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N.C. A&T one and done from MEAC

By Dan Friedell

Special to the News & Record

"Going 8, 9, 10 minutes without scoring a field goal is not our problem. The problem is Howard was able to score against us. Usually our defense limits people from scoring."

Jerry Eaves,

N.C. A&T coach

RALEIGH -- Miss Manners says it's bad form to leave your own party early.

But that's exactly what happened to N.C. A&T -- the host school of this year's MEAC conference tournament -- when the Aggies' 62-52 loss to ninth-seeded Howard completed a sweep of the schools' basketball teams from the tournament at the RBC Center.

The game wasn't quite that close, as the Aggies trailed Howard by 31 points with 15:54 to play.

Earlier, the sixth-seeded women's team lost by 20 against 11th-seeded Bethune-Cookman.

A&T athletics director DeLores Todd, who was sitting courtside, said she was disappointed to see her school's teams going home after the tournament's first day.

"Us going out hurts the tournament, because our fans would have been here," she said.

A&T and Howard met just six days ago in Greensboro and produced a more even contest as the Aggies lost 58-50.

But Howard made sure Tuesday's game wasn't close -- using three 3-pointers in the first 2:40 to jump out to a 9-2 lead.

With senior point guard Louis Ford pushing the ball down the court and finding open teammates for mid-range jumpers and easy layups, the Howard lead reached 21 points with 2:45 to play in the half.

"We were just running our offense the way coach wants us to" Ford said. "We were just knocking down the shots."

After the game, A&T coach Jerry Eaves was marveling at Howard's shooting efficiency in the first

half.

"They hit their shots, and that's not traditionally what they do," Eaves said. "It was just a very tough situation for us in the first half."

The advantage was not only due to Howard's 60-percent shooting during the game's first 20 minutes -- including 6 of 7 on 3-pointers -- but also to A&T's inability to make a field goal. A&T was as bad as Howard was good: the Aggies made 5 of 21 shots in the half.

"When it was 23-13, they hadn't really gone anywhere, it was our problem, not theirs," Eaves said. "We just couldn't get the ball in the basket."

After Greg Roberts made a short hook shot with 7:35 left in the half, the Aggies didn't hit another field goal until Leslie Powell knocked down a 3-pointer with 15:27 to go in the game.

During the 12-minute stretch, Howard's lead ballooned to 48-17.

"Going 8, 9, 10 minutes without scoring a field goal is not our problem," Eaves said. "The problem is Howard was able to score against us. Usually our defense limits people from scoring."

Roberts, averaging 9 points per game, had been struggling lately with an ankle injury.

"He hadn't played in the last two games, and he tried to play today," Eaves said. "He was just out of sync and we can't have that."

While a spirited effort by the Aggies in the game's final 10 minutes cut Howard's advantage to more manageable 50-38 with 5:30 to go, the Bison wouldn't give up the game and advanced to the tournament's quarterfinals to face top-seeded Delaware State tonight.

While Howard coach Gil Jackson was happy to escape with the win, he's worried about his team's inability to play a complete game.

"I thought our intensity in the second half just wasn't there," Jackson said. "I thought A&T did a good job of coming back. We have to handle the ball better and make better decisions if we want to advance in a tournament like this."

Howard (7-21)

N.C. A&T (6-23)

Blocked shots: Howard 4 (Gant, Myatt, Greene, Smith); N.C. A&T 1 (Roberts). Steals: Howard 11 (Ford 5, Hudson 4, Gant, Trotter); N.C. A&T 9 (Powell 6, Chaplin, Faison, Wills). Officials: Upton, Gladden, James. Attendance: not available

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