

LIVING ROOM TIMES

BINDER UPDATE

TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 1999
POSTSEASON BASKETBALL SPECIAL

MARCH SADNESS



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Gonzaga marches on

Qualifies for second NCAA bid ever

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP) -- Gonzaga is headed to the NCAA tournament for the second time in its history, and an extraordinary display of outside shooting got it there.

The toxp-shooting 3-point team in the West Coast Conference, Gonzaga connected from beyond the arc 18 times, including eight by Matt Santangelo, and overwhelmed Santa Clara 91-66 in Monday night's tournament championship game.

"I told the team we were not going to play afraid," Gonzaga coach Dan Monson said. "We were going to dictate this game. We're the best team in the tournament. We just needed to go out and play."

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Devils, Mickens fall one game short

Lose to Mount St. Mary's in NEC final, miss out on NCAA bid

NEW YORK (AP) -- College basketball history can wait. The NCAA tournament was all the Mount St. Mary's coach and players wanted to talk about.

That the Mounties' 72-56 victory over Central Connecticut State on Monday night was the 800th of Jim

Phelan's career was relegated to runner-up status behind the NCAA bid that went along with the win in the Northeast Conference tournament championship game.

Phelan, the fourth coach on any level to reach 800 wins, said he and his team didn't talk about the magic number.

"We didn't even think about it," senior guard Greg Bethel said. "After the game I congratulated him on it, but I was happier for him and us that we won it all and get to go on."

The sixth-seeded Mounties (15-14) clinched an automatic bid in the 64-team field.

It will be Phelan's second time in the tournament since the small Catholic school from Emmittsburg, Md., moved to Division I in 1989. In his 45 seasons at the Mount, the bow-tied Phelan won the 1962 college division national championship and went to three other Final Fours and has compiled an 800-442 record. He trails only Dean Smith (879), Adolph Rupp (876) and Clarence "Big House" Gaines (828) on the career list.

"Maybe it was a combination of No. 800 and the NEC tournament and the right to go the NCAA that made this bigger than 1995, which was a great experience," Phelan said of his other NCAA appearance. "I think it was the combination of all that that made this a little bit bigger."

Three other teams grabbed NCAA tournament berths Monday night when Siena downed St. Peter's 82-67, Creighton stopped Evansville 70-61 and Gonzaga

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CCSU falls just short of NCAA bid

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defeated Santa Clara) 91-66.

With a disappointing finish to the regular season, Mount St. Mary's made the pursuit of Phelan's 800th more dramatic.

He won No. 797 on Feb. 6 at Wagner. Three home wins to close out the regular season would mean a milestone for Phelan and a good record for the Mounties. Instead, they dropped all three games, meaning the only way Phelan could get 800 this season would be by winning the NEC tournament.

"I felt the level of intensity tonight was what they felt they should have had, but didn't, at the end of the season," Phelan said. "They took advantage of the opportunity of a second chance and then played hard and with intensity."

Mount St. Mary's also played some serious defense against the fourth-seeded Blue Devils (19-13), holding them to a season-low 29 percent shooting, including one field goal in the final eight minutes.

"They took away our offense," Central Connecticut coach Howie Dickenman said. "We couldn't make jump shots and then we couldn't get the ball to our inside players."

It also helped that freshman center Melvin Whitaker was down low for Mount St. Mary's, even if it was only for 25 foul-plagued minutes. He had 10 points, seven rebounds and eight blocked shots.

Whitaker brought the school national attention this season when he enrolled after spending two years in jail after slashing a University of Virginia football player with a box cutter on a recruiting visit there.

"A lot of the fouls could have gone either way and the ones I did get clean got in their minds," he said. "I'm still adjusting to being in officiating situations, period."

Gregory Harris had 20 points for Mount St. Mary's, while Bethel had 16, 10 more than his season average.

Charron Watson had 21 points for Central Connecticut State, which had its first winning season since moving to Division I in 1986. The Blue Devils were 4-22 last season.

"I'm very proud of this team's accomplishments this

season," Dickenman said. "I'm very disappointed for them after such a year-long effort."

Just after the final buzzer of his first chance at going to the NCAA tournament, Dickenman, who has a career record of 32-53, was shaking hands with Phelan, who walked down to the loser's bench as his team celebrated on the court at the Spiro Sports Center at Wagner College.

"If there is a consolation to losing, it's losing to a gentleman like Jim Phelan," Dickenman said.

Creighton 70, Evansville 61

In St. Louis, Rodney Buford scored nine of his 21 points in a crucial 1:44 second-half sequence as Creighton upset top-seeded Evansville for the Missouri Valley Conference tournament title.

Buford also had 13 rebounds, and Ben Walker had 18 points and 11 rebounds for Creighton (21-8), the conference's No. 2 seed.

Marcus Wilson had 16 points and Craig Snow 13 for Evansville (23-9), which won the conference race by two games and split with Creighton in the regular season, with each team winning on the road. Siena 82, St. Peter's 67

In Buffalo, N.Y., Marcus Faison scored 17 points as Siena (25-5) got balanced scoring to win its first Metro Atlantic Conference tournament title.

Scott Knapp added 14 points and Jim Cantamessa and Melvin Freeny each had 13 each for the Saints.

Jamar Hunter scored 22 for St. Peter's, Kamaal McQueen had 19 and Ricky Bellinger 12.

Siena's only previous NCAA tournament appearance was in 1989, when the Saints beat Stanford 80-78 and lost to Minnesota 80-67.

Gonzaga 91, Santa Clara 66

Gonzaga earned its second NCAA tournament slot for by winning the West Coast Conference tournament at Santa Clara, Calif.

Gonzaga (25-6) connected on 18 3-pointers, including eight by Matt Santangelo, the unanimous tournament MVP, who matched his career high with 34 points.

Gonzaga was making its fifth appearance in the tournament final. Its only other victory came in 1995.

Alex Lopez's 18 points led Santa Clara (14-15).

Gonzaga qualifies for NCAA's with win

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And play they did.

Santangelo, the unanimous tournament MVP, matched his career high with 34 points, Quentin Hall had 19 and Richie Frahm added 18 -- all on 3-pointers.

"Tonight for us they were unstoppable," Santa Clara coach Dick Davey said. "We weren't able to defend them. They were too active and too efficient in their play. They created a lot of problems for us."

With the victory, Gonzaga (25-6) set a school record for wins in a season and secured an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament as the WCC representative. The Bulldogs were coming off a 24-10 campaign last season.

Gonzaga was making its fifth appearance in the tournament final. Its only other victory came in 1995, when it went to the NCAA tournament for the first time and lost in the opening round.

Alex Lopez's 18 points led Santa Clara (14-15). Darrell Teat added 13 points.

"I thought our concentration was at an utmost high," Monson said. "We came to play. This is something we have worked for for a year.

"I could tell by the look in their eyes they were not to be denied. Everybody stepped up. To answer the question I've been asked for the last month, I think this gets us in."

Up by nine points at halftime, Gonzaga stretched its lead to 57-40 amid another flurry of 3-pointers.

Santa Clara scored the first four points in the second half but the Bulldogs answered with another barrage from the outside. Frahm and Santangelo hit consecutive 3-pointers to start a 17-5 run and Santa Clara just couldn't stay with the Bulldogs, who beat the Broncos for a third time this season.

Gonzaga relied on its outside shooting to build a 40-31 halftime lead, putting in nine 3-pointers in the opening 20 minutes.

Santangelo accounted for four of them, the last coming with 1:40 left to give the Bulldogs a 40-27 lead. Lopez made one of two free throws and Nathan Fast hit a 3-pointer in the last minute to narrow the gap.