



State's tender spot: A&T's Jimmy Brown fires a jumper over the Wolfpack's Terry Garmon, exploiting the Aggies' advantage in the backcourt (photo by Joe Daniels).

Making Headway

Though North Carolina A&T's Aggies lost a game to defending national champion N.C. State in December, they won considerable measures of respect from both themselves and the Wolfpack in the process.

By ROBERT ELLER

A weary Don Corbett emerged from the visitors' dressing room almost unnoticed by the throng of reporters huddled around North Carolina State's Jim Valvano. It was nearly 45 minutes after N.C. State's 84-71 win over Corbett's North Carolina A&T Aggies.

Across the hall, another horde of sports reporters, some with TV cameras, others with tape recorders and still others with pens and pads in hand, were taking in every possible word they could get from players on last year's NCAA title team.

But, by now, the A&T players were dressed and headed for their team bus and the ride back to Greensboro.

"Coach Corbett," I said, drawing the attention of the tall, slightly balding man.

"Surely, you are not going to ask for an interview now," he almost pleaded. "Our kids are already on the bus."

There was pain in both Corbett's voice and his face. His tie was loose, his shirt drooped from his trousers and his eyes were a pale red. Still, he mustered a smile and conceded, "O.K., what can I do for you?"

Corbett already knew most of the questions; problem was, he didn't know the answers. Before I could start the interview, he began talking slowly. "You saw what happened out there. It's the same thing that almost always happens when we play the big-name white schools. They just overpower us inside. Our kids gave a game effort. But they are so much bigger and stronger than we are that eventually they will wear us down just like they did tonight."

That was indeed the case in Reynolds Coliseum that Tuesday evening. Corbett's smaller but quicker team stayed even with the Wolfpack for the first four minutes. Then N.C. State's superior size, a bad call here and there and a couple of Aggie turnovers gave the Wolfpack a 30-17 lead with just under seven minutes left in the half.

Corbett didn't give up, though, exploiting the one A&T advantage -- speed in the backcourt -- to put his team back in the contest. Employing a halfcourt trap, his team forced seven turnovers and got back to within seven (41-34) at the half.

The Aggies hung tough for the first three minutes of the second half. But then three walking calls, under the Aggies' own basket, and a charging foul allowed N.C. State to score eight unanswered points and the contest was decided.

Corbett thought momentarily about the game's turning point, then forced another weary smile. "We're facing an uphill battle," he said. "We've played three tough games on the road against tough Division I teams but, as long as the MEAC is a Division I conference, we will have to play those teams."

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