

Late Highlander rally comes up just short in Big West opener:

CSUN: 33-50=83 (7-10 Overall, 0-1 Big West Conference)

UC Riverside: 40-42=82 (6-11 Overall, 0-1 Big West Conference)

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Riverside,CA-

Big West Conference men's basketball teams will play a minimum of 640 minutes on the road to determining a regular season champion and tournament seeding. If the opener between CSUN & UC Riverside was any indication it's going to be a wild ride in determining that field and its qualifiers. UC Riverside led for 19:31 but a 15-4 Matadors run covering 5:11 gave them their first lead at 48-47. From that point the Highlanders deficit grew to eight on four occasions at 59-51, 65-57, 68-60, and 70-62. Ultimately a late rally was not enough as UC Riverside fell 84-83 in the Student Recreation Center on Wednesday night before 437 fans.

Early on the teams traded tied scores and Highlander leads to the tune of seven ties in twenty minutes. Dominick Pickett connected on a three pointer giving UC Riverside a 10-5 lead with 15:12 till half. Dikymbe Martin's three pointer with 7:34 left held the Highlander lead at five points 28-23. As you can probably tell three point shooting played a big part in the outcome of this game. UC Riverside's lead reached ten points at 40-30 with 49 seconds until intermission off a three pointer from Pickett. Terrell Gomez hit a layup at the buzzer making CSUN's deficit 40-33 after twenty minutes. Both sides were hot from three point range in the opening stanza and combined for 14-25 (56%) beyond the arc. Gomez led the Matadors with 13 points at intermission while Martin had 16 for UC Riverside. Lamine Diane ,who averaged 24.3 PPG & 11.1 RPG coming into the opener was held to just 9 points at intermission on 3-6 shooting by an active Highlander defense that generated six steals.

An 7-2 run by CSUN brought the Matadors to within two points at 42-40 with 17:44 left. Gomez & Lamine Diane each had a two point field goal while Michael Ou converted a three point play in that stretch. Jordan Gilliam restored a five point lead at 47-42 Highlanders with 16:31 left off a three pointer on Menno Dijkstra's assist. Gomez' three pointer with 15:43 to go gave us an eighth & final tied score at 47. Diane split a pair of free throws with 14:49 left giving CSUN their first lead at 48-47. With just under eleven minutes left a Ou layup put the Matadors up eight points at 59-51. A three pointer from Dijkstra made it 59-54 CSUN in front with 9:57 left. Ajani Kennedy's three pointer brought the Highlanders to within three points at 60-57 with 9:04 left. Gomez answered that with a big three of his own off an assist from Diane about twenty six seconds later pushing the CSUN lead to 63-57. At 6:27 remaining Gomez connected on another three point shot giving the Matadors a 68-60 lead (their largest thus far). A 6-2 run from UC Riverside brought the Highlanders to within four points at 70-66 with 4:24 left and culminated with a Martin layup. DJ McDonald's three pointer with 3:44 left also held the deficit to four at

73-69. Dragan Elkaz hit a three with just under 35 seconds left pulling the Highlanders within two points at 78-76. A Martin three pointer brought the Highlanders within one point at 82-81 with thirteen seconds remaining. Trailing 84-83 after Gomez split a pair of free throws with 5.1 seconds left the Highlanders got one last shot at a storybook ending. Martin took a three pointer from the left wing which missed as time expired and all involved could finally exhale after a hard fought battle.

CSUN coach Mark Gottfried said about the win “We had to pick up our defensive pressure which was a point of emphasis in the locker room and take away the three point shots. Certainly we didn't do a very good job of that in the first half but did much better in the second half at contesting their shots and speeding things up.”

About Gomez 32 point night (a season high which was previously 29 points set against Morgan State on 12/29) Gottfried remarked “He was aggressive and we need him to be. We found him shots in our offense but he was also hunting his own shot. Sometimes he tends to be a bit too unselfish and we have to tell him it's ok that he takes a few more shots.”

In a postgame radio interview Highlanders coach David Patrick said “That game came down to two things-transition defense and defensive rebounding. They had way too many second chance opportunities in that 2nd half especially early on. Coming out of the half they hit us in the mouth and we did not respond well at all. Ultimately we have to learn and grow from this one. It's a long season so there's plenty of time to do just that.”

Matador Notables:

Lamine Diane>>21 pts on 7-15 FG's (7-16 FT's), 8 Rbs, 7 Ast

Terrell Gomez>>32 pts on 11-17 FG's (6-9 3 Pt Range)

Rodney “Rocket” Henderson>>16 pts on 6-10 FG's (1-3 3 Pt Range), 8 Rbs, 3 Ast, 2 Steals

Highlander Notables:

Dikymbe Martin>>25 pts on 8-20 FG's (5-8 3 Pt Range), 6 Ast, 2 Steals

Menno Dijkstra>>14 pts on 5-10 FG's (2-4 3 Pt Range), 6 Rbs, 2 Ast

Jordan Gilliam>>10 pts on 7-8 FT's (1-2 3 Pt Range), 3 Ast

Next Up:

UC Riverside @ UCSB 1/12 7pm

CSUN @ Cal Poly 1/12 7pm

