
Arkansas State 73, North Texas 70

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For the second time in three days, North Texas lost a tough game at home in Sun Belt action.

Leonard Hopkins started off strong, unlike Thursday night and North Texas got out to an early lead. The pattern the entire game was of North Texas getting ahead anywhere from 7-11 points only to have ASU come back. This seemed like it happened 10 times in the the first half. The team was all over the rebounds and loose balls early, and got out on the break. Isaac Hines really shines in this type of game pace. Calvin Watson also started off very well, hitting his shots from downtown. Another good sign from Watson were some nice moves taking his man off the dribble. If he can implement that into his arsenal, he will be a much more potent scorer. Right now, he is very streaky because he relies so heavily on his outside shooting. On nights that he is off, and it happens to everyone, he needs to be able to rely on an all-around offensive game much like Leonard Hopkins.

At halftime, North Texas led by nine points shooting at over 51% and dominating on the boards. The second half would be a different story.

ASU really dominated the boards in the second half, and not with big size controlling the paint. They did it by using the body to gain position, blocking out, and going after the ball in the air like Johnny Quinn after a Scott Hall floater. It really did seem like they wanted it more, and that is a very disappointing sign.

ASU repeatedly had second chance points, and I have no doubts that it was the difference in the game. Had North Texas been able to cut those opportunities in half, the three point deficit would have been made up.

North Texas was able to come back in the final minutes, but like Thursday fell just short. Drives into the lane by Hopkins and Watson resulted in three point plays. Isaac Hines made one of two after drawing an over the back call to cut the lead to two points. But the inability to secure the rebound was the difference, as ASU ran the clock down and hit their free throws making a three pointer the only option for the Mean Green. Hopkins got off an off-balance shot with a defender close by, and Watson chased down the rebound and had a decent look, but a little too far out and ASU escaped with the win.

Bad things:

- 1) North Texas did not show the desire to rebound or play defense that they had shown earlier in the season. They are too cautious in the diamond press and unaggressive crashing the boards.
- 2) The two Mikes, Jones and Sturns are non-factors at this point. Jones has all-conference potential, but gets in too much foul trouble, and is inconsistent. In his defense, he is playing out of position, but he is still not playing to his ability. Sturns is a freshman making the transition to point guard and is being overwhelmed. I advocate moving him to the 3 so that his defense and athletic ability can be used. I would rather see him play that position than Ty Thomas, though Thomas has improved his shot greatly.

Good things:

- 1) Once again, Jeffrey Simpson was solid inside. He got the start tonight and ended up with a career high 16 points. He should have the starting job until further notice. I would also like to see more of Simpson at the 5 and Quincy Williams at the 4 to help with rebounding. I'm impressed with the way Williams sees the floor when he is posting up. He is much more of an offensive threat than Ron Harris.
- 2) Calvin Watson led all scorers with 20 points. He was hitting from downtown, and as was mentioned earlier, he added some nice off the dribble moves as well. I was also impressed with his on the ball defense, in the past he has not been entirely focused on defense, but he is improving there. I think he realizes that when he does that, he does not get pulled to get a defender (Thomas) in there.

The homestand ends up 0-2 and this team needs to work on all areas. Shooting, defense, and rebounding or this season could start slipping away. I think Johnny Jones is a good coach, and I do have faith in his ability, but this team is regressing before our eyes and with the Sun Belt tournament at home, the timing for a collapse would be horrible. There was a decent crowd on hand tonight, but that still needs to be doubled, and that won't happen until the program turns the corner like they showed the ability to do earlier in the season. I hate to put pressure on Coach Jones, but the collapse watch is on, and if things do not get worked out, the seat may get a little hot. This team is better than this, and the fire is just not in their eyes. Arkansas Little-Rock wanted it, and Arkansas State wanted it. This team has two leaders in Hopkins and Hines and both of those are quiet strong leader types. They may need to speak out more and get the guys around them focused and wanting the loose balls, wanting the defensive stop, wanting the win. I hate it, but they did not want it as bad as the last two opponents, and things must be changed.

Mean Eddie Walker

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