"That's the story right there," said Thomas. "Everybody's just playing great games against us."

The Explorers hit a string of free throws in the final minute to

take a 101-95 lead. McCloud hit his final 3-pointer to cut it to 101-98 with 18 seconds left.

La Salle's Doug Overton lost the ball out of bounds three seconds later to give FSU its final shot.

McCloud dribbled around and fired over two defenders.

"It didn't feel good when it left my hand," he said. "But I had to take the shot."

After three road losses in the past week, the Seminoles get a week off before meeting Virginia Tech on March 1 at the Civic Center.

It's not the Palestra, but FSU will take win No. 20 anywhere it can get it.

FLORIDA STATE (189)

Dawson 8-17 4-6 20, Thomas 4-6 1-1 9, Hunter 3-6 0-0 6, McCloud 11-22 4-4 36, Mayes 10-17 2-3 24, Mitchell 0-4 0-0 0, Boyd 2-4 0-0 5, Johnson 0-0 0-0 0, White 0-0 0-0 0, Totals 38-78 11-14 100.

LA SALLE (191)

Simmons 12-21 10-12 36, Conlin 1-2 2-2 4, Liversett 4-5 3-4 11, Overton 8-14 0-0 17, Hurd 6-8 3-4 19, Johnson 5-15 2-2 14, Shelton 0-0 0-0 0, Totals 36-66 20-24 101.

Halftime—La Salle 50, Florida State 31, 3-point goals—Florida State 13-28 (McCloud 10-17, Mayes 2-7, Boyd 1-2, Dawson 0-3), La Salle 9-17 (Hurd 4-6, Simmons 2-2, Johnson 2-6, Overton 1-3). Fouled out—Dawson. Rebounds—Florida State 43 (Hunter 8), La Salle 35 (Simmons 10). Assists—Florida State 25 (Mayes 10), La Salle 20 (Overton 7). Total fouls—Florida State 20, La Salle 18. Technical—Florida State Coach Kennedy. A—8,722.