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NO MADNESS FOR THE OSPREYS

THE ROAD CURVES TO THE NIT

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The Florida Gulf Coast Eagles delivered a second gut-punch to the Ospreys by beating Stetson 78-80 in the Atlantic Sun Championship March 6, guaranteeing the Eagles a bid in the NCAA March tournament and sending the Ospreys to the National Invitation Tournament (NIT).

A Stetson victory was the Osprey's last hope to dance in March.

The Hatters are banned from postseason play after failing to meet the NCAA's academic progress rate, and A-Sun rules state that if a team who wins the conference tournament is ineligible, the regular-season champion will receive the automatic bid.

The Ospreys clinched the A-Sun regular season championship with a victory over Jacksonville University (JU) in the last game of the season, promising them a bid to the NIT and making them Stetson's replacement in the NCAA Tournament.

Ken Pomeroy, who uses log5 regression to estimate teams' chances in conference and national tournaments, gave the seventh-seeded Hatters a 0.7 percent chance to win the tournament. The Hatters upset No. 3 seed JU in a double-overtime thriller and then beat No. 2 seed New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) to advance to the finals.

FGCU stunned No. 1 seeded UNF with a 33-point defeat in the semifinal game March 3, leaving the Ospreys watching as helpless spectators as their destiny was decided Sunday night.

The A-Sun Championship provided drama consistent with the entire tournament.

FGCU trailed most of the game, but with under 10:50 to play they took a lead for the first time since early in the first half.

The Eagles and Hatters slugged it out in the final five minutes, and when the Eagles went on a 10-0 run the Hatters responded with back-to-back three-pointers to keep it close.

There were four lead changes in the final five minutes, and Stetson forward Derick Newton hit a clutch free throw to tie the game with 25 seconds left.

Stetson's defense forced a turnover with six seconds left to regain possession for the final shot, but Hatter's guard Divine Myles had the ball stolen by Eagle Zach Johnson, sending the game to overtime tied at 69.

Zach Johnson made a beautiful layup with 16 seconds left to give the Eagles a three-point lead, but Myles answered for

Stetson, scoring a basket to cut the lead to one point with 10 seconds to go.

FGCU made a free throw to take a two-point lead with 9.2 seconds left.

On the final play of the game, Zach Johnson delivered a powerful, rim-protecting block to end the game and send the Eagles dancing into the NCAA tournament.

Spinnaker reached out to UNF Athletics who declined to comment.

"Coach will not be talking tonight," Director of Athletic Communications Brian Morgan said.

The next dates on the Osprey's calendar are March 13-15, when the NIT selection committee will decide who UNF will face in the tournament's opening round.



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