ARIZONA WILDCATS



ARIZONA DAILY STAR | FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2020 | PAGE BC1

Editor: Ryan Finley | 520-573-4312 | sportsed@tucson.com

NO. 23 ARIZONA 85, USC 80

WHEW! WILDCATS WIN



PHOTOS BY KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Zeke Nnaji lets go with a yell after slamming home a bucket in the second half. The Wildcats led by 20 points at one time but had to hang on to win by five to improve to 6-3 in Pac-12 play.

UA survives after USC erases huge lead

By Bruce Pascoe

Nearly two weeks after their 22-point lead evaporated in a loss at ASU, the Arizona Wildcats nearly gave off the same sort of feeling Thursday.

In their 85-80 win over USC at McKale Center, the No. 23-ranked Wildcats took two leads of 20 points in the second half but watched their advantage slip down to just three in the final minute.

USC's Daniel Utomi hit a 3-pointer to cut the Wildcats' lead to just 81-77 with 29.7 seconds left and, after Dylan Smith and Josh Green each missed one of their two free throws, Jonah Mathews hit a 3 to make it 83-80 with five seconds

Finally, the Wildcats were able to seal the win when Nico Mannion hit a pair of free throws with 3.7 seconds left.

It wasn't a complete meltdown like the ASU game was, but it wasn't anything like last weekend, either, when the Wildcats collected the Pac-12's first road sweep of the season by winning at Washington and Washington State.

"I don't know if I've felt better about this year's team on that trip, but tonight we obviously revert-"We had a hard time practicing leading up to the game."

Miller said the Wildcats "didn't and by the fact that USC shot an a big advantage in the takeaway



Arizona guard Josh Green finishes off a turnover in style in the Wildcats' win Thursday. The freshman finished with 18 points

play well, we didn't play smart even 50% for the game. and I really feel like we struggled throughout the game."

That was evidenced by the fact ed," UA coach Sean Miller said. that UA hit just 5 of 22 3-pointers, taking some shots too quickly and unwisely for Miller's standards,

But the Wildcats didn't revert all the way back to that harrowing 66-65 loss at ASU, thanks in part to Josh Green's slump-busting 18 points, Zeke Nnaji's double-double of 18 points and 11 rebounds,

game and tons of free throws.

Arizona basically won the game at the line despite a poor percentage effort there. The Wildcats took 40 trips to the line and hit 28 of them, but USC took just 24 and hit

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UP NEXT

- Who: UCLA (12-11, 5-5)
- at No. 23 Arizona (16-6, 6-3)
- When: 8 p.m. Saturday
- Radio: 1290-AM, 107.5-FM

Cats cause Miller plenty of stress in win

SC wins so infrequently at McKale Center - twice in the last 35 years — that it's difficult to imagine anything less likely than a Trojan victory over Arizona.

But times change. As Arizona beat USC 85-80 in a mostly suspense-free game Thursday at McKale, two against-the-odds moments

One, the school attempted to honor Sean Miller for his 400th career victory before he could escape to the locker room.

Miller isn't a let's-celebrate-in-February guy - he's not a hey-look-atme-guy at any time – so



Greg Hansen

he grabbed the game ball from UA president Bobby Robbins and was gone, the most impressive fast break of the evening.

Miller looked at Thursday's game much differently than the average guy who was pumped by the slump-breaking performance of UA freshman Josh Green. But other than a positive reaction to Green's

18-point game, Miller's tone was that of a coach who had just lost his 400th career game. He referred to his team as

sloppy, fat and happy." Seriously. "We didn't play well, we

didn't play smart," he said. "I really felt like we struggled throughout the game." In March, you take any

victory over a team as good as USC and move on with a sense of accomplishment. But in early February, at home, you use it as a teaching moment, as Miller so often does.

"It's like the jockey coming down the stretch," said Miller. "You've got to

pick and choose, but you can only hit it so hard. We were very fortunate to win tonight."

This is straight out of Coaching 101. Miller is taking no chances on putting a sloppy, fat and happy team on the court Saturday night against UCLA.

He prefers — and expects Secretariat at McKale.

The second againstthe-odds item Thursday was that Arizona used the massive McKale Center jumbotron to advertise a ticket package for its five remaining home games. What is this, ASU's Desert

See HANSEN, BC2



KELLY PRESNELL / DAILY STAR

Arizona's Ira Lee gets a couple fingers on a shot by Elijah Weaver in the first half. **UA** moved within a halfgame of first-place Oregon and Colorado in the Pac-12 with the win. UA (16-6) hosts **UCLA** on Saturday night.

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SEEN AND HEARD AT MCKALE CENTER

Nnaji makes cut for Malone Award

Ten players were named to the Karl Malone Award watch list, an accolade given to the top power forward in college basketball, and Arizona forward Zeke Nnaji was included. Here are the other finalists: Tyler Bey (Colorado), Yoeli Childs (BYU), Obi Toppin (Dayton), Killian Tillie (Gonzaga), Jalen Smith (Maryland), Xavier Tilman (Michigan State), Reggie Perry (Mississippi State), John Mooney (Notre Dame), Hasahn French (Saint Louis).

The only Wildcat to win the Karl Malone Award is Deandre Ayton from his Ione season in 2018.

Going Green

Josh Green soared in the first half for the Wildcats, which is a welcome sight for Arizona fans. Green's 12 first-half points came on a variety of ways: a baseline dunk, transition dunk and even a couple 3-pointers. It marks just the second time in the last seven games that the freshman forward has scored double figures.

Two Ex-Cats take talents to South Beach

The NBA trade deadline ended on Thursday and the Memphis Grizzlies traded former Arizona Wildcats forwards Andre Iguodala and Solomon Hill to the Miami Heat.

The Grizzlies also traded Jae Crowder to Miami, which was revealed Thursday morning by ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski. Miami packaged forward Justise Winslow, Dion Waiters and James Johnson to Memphis as part of the

Following the trade, Iguodala signed a twovear. \$30 million extension with a team-option for the 2021-22 season, which gives Miami salary cap flexibility and allows the Heat to target a player for a max deal, but if Miami strikes out in free agency, Iguodala will be retained for a final season that's worth \$15 million.

Iguodala, who was in his final season of a three-year, \$48 million contract, has sat out the entire season with the Grizzlies thus far since he was traded to Memphis from Golden State following a six-year run with the Warriors that included three NBA championships and NBA Finals MVP honors.

Miami becomes the fifth NBA team Iguodala has played for since being drafted by the Philadelphia 76ers in 2004. Iguodala also played for the Denver Nuggets (2012-13) and the Warriors (2013-2019) before his pit stop in Memphis.

Hill on the other hand is in the final year of a four-year, \$48 million contract, which will expire in the summer. Hill has played seven seasons in the NBA since he was drafted in 2013 by the Pacers. After three seasons in Indiana, Hill also played three seasons for the New Orleans Pelicans before he was traded to Memphis during the NBA Draft. This season, Hill is averaging 5.7 points, 3 rebounds and 2 assists in 22.1 minutes per game.

The Heat is in fourth place in the Eastern Conference standings with a 34-16 record. Iguodala and Hill join a Heat team that features star wing Jimmy Butler, All-Star center Bam Adebayo, forward Derrick Jones Jr., guard Goran Dragic, Kendrick Nunn and rookie Tyler Herro, among others.

The Heat has five games before NBA All-Star weekend and return from the midseason break on Feb. 20 against the Hawks in Atlanta.

The big number

Sean Miller earned his 400th career win with Thursday's 85-80 victory, tying him with Eddie Sutton for the 21st-fastest head coach in NCAA basketball history to reach that milestone. He needs 20 more wins to reach 300 wins at Arizona.

Miller's 300th career win came in the 2015-16 season when the Wildcats defeated Oregon State 80-63 on Jan. 30.

Throwback Thursday

Thursday night marked the 60-year anniversary of former Arizona standout Ernie McCray scoring a program-best 46 points against Cal State-Los Angeles, which was played at Bear Down Gym. McCray shot 16 of 26 from the field and knocked 14 of 16 free throws en route to a 104-84 victory. The 3-point line hadn't been added to the collegiate level for 26 years.

McCray still holds the UA record for most points scored in a game.

The closest Wildcats to break his record are Damon Stoudamire (45) versus Stanford in 1995, Joe Skaisgir (44) versus Hardin-Simmons in 1962, Coniel Norman (44) versus BYU in 1974, Al Fleming (41) versus Detroit in 1976 and Khalid Reeves (40) versus Michigan in

'Dream Team' member in the house

Former Golden State Warrior and member of Team USA's 1992 "Dream Team," Chris Mullin, was in attendance for Arizona-USC as a color analyst for Westwood One's radio broadcast of the game. The Hall of Famer has worked as a radio analyst since stepping down as head coach of his alma mater St. John's in 2019.

A six-minute benching

Two USC starters — Jonah Mathews and Nick Rakocevic — did not start the game for violating team rules, per a team official. Albeit, their punishment was rather quick as both players were inserted into the game after the first timeout of the first half.

A little, but good number

9 Turnovers for Arizona in 60 minutes over the last two games. The Wildcats posted six turnovers against Washington State on Saturday and three in the first half Thursday night.

- Justin Spears and Alec White



PHOTOS BY KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

USC's Onyeka Okongwu, left, and Nick Rakocevic, right, converge and foul Arizona guard Josh Green in the second half at McKale Center.

WILDCATS

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18, giving UA 10 extra points off

free throws. Arizona's free throws helped it hang on despite failing to make a single field goal over the final 8:20, and making just one of

their last nine field goals overall.

Nico Mannion was a microcosm of this phenomenon, taking a season-high 18 trips to the line but making just 12 free throws - while missing 2 of 6 over the final two mintues, when the Trojans kept cutting into the

Wildcats' lead. "I mean it was a physical game so I think the fouls they called just happened because it was so physical," Mannion said. "I think we've just got to work on it more as a team. I know I definitely have to work on it more myself. They all felt good, but some just didn't fall."

Mannion wound up leading Arizona in scoring with 20 points along with seven assists.

While Green wound up just 2 for 6 from 3, his overall scoring broke him out of a recent shooting slump. Green had shot just 23% over his past three games and hit only 1 of his last eight 3-pointers entering Thursday, but hit 2 of 3 3s in the first half against the Trojans.

In the second half, Green missed all three 3s he took but often did what he does best taking a turnover or a pass and racing to the bucket for a slam or layup. He finished hitting 6 of 11 shots.

Miller said he was happy to see Green play well especially right way," but it was also therapeutic for his teammates to see him play well.

"He was flying around tonight, had great energy," Mannion said. "I think he had a couple of steals and he was getting out transition and that's I think where he's best. He hit a couple 3s to start us off. He was just he was a great energizer for us."

In the first half, Green had 12 points on 5-for-6 shooting to give Arizona a 43-33 halftime lead.

With Miller having preached beforehand how important rebounding would be against the Trojans, Arizona took early leads of 12-9 and 20-14 by beating USC often on the glass. Over the first 10 minutes of the game, UA had four offensive rebounds on its first 10 missed shots, and were outrebounding USC overall 12-5 to that point.

USC coach Andy Enfield did not start Nick Rakocevic nor Jonah Mathews - two guys who played key roles down the stretch - because of unspecified team rules but both entered the game at the first media tim-

"We expect them to buy into what we're doing as a program," Enfield said.

Both players were a limited factor at first while Arizona went on an 11-3 run over the middle of the first half to take a 25-14 lead after Mannion hit a 3-pointer with 8:20 to go.

UA then went ahead 29-18 after Green hit a 3 and Stone Gettings made a free throw and later took a 10-point lead, 39-29, after Mannion hit a pair of free throws with 2:22 left.

Arizona and USC played each minutes of the second half. But The Wildcats took their second

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		FG	FT	Reb			
USC	Min	M-A	M-A	0-T	Α	PF	PTS
Mobley	15	1-4	0-0	0-1	0	4	2
Okongwu	36	7-11	9-10	6-8	2	3	23
Adlesh	13	0-1	0-0	0-1	4	2	0
E.Anderson	22	3-6	1-4	0-1	2	1	8
Utomi	28	7-10	4-4	0-3	1	3	22
Mathews	29	2-10	1-1	1-2	1	3	6
Rakocevic	23	8-11	2-2	1-8	1	5	18
Weaver	22	0-2	0-0	0-2	3	3	0
Sturdivant	13	0-1	1-2	0-2	1	2	1
Totals	200	28-56	18-23	8-28	15	26	80
Porcontagos:	EC 50	U ET :	702 2	Doint	Ca	alc: 6	S-17

ercentages: FG. 500, FT. 783. 3-Point Goals: 6-17, .353 (Utomi 4-7, E.Anderson 1-3, Mathews 1-5, Adlesh 0-1, Rakocevic 0-1). Team Rebounds: 3. Team Turnovers: 1. Blocked Shots: 3 (Okongwu 2, Rakocevic). Turnovers: 12 (Utomi 3, E.Anderson 2, Rakocevic 2, Adlesh, Mathews, Okongwu, Sturdivant, Weaver). Steals: 4 (Okongwu 2, Mathews, Utomi). Technical Fouls: None.

	FG	FT	Reb			
Min	M-A	M-A	0-T	Α	PF	PTS
25	5-7	1-2	5-8	1	3	12
35	6-13	6-8	0-11	2	3	18
36	6-11	4-6	2-4	2	3	18
35		12-18	1-3	7		20
23	1-5	3-4	1-2	1		5
19	1-5	0-0	1-3	3	2	2
17	4-5	2-2	1-1	0	1	10
8	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
				16	18	85
FG .45	6, FT .	700. 3	-Point	Goa	als: 5	5-22,
	25 35 36 35 23 19 17 8 2 200	Min M-A 25 5-7 35 6-13 36 6-11 35 3-10 23 1-5 19 1-5 17 4-5 8 0-1 2 0-0 200 26-57	Min M-A M-A 25 5-7 1-2 35 6-13 6-8 36 6-11 4-6 35 3-10 12-18 23 1-5 3-0 17 4-5 2-2 8 0-1 0-0 20 26-57 28-40	Min M-A M-A C-T	Mi-A M-A O-T A 25 5-7 1-2 5-8 1 1 1 2 5-7 1-2 36 6-11 4-6 2-4 2 3 3-10 12-18 1-3 7 4-5 2-2 1-1 19 1-5 0-0 0-1 3 3 1 4-5 2-2 1-1 3 3 6 3 3 1 4-5 2-2 1-1 3 3 2 4-5 3 3 4 4-5 3 3 4 4-5 3 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4	MiA M-A O-T A PF

rectrages: FG. 4:56, F1.7/0J. 3-7-Point Goals: 5-22, 227 (Green 2-6, Mannion 2-7, Gettings 1-1, Hazzard 0-1, Smith 0-3, Baker 0-4). Team Rebounds: 2. Team Turnovers: None. Blocked Shots: 2 (Gettings, Lee). Turnovers: 6 (Mannion 4, Gettings, Nnaji). Steals: 6 (Green 3, Mannion, Nnaji, Smith). Technical Fouls: None.

A: 13,816. Officials: Deron White, Randy McCal David Hall

UA then went on a 10-0 run to go ahead 61-41 with 13:31 left, getting two inside baskets from dunk from Green, off his steal 16-6 overall and 6-3 in the Pacfrom USC's Rakocevic.

At that point, Arizona had overall and 6-4. scored 17 points off eight USC turnovers, finishing with 18 points on 12 USC turnovers while the Wildcats only gave up the ball six times themselves.

"We're at our best in transition," Miller said. "We made some very good plays and we did score 85 so it's not all gloom and doom."

But there was a lot of that, at least from Miller, after USC scored 47 points in the secsince he has done things "the other evenly over the first four ond half on 53.3% shooting. have a group that has a lot to

20-point lead on a jumper from Stone Gettings that made it 63-43, but the Trojans gradually chipped away at the lead.

USC cut it to just 68-58 with 8:43 left after Rakocevic scored twice inside, drawing a foul while running into the basket support on his first layup. Teammate Ethan Anderson made the free throw in his place but Rakocevic returned to the game after 29 seconds and quickly scored the second basket.

After Mannion was called for a charge on a driving layup, Rakocevic scored again inside to cut it to 71-62 and he later scored again to cut it to seven points, 73-66 with 4:37 left. At that point, Rakocevic had 14 points on 7-for-9 shooting in the second half alone.

Two free throws from Onyeka Okongwu and a 12-foot jumper from Daniel Utomi pulled the Trojans within 76-70 with 2:46 to go as UA couldn't breathe easy.

Especially Miller, even if he did manage to pick up his 400th career win as a head coach. And Nnaji, a 3 from Mannion and a even if his Wildcats moved to 12 while USC dropped to 17-6

It was a win but, the way Miller described it, it hardly felt like a celebration.

"It kind of like that jockey coming down the stretch," Miller said. "You've got to pick and choose but you can only hit it so hard.

"You have to pick and choose and sometimes the best way to learn is just failing. We've done that a number of times, but we have a very young group. We

HANSEN

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Financial Arena?

The Wildcats are now marketing a four-ticket package, including four hot dogs and four drinks, for \$95. It's like something out of the 1992 Tucson Toros sales plan. As I recall, the last time Arizona needed to market tickets to McKale Center was 1984.

That was the last time the Wildcats didn't lead the Pac-12 in home attendance, but if you looked into the dark upper deck Thursday night, especially to sections 103, 121 and 126, you saw the same empty seats that have been unoccupied for most of the last two seasons.

UA only sold out the Gonzaga and ASU games this season and is averaging 13,551 at the gate. It's even below last year's sobering average of 13,744, the lowest at McKale in eight seasons.

The UA hasn't averaged below 14,000 two consecutive seasons since 1988, when capacity at McKale was about a thousand fewer than the current occupancy maximum of 14,644.

So what's 1,000 tickets a game? For starters, it's probably close to \$30,000 per game and maybe \$200,000 a season. No. 2, and probably more important, it's a blow to the UA's pride. There's a certain feeling of accomplishment – and ex-



KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Arizona's Nico Mannion (1) picks up a charge on his way to the basket over USC guard Kyle Sturdivant during the second half.

pectation - when you can put 14,644 in the seats every night, as Miller's teams routinely did from 2014-18. A lot of Thursday's angst was

predictable.

Arizona's three leading scorers - Green, Nico Mannion and Zeke Nnaji – are freshmen. That's what most expected this season, but it hasn't been that easy.

But through 22 games, Green, Mannion and Nnaji have only finished a clean 1-2-3 in scoring against Illinois, St. John's and South Dakota State. That's the most clear sign of a young team trying to find itself. Green, Mannion and Nnaji take 67 percent of Arizona's field goal attempts, so you might expect they would've been 1-2-3 in scoring (in any order) in most games.

But if you check the NBA draft evaluations on nbadraft. net, you'll see that Green is rated a 6 and Mannion a 7 on a 1-10 scale in the "NBA ready" category. Getting them to a 10 is what

occupies so much of Miller's time, and as we've learned through 101/2 seasons, he's not an easy grader. He insists on more than he's getting from everyone on his squad.

"We had a hard time practicing leading up to the game," said Miller. "We didn't have a good shoot-around (Thursday). We have to learn from this, try our best, and see if we can be better Saturday."

This season's Arizona-UCLA showdown at McKale Center cannot be compared to those of the last 40 years. Given UCLA's transition from Steve

PAC-12 STANDINGS

ieaiii	Com.	Overall
Colorado	7-3	18-5
Oregon	7-3	18-5
Arizona	6-3	16-6
USC	6-4	17-6
Stanford	5-4	16-6
Arizona State	5-4	14-8
UCLA	5-5	12-11
California	4-5	10-12
Utah	4-6	13-9
Washington St.	4-6	13-10
Oregon State	3-7	13-9
Washington	2-8	12-11

Alford to the more intense and defense-first Mick Cronin, it's going to be a while before those at McKale get a view of UCLA's best shot.

But that's a UCLA problem. As much as anything else on Thursday, it became manifest that Miller's sole intent before this season ends is for Tucsonans to see the best version of the Mannion-Green-Nnaji Wildcats of 2020.

"There's so much at stake for players individually," he said. "But what they don't understand until it's over, is that the respect in college basketball is always and has always been given to those teams and programs that win and thrive. The team success carries the individual

players." Predictions? Arizona's "fat and happy" days are gone. Miller's 401st victory will be much more satisfying.