

'Birds narrow out BU to conclude regular season

Written by Ashley Schrader, Daily Vidette Sports Editor
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With the stress of the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament seed in the back of their minds, and the I-74 rivalry game on the line in the final regular-season battle, it was no secret the ISU men's basketball team had something to fight for at the Carver Arena Saturday afternoon.

Equally as stressful, the fight between the Redbirds and Braves came down to the final seconds. ISU, however, was able to knock out BU, 54-53, and secure a fourth-place spot in the MVC among a five-way tie for third place in the Valley to postpone its first tournament game to Friday.

"We treated it like a championship game," ISU head coach Tim Jankovich said on WJBC radio after the game. "There are so many things at stake right here, positioning and all that, plus the Bradley rivalry.

"What a tremendous effort, we did just enough to win. We needed this so badly, this was big."

With 3.2 seconds remaining in the second half, ISU (18-12, 9-9) gave Bradley (7-24, 2-16) a chance to tie the game when Bryant Allen accidentally fouled Walt Lemon, with the 'Birds only up by two, 54-52.

Lemon completed the first but missed the second attempt. Jon Ekey jumped up to grab the rebound and was immediately fouled with 2.2 seconds left.

Ekey missed the first, then Jankovich called a play-drawing timeout.

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“All we wanted was him to miss, coral the ball in the back, and, if anything, they would get a 70-foot guarded shot, and that’s exactly what we got,” Jankovich said.

Lemon reciprocated with a rebound, but was unable to get the shot off before the game horn blared. However, officials announced the game “was not over,” as the game clock started too early.

The officials revisited game clock tape, allowing for a four-minute break. They determined .4 seconds remained and BU was to inbound the ball for a second chance at a court-length basket.

Luckily for the 'Birds, the second game horn ended with the same result as the first.



“That was very frustrating for me, because all we did to miss the free throw could have gone out the window ... we really could have lost the game right there, we had it won,” Jankovich said. “The worst thing that could have happened was replay it like the '72 Olympics, so I’m still not calmed down from that one. I’m not accusing anyone, but that would have been so unbelievable had we lost that game given that situation.”

ISU opened the game ice cold, going scoreless for the first three minutes, while BU chipped in five.

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"I knew this was going to be the polar opposite game than what we had [at Redbird Arena] three weeks ago," Jankovich said. "Sure enough we come out offensively just struggling mightily, we take a few bad shots, miss all our good shots, and we dig ourselves in a hole."

The one-step-behind offensive play for ISU continued into the half until Tyler Brown hit three-straight three pointers to give the 'Birds their first lead of the half, 25-23, with one minute remaining. BU and ISU closed the half tied, 25-25.

"We just really got off to a slow start," Carmichael said. "Tyler [Brown] had those three three-pointers toward the end of the first half, which were kind of momentum builders for us."

The rival teams exchanged baskets throughout the second half, but strong ISU defense and a 9-2 with five minutes on the clock helped pace the Redbirds ahead of BU and secure the lead until the conclusion.

"We really just got down in the second half on defense and grinded it out," Carmichael said. "It was a hard fought game by our team for sure. Our team really came ready to play and we didn't overlook them at all."

Carmichael finished with 16 points and 14 rebounds, his 11th double-double of the season. Ekey wrapped up the game with 10 points and five boards.