Bulldogs Oust #15 Arizona To Claim 2K Classic Crown

box score

NEW YORK - Another solid defensive effort lifted the Mississippi State men's basketball team to its second upset victory in as many nights.

Behind Tournament Most Valuable Player Arnett Moultrie's fourth double-double of the season and a stellar effort defensively, Mississippi State knocked off No. 15 Arizona 67-57 to win the championship of the 2K Sports Classic Friday night at Madison Square Garden.

With the victory, the Bulldogs knocked off back-to-back ranked opponents for the first time since beating Florida and South Carolina in 2004. Arizona had won 12 of its last 13 games in the world's "most famous arena." However, on this night, the tournament championship was wrapped in Maroon and White.

"I am awfully proud of our guys," MSU head coach Rick Stansbury said. "This game was about effort and toughness. If you look at the stat sheet, you see who the tougher team was on that floor tonight. We hustled, played hard and made all of the effort plays you need to make to win a championship."

For a second straight night, the Bulldogs came out of the gates strong. In Thursday's 69-60 win over No. 18 Texas A&M, the Maroon and White sprinted out to a 15-5 lead and later a 31-9 advantage. Against the Wildcats, MSU scored the game's first seven points.

MSU (4-1) never trailed in either of the final two contests played in the four-game tournament.

"We came out with the intensity you have to have to win games like this," Stansbury said. "Our ability to share the ball was outstanding. We got several players involved. It was our most complete game offensively, while we really locked them down on defense in the final half."

The Bulldogs still held a 21-13 lead before Arizona (4-1) responded with a 12-2 run to tie the game at 23. MSU's Rodney Hood scored his team's next two baskets. Brian Bryant followed that up with a 3-point make. Still Arizona hung tough, as the Bulldogs eased into halftime with a 34-33 lead.

In the final half, the MSU defense held Arizona to 23 total points and eight field goals.

After Arizona closed within 44-43, Moultrie rammed home a monster dunk on the other end. That dunk would fuel a 6-0 run, helping the Maroon and White out to a 50-43 advantage.

Arizona again chopped it to one at 54-53 with 6:30 remaining. This time, Renardo Sidney had the answer on the offensive end. Dee Bost then hit a free throw. Moultrie followed that up with a 15-foot jump shot and a putback for a six-point lead.

Four straight points by Wendell Lewis ran the advantage to 10 points. Moultrie, from nearby Queens and who celebrated his 21st birthday Friday, followed with two more free throws to seal the victory.

For the contest, the Bulldogs hit 26 of 58 shots from the field (44.8 percent), 4 of 16 shots from 3-point range (25.0 percent) and 11 of 17 shots from the foul line (64.7 percent). The Wildcats hit 23 of 58 shots from the field (39.7 percent), 6 of 20 shots from 3-point range (30.0 percent) and 5 of 9 shots from the foul line (55.6 percent).

MSU held a 36-31 rebounding advantage. The Bulldogs had 10 assists and nine turnovers, while the Wildcats had 11 assists and nine turnovers.

Hood had nine points, while Sidney and Bost each had eight points. Bost had a team-best six assists, while joining Moultrie on the all-tournament team.

Arizona received 12 points from Solomon Hill and 11 points from Jesse Perry.

MSU opens a six-game homestand with Louisiana-Monroe at 7 p.m. Monday.