

The 'Hoos Roll Past the Yellow Jackets and Clinch a Share of The ACC Title

With help from off the bench, Virginia comfortably proceeds into the home stretch of the regular season.

Katie Taylor | February 21, 2018



Virginia's leading scorer, Ty Jerome (11) against Georgia Tech at the ACC matchup on Wednesday, February 21, 2018 at John Paul Jones Arena in Charlottesville, VA. (Ryan M. Kelly, Getty)

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA— After a break following their win on the road at Miami last Tuesday, the re-energized Cavaliers (25-2, 14-1 ACC) fired up the home crowd inside of John Paul Jones Arena Wednesday night. Starting out slightly sluggish, the 'Hoos pushed through their breakdowns and captured a 65-54 victory over Georgia Tech (11-17, 4-11).

On February 10, 2018, UVA fans witnessed a stinging upset over their commonwealth rival, Virginia Tech. Tonight, fans anticipated a blow-out; however, the Yellow Jackets challenged the Wahoos and forced Virginia to make their shots count.

Virginia head coach Tony Bennett admitted that his No.1 ranked team was “not great tonight.” Bennett said, “credit to Georgia Tech and how physical they were and how they came out. We had to earn it and outlast them.”

The resilient 'Hoos ultimately fought off the offensive attacks from the Yellow Jackets and refreshed their home winning streak, giving Virginias' 'Hoo Crew' much to cheer for.

Sophomore guard Ty Jerome buried shot clock three pointers which helped Virginia secure its victory. Totalling 18 points, Jerome was crucial in determining the triumphant outcome for the 'Hoos.

"When the shot presents itself, I am going to shoot and when help comes, I will kick," Jerome said.

Virginia's sixth man and the ACC Co-Rookie of the Week, redshirt freshman guard De'Andre Hunter, knocked down key jumpers throughout the first half, helping the 'Hoos advance a 31 to 30 lead at the break.

With their team only up by 1 point, Wahoo fans were nervous at the start of the second half. The Yellow Jackets remained even with the Cavaliers in field goal percentage (46.2) and dominated the home team in free throw percentage (75 - 57.1).

Hunter said after the game, "Georgia Tech is a good team, they came out, they played hard, they hit shots."

The Yellow Jackets spread Virginia's Pack Line defense out, which forced the top-ranked team to stumble in their offensive chemistry.

Not until late into the second half did the Cavaliers take control of the game. Coming off Virginia's bench, redshirt sophomore forward Mamadi Diakite delivered crucial performances. As teammate senior forward Isaiah Wilkins said, Diakite's offensive plays in the later part of the game provided a "big lift" for UVA.

The crowd agreed. Roars from all corners of the arena echoed through the standing ovations Diakite received at the Cavaliers' home venue.

Regarding Diakite, Georgia Tech head coach Josh Pastner said, "I thought he was the most active of their bigs. He was their best defensively in this game and I thought offensively he hurt us in the post."

When the two ACC teams met earlier this season, the Cavaliers handled the Yellow Jackets in a 64-48 win. Tonight, the Yellow Jackets anticipated another difficult matchup. Preparing for the game this week, Georgia Tech head coach Josh Pastner said the team would have to be "near perfect" to beat the No.1 team on the road.

Georgia Tech owed much of its' tenacity to senior center Ben Lammers, who totaled 22 points and became the third 1,000-point scorer on the Ramblin' Wreck 2017-2018 roster.

Pastner said, "I thought this was the most physical he had been since the UCLA game," in which the Yellow Jackets lost by three to the Bruins in November. He noted that Lammers "had a hit-first mentality like he had a physicality like him."

However, 6-9 Diakite prevailed in the guarding Lammers in the late second half. Wahoo sophomore guard Kyle Guy said, “[Diakite] was huge and he played really well offensively. Defensively, he helped keep [Ben Lammers] in check.”

The Yellow Jackets have struggled with physical setbacks this season. “We have been hit with an injury bug, we have been snake bitten,” said Pastner, referring to their two valuable freshman guards Jose Alvarado and Curtis Haywood III.

Against the nation’s top-ranked defense, Georgia Tech shot 47.9 percent. The ‘Hoos held the Yellow Jackets’ offensive threat, sophomore guard Josh Okogie, to 7 points.

The Wahoos’ victory, their tenth out of the last twelve meetings with Georgia Tech, advances them as the No.1 seed for the ACC tournament.

Bennett reminded his players to remain humble and focus on preparation. “The rankings, the seeding, what social media says -- that is insignificant. Concentrate on the Process. We will see how far we can take this,” Bennett said.

ON THE HORIZON

Three regular-season games remain for both the Yellow Jackets and the Cavaliers. A tough schedule ahead of them, the Yellow Jackets face No. 15 Clemson (20-6,9-5) Saturday afternoon. The Wahoos return to action against the Pittsburgh Panthers (8-20, 0-15) Saturday afternoon as well.