

Title: Kentucky now 7-3 in championship games

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this year. It was filled with overtime games, buzzer beaters and surprises from the likes of Valparaiso and Rhode Island, Stanford and Utah.

But the Utes, who won the championship in 1944, couldn't pull off one more upset in the title game.

Utah, the second-best defensive team in the country this season, had held its five tournament opponents to 39 percent shooting and an average of 62.5 points.

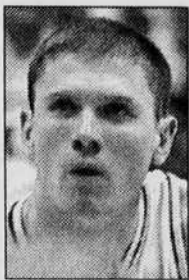
Kentucky, which finished 29 for 57 from the field (51 percent), chipped away at the lead by scoring on seven of 10 possessions. The Wildcats went on a 9-0 run, and took the lead for the first time since early in the first half at 60-58, with 7:16 to play on a breakaway dunk by Jeff Sheppard after he stole the ball from Hanno Mottola.

Utah got the lead back at 62-60

on a driving layup by Andre Miller with 6:16 left and even extended it by two more points when Miller fed Alex Jensen for a layup 23 seconds later.

But a three-pointer by Mills, Kentucky's fifth of the game — all in the second half — and a driving jumper by Sheppard with 4:53 left gave the Wildcats the lead for good.

Sheppard's jumper was Kentucky's last field goal until a dunk by Wayne Turner with 12 seconds to play. The Wildcats went 11 for 12 from the foul line down the stretch, and Utah's solid offensive game went to pieces as it scored on just two of its last 10 possessions.



SHEPPARD

Scott Padgett led the Wildcats with 17 points, while Sheppard, the Final Four's most outstanding player, had 16.

Miller led the Utes with 16 points, while Mottola and Michael Doleac each had 15 and Jensen 14.

As the trophy was presented by Selection Committee Chairman C.M. Newton, who also happens to be the athletic director at Kentucky and the man who picked Smith to succeed Pitino, the crowd chanted "Tubby, Tubby."

It seemed implausible that any coach could be more popular in Kentucky than Pitino had been in leading the program back from one of its lowest points following probation. But Smith may have topped him in the one year since Pitino left to coach the Boston Celtics.

Kentucky is now 7-3 in NCAA championship games, and its record over Utah in the last three seasons is 3-0 with a regional

semifinal win two years ago and a regional final victory last season.

Utah (30-4) had beaten defending national champion Arizona in the West Regional final in a 25-point thriller. The Utes had to hang on to beat North Carolina in the Final Four, but they couldn't do it against Kentucky as the Wildcats wore down the nation's top rebounding team.

Utah finished with a 39-24 advantage on the boards, but in the later possessions Kentucky didn't miss many shots.

In the first half, Utah went on a 10-0 run that Jensen started and ended with layups off long passes to take a 34-23 lead. Kentucky did get within 37-31, but the Utes scored the final four points of the half for the 10-point lead.

The largest halftime deficit overcome in a title game had been eight points when Loyola (Ill.) beat Cincinnati 60-58 in overtime in 1963 after trailing 29-21 at the half.

Title game notes

■ Monday's victory gave Kentucky its second championship in the past three years and seventh in the history of the program.

■ The Wildcats became the first team to come back from a halftime deficit of more than eight points to win in the championship game.

■ The win boosted Kentucky's record to 10-2 in games when it trailed at halftime.

■ Utah was outscored 47-28 in the second half.

■ For the game, Kentucky shot 50.9 percent from the field (29 for 57). It was the first time this season an opponent shot 50 percent or better against the Utes.

■ Kentucky's Jamaal Magloire had three blocked shots in the championship game, tying a record shared by seven others, most recently teammate Nazr Mohammed, who had three against Arizona last season.

■ Utah head coach Rick Majerus sought out Kentucky senior Jeff Sheppard after the game to give him his personal congratulations, walking across the floor to shake Sheppard's hand. "He played a great game, and I wanted to tell him that," Majerus said.

■ Majerus wore the same white sweater he displayed on the sidelines during the championship game in every game of the season.

■ The loss prolonged Utah's streak of seasons without a title to 54 years. The Utes last championship was a 42-40 overtime victory over Dartmouth in 1944.

■ For what it's worth, Kentucky has now won a championship in 1948, 1958, 1978 and 1998.

■ Majerus, the rotund Utah coach, has been following half of his doctor's orders.

"He told me to get plenty of rest and lose some weight," Majerus said. "Guess which one I'm not doing?"

He also grades restaurants where he dines and gave an Italian restaurant and a German delicatessen in San Antonio his highest award.

■ Frank Fallon, the public address announcer for 21 straight Final Fours, ended his career Monday night. Fallon said his favorite championship game was Villanova's 66-64 upset of Georgetown in 1985.

■ Kentucky's win gave the state of Kentucky its ninth title, with Louisville's two adding to the Wildcats' seven. The state trails only California's 15 titles, with wins from Stanford, San Francisco, California and UCLA.

■ North Carolina's upset loss to Utah on Saturday sent ticket prices tumbling for the championship game. Ticket brokers were getting up to \$1,000 for an upper deck seat and \$2,000 for a lower deck seat, but prices crashed when North Carolina fans flooded the market with their tickets. Regular upper deck tickets were \$80 and lower deck tickets were \$100. Many North Carolina fans were roaming the hotel lobbies trying to sell their tickets for face value, and one Tar Heels fan bailed out for \$50 for his \$80 ticket.

— The Associated Press contributed to these notes

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