

Arizona Daily Star SPORTS

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NO. 1 ARIZONA 69, SOUTHERN 43

Gordon finds reason to smile after UA rout

By Bruce Pascoe
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Taking finals and playing a weaker opponent than the Arizona Wildcats beat at Michigan last Saturday still wasn't enough to turn Aaron Gordon's motor off again Thursday.

UA's well-regarded freshman forward flashed the usual intensity while collecting a career-high 21 points in Arizona's 69-43 win over Southern University on Thursday at McKale Center.

But Gordon has also found that sometimes, just for a moment, it's best to put things in idle and smile a bit.

That moment came in the second half of when Gordon went to the free throw line, and McKale Center came to a noticeable hush. Gordon entered the game shooting just 44.7 percent from the line, a stat that nearly everyone seemed aware of.

His first shot bounced off the rim and in the basket, prompting wide cheers. The second one swished, and the crowd went wild.

Gordon couldn't help but notice.

"I think it's funny. It's hilarious," Gordon said. "It's pretty much a realization that I'm not making any free throws. It made me laugh. We have great fans, and I know they're supportive of me. It helped me shoot a little bit better."

Gordon could laugh because, for one thing, he said when he smiles "everything else is good."

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NEW UA FAN PAGE

The Star's new Arizona Wildcats page caters to the most die-hard UA fans.

Visit the Star's new forums, where fans can scrutinize and debate the day's Wildcats news. View UA photo galleries and watch video highlights of the Wildcats and other college teams. Or build your own UA meme and share it with your friends online.

Visit www.azstarnet.com/wildcats to check it out.



Arizona forward Aaron Gordon throws down a dunk over Southern's Bryce Clark (12) and Trelun Banks during the first half of the nonconference game at McKale Center. MIKE CHRISTY / ARIZONA DAILY STAR



Greg Hansen

Wildcats playing stifling defense

Lute Olson's No. 1-ranked basketball teams were visual. Sean Miller's No. 1-ranked Arizona Wildcats are invasive.

This is no knockoff No. 1. This is an entirely new way of basketball at Arizona.

Do you realize the Wildcats are limiting opponents to 58.7 points per game? That's the fewest points UA opponents have averaged since 1951.

And that's not all. UA opponents are shooting .372 from the field. That's the lowest percentage since 1957.

You'll have to check the math here, but isn't that more than 50 years?

No wonder Miller had the word ATTACK stitched to the back of his player's warm-up jerseys.

Here's another way to look at it: At the end of business Thursday, after Arizona smothered Southern 69-43, the Wildcats had established a new way of winning at precisely the time the Pac-12 fronted itself as the NCAA's leading shooting/scoring league.

Incredibly, through Wednesday, the nation's four leading shooting teams were all from the Pac-12.

1. UCLA .543.
2. Oregon State .537.
3. Utah .535.
4. Oregon .526.

Arizona hasn't been a follow-the-leader type of basketball program, and nothing has changed. In its climb to No. 1, the Wildcats have exhibited that there's more than one way to win at the highest levels.

For the first time ever, the Pac-12 has six teams averaging more than 80 points a game. The old walk-it-up league has become a run-and-shoot league.

See HANSEN, B4

GAONA IN THE GAME

Local stars offered plenty to celebrate during a packed '13

By Daniel Gaona
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Since Jan. 1, Southern Arizona high schools have combined for 16 team state championships.

It was the final one that put the exclamation point on 2013.

Salpointe Catholic's football team finished off its undefeated season with a win in the Division II state championship game at Arizona Stadium. Last month's victory cemented the Lancers' first state title in football.

Salpointe was clearly Tucson's best this season — although there were plenty of others players, coaches and teams to celebrate.

Here are 13 we'll remember:



Daniel Gaona

1. Cameron Denson. Just because football season is over doesn't mean Denson is in hibernation. The Salpointe football star and Arizona Wildcats commit led the Lancers in their 14-0 season and now is trying to help the basketball team reach the state championship game for the second

COMING SUNDAY: HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL ALL-STARS

More than 200 players from more than 30 local schools will be honored on the Star's annual list. Players were selected by the high school sports staff in consultation with area coaches.

straight year.

2. Alex Verdugo. In possibly the best individual performance of 2013, Verdugo struck out a career-high 18 batters in a state tournament elimination game against Nogales. Since then, the Sahuaro senior has verbally committed to Arizona State, played in the Under Armour All-America Game at Wrigley Field and only improved his draft stock to make it

look like he's heading straight for professional baseball.

3. Alyssa Thompson. The Salpointe senior, now at Wake Forest, stole the show in her final high school track meet last spring, going out a rare quadruple champion. The highlight came when she came close to breaking the state record in the 300-meter hurdles, which former Canyon del Oro star **Jaide Stepter** set the year before.

4. Sunnyside wrestling. Second-year coach Anthony Leon got the Blue Devils back on top last February, leading them to their 15th state title in the last 16 years. With individual state champions **Gabe Gonzales**, **Juquin Olivas** and **William Olivas** back, chances are Sunnyside will repeat as Division I champs in a couple months.

5. Alex Robles. As a senior baseball player at Tucson High last spring, Robles was the ace and cleanup hitter for the Badgers and got them within one win of a trip to the Division I state championship game. He was named our

See GAONA, B2

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