

Nowell pops for 32 as Washington beats Belmont 86-82

By Tim Booth

SEATTLE (AP) — Jaylen Nowell was the one high school star that remained committed to Washington when a coaching change was made and Mike Hopkins was hired.

Seemed appropriate it was Nowell delivering Hopkins his first win as the Huskies head coach.

Nowell scored 25 of his 32 points in the second half and Washington rallied from nine points down in the final five minutes to beat Belmont 86-82 on Friday night in Hopkins debut. The game was part of the 2K Classic.

"He's got the eyes of a scorer," Hopkins said.

Nowell was fantastic down the stretch as Washington (1-0) got off to a positive start after closing last season on a 13-game losing streak. Nowell scored nine points in the final two minutes, 24 seconds, including a driving layup with 32 seconds left to give Washington an 80-79 lead. Austin Luke missed a 3-point attempt for Belmont on its next possession and David Crisp knocked down a pair of free throws with 22 seconds left for an 82-79 lead.

Kevin McClain scored on a backdoor layup with 14 seconds left to pull the Bruins within one, but Nowell made two free throws. Washington fouled Luke, who made the first and purposely missed the second. Matisse Thybulle got the rebound and made two free throws to clinch the victory.

Nowell made 12 of 18 shots and added five rebounds. It's the second straight year a Washington freshman scored at least 30 points in their first game as Markelle Fultz had 30 in his debut a season ago. Just as important as Nowell was the contributions of Carlos Johnson off the bench, who finished with 10 points. Johnson and Nowell combined to score 19 consecutive points during Washington's rally.

"We don't care how much we're down by. We're always going to keep working hard and focus on what is best for us to win," Nowell said.

It was an exhaustive and emotional night for Hopkins, who left his role as the presumptive replacement for Jim Boeheim at Syracuse to rebuild the Washington program after Lorenzo Romar was fired last March. His suit for the opener was accentuated by a purple tie, but the suit jacket lasted just seven minutes before it was tossed aside and Hopkins rolled up his sleeves.

Washington trailed by as many as 10 early in the second half and was down 70-61 with 5:40 left after Nick Hopkins made his sixth 3-pointer, but the Huskies outscored the Bruins 25-12 the rest of the way and made nine of their final 10 shot attempts.

"In the second half there were probably two or three times the game felt like it could get away from you again and these guys just kept fighting," Hopkins said.

Nick Hopkins led Belmont (0-1) with 22 points in his college debut, including six 3-pointers. Dylan Windler added 18 points before fouling out late. The Bruins made 10 3-pointers but were just 4 of 14 behind the line in the second half.

SHOOTING 3s

Belmont was an NIT team a season ago and its style of hoisting 3-pointers was a difficult matchup with the Huskies still learning how to play Hopkins' zone defense he brought from Syracuse. Belmont attempted 31 3s out of 65 field-goal attempts. But the Bruins made just two 3-pointers in the final eight minutes.

BIG PICTURE

Belmont: The Bruins looked just fine adjusting to the loss of forward Evan Bradds, who graduated last season after helping lead Belmont to four straight Ohio Valley regular season titles. The Bruins put four players in double figures, including 17 points from Amanze Egekeze, the top returning scorer for the Bruins.

Washington: The Huskies need to get more contributions from its interior players. Noah Dickerson was in foul trouble and finished with just eight points before fouling out.