

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
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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 left.

Finally, the Wildcats were able to seal the win when Nico Man-nion 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 reverted," UA coach Sean Miller said. "We had a hard time practicing leading up to the game."

Miller said the Wildcats "didn't



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 and I really feel like we struggled throughout the game."

That was evidenced by the fact that UA hit just 5 of 22 3-pointers, taking some shots too quickly and unwisely for Miller's standards, and by the fact that USC shot an

even 50% for the game.

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, a big advantage in the takeaway

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

See WILDCATS, BC2

UP NEXT

- Who: UCLA (12-11, 5-5) at No. 23 Arizona (16-6, 6-3)
- When: 8 p.m. Saturday
- TV: ESPN2
- Radio: 1290-AM, 107.5-FM

Cats cause Miller plenty of stress in win

USC 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 occurred.

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-at-me-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 against-the-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 half-game of first-place Oregon and Colorado in the Pac-12 with the win. UA (16-6) hosts UCLA on Saturday night.

