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'Cats have trouble with Washington

By Bob Baum
 The Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Much to the shock of coach Lute Olson, No. 2 Arizona came out for Thursday night's game against Washington State wearing white headbands.

After his team struggled to an 80-75 victory, Olson promised the headbands would never be seen again.

"The headbands compressed the brains," Olson said. "The first time I saw them was when they came out to warm up. You won't see the headbands again."

Loren Woods scored a career-high 25 points and blocked a school-record 10 shots as Arizona barely survived, but Olson was angry about his team's performance in its first game since beating then-No. 1 Stanford on the road last Saturday.

"We were outsized and they had better athletes, but it comes down to heart," Cougars forward Chris Crosby said. "It was gut-check time, and we fought like crazy. We laid it all on the line."

Olson would not argue Crosby's conclusion about which team played harder.

Washington State, Olson said, "played extremely well. We played extremely stupidly. That's what I'm concerned with. We played like we had no brains."

The Wildcats (14-2, 3-0 Pac-10) beat the Cougars for the 29th consecutive time, the longest current streak of any opponents in the same conference in major college basketball. But it was anything but easy for an Arizona team favored by 24 points.

Washington State (5-7, 0-3) led 35-34 at halftime, fell behind by 13 in the second half, then cut Arizona's lead to three on four occasions over the final 2:06.

Arizona didn't have a field goal over the last 8:53, but went 14-for-16 at the line the rest of the way. For the game, the Wildcats made 31 of 37 free throws, while WSU was 9-for-13.

Michael Wright added 20 points for Arizona but grabbed only three rebounds, none in the first half, as the smaller Cougars outrebounded the Wildcats 36-25. Jason Gardner scored 12 points and Gilbert Arenas added 11 for Arizona.

Mike Bush scored 18 points for Washington State and Eddie Miller added 16 points and 14 rebounds. Crosby and Jan-Michael Thomas had 14 points each.

Thomas, who had a McKale Center-record eight 3-pointers in his last trip to Tucson, was 4-for-6 from long range this time.

"Our team can definitely use this game as a stepping stone," first-year Washington State coach Paul Graham said. "We came into a hostile environment and played hard. I can't say enough about our effort. That's what I want to see every night."

Olson was most upset with his three freshmen starters — Gardner, Arenas and Luke Walton — for their penchant to throw up long-range shots or take wild drives to the basket when the Wildcats had an obvious offensive advantage inside.

"I say more than anything else it's time to grow up," Olson said. "I'm more than disappointed. It's so frustrating that we can go out and play like we did against Stanford and then think all we have to do is just show up."

The 7-foot-1 Woods shattered the old Arizona blocked shot record of seven. The record was set by Anthony Cook against UTEP in the first round of the 1987 NCAA tournament and already tied three times by Woods this season.

"I am a shot-blocker," said Woods, whose presence altered uncounted other Washington State shots. "They kept trying to shoot layups. You have to think they would get the hint after a while."

The Wildcats finally had what seemed to be a comfortable lead when Rick Anderson capped a 15-5 spurt with a 3-pointer that made it 66-53 with 8:53 to go.

But a 14-4 run by Washington State cut the lead to 72-69 on Bush's drive with 2:06 to play.

Wright, Gardner and Justin Wessel each made two free throws, but each time Washington State answered with field goals — two by Miller, then one by Bush that cut it to 78-75 with 2.9 seconds left.

Anderson finally clinched it with two free throws with two seconds to play.

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