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St. Joe's blows two leads in loss to Bonnies



By Vinny Pezzimenti, FOR THE INQUIRER

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OLEAN, N.Y. - The St. Joseph's Hawks may very well look back at this one with particular trepidation come Selection Sunday.

St. Joe's coughed up seemingly insurmountable six-point leads at both the end of regulation and the first overtime in suffering a 98-93 double overtime loss to St. Bonaventure on Wednesday before 3,539 at the Reilly Center.

The loss is painful for the Hawks (19-12, 9-7 Atlantic Ten) not only because of NCAA tournament implications. They also could have clinched a first-round bye in the Atlantic Ten Conference tournament with a victory. Instead, St. Joe's will have to be satisfied with a first-round tournament game at home against an opponent to be determined on Tuesday.

"We came here to get the bye, and we didn't get it done," coach Phil Martelli said. "It has to hurt."

The Bonnies (17-10, 10-5), meanwhile, earned a bye into the quarterfinals with the win and a Massachusetts loss to Temple.

St. Bonaventure can thank Andrew Nicholson for the results. The star big man poured in 32 points and connected on several key shots to lift St. Bonaventure to its fourth straight win.

Nicholson forced the second overtime with a three-pointer with two seconds left and landed the knockout punch with another three-pointer with a minute and a half remaining in the final period, giving the St. Bonaventure a 95-89 lead.

The Hawks never led in the second overtime. They had plenty of opportunities before that to put the Bonnies away.

St. Bonaventure erased a six-point lead in the final two minutes of regulation and took a two-point lead on a Matthew Wright three-pointer with 1.9 seconds left. But St. Joe's C.J. Aiken was fouled after receiving a long in-bounds pass and buried two free throws with 1.1 seconds left to force overtime.

St. Joe's seized momentum, taking advantage of three-pointers from Carl Jones and Langston Galloway and two free throws by Chris Wilson to forge an 82-76 lead with 40 seconds left in the first overtime. But Aiken and Wilson each missed free throws, and Wright and Nicholson countered with three-pointers for St. Bonaventure.

"You hate to bang a table after going 17 of 21 from the foul line. But in the end we go 2 for 4. If we go 3 for 4, then we're talking about having won the game," Martelli said.

The Bonnies, who shot 10 of 18 on three-pointers, canned three more from deep in the second overtime and never looked back.

"We could have defended better," Galloway said. "We switched when we shouldn't have, and they just happened to make the shots."

Galloway and Jones each scored 20 points for the Hawks. Ronald Roberts, who fouled out in the first overtime, added 18 points and seven rebounds off the bench.

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