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Runnin' Bulldogs topple Highlanders in thriller



photo courtesy of gwusports.com

By Jared McMurry

Paul Porter Arena was packed full of Runnin' Bulldogs' fans for a men's basketball game aired on ESPNU; Gardner-Webb and Radford turned an early season Big South Conference matchup into an instant thriller.

After trailing by nine at halftime, Gardner-Webb was able to storm back and win the game 88-85 in double-overtime.

The Runnin' Bulldogs were able to jump out to their biggest first half lead of 27-21 after a Jarvis Davis three-pointer with just over six minutes left. The remainder of the half went downhill from there as Radford began forcing turnovers, which led to easy buckets.

"We just didn't handle their pressure well in the first half," Head Coach Tim Craft said. "They were able to force some key turnovers."

The Highlanders would proceed to hold the Runnin' Bulldogs scoreless for the remainder of the first half and take a 36-27 lead into the break.

It took the majority of the first 10 minutes of the second half, but slowly Craft was able to get his team within striking distance. At the under eight media timeout Jerome Hill was at the free throw line where he would eventually finish a three-point play and get the Runnin' Bulldogs within two.

Gardner-Webb would take their first second half lead on a trey and it started to look as if they would slowly pull away from the Highlanders. The Runnin' Bulldogs jumped up 64-56 before Radford once again held Gardner-Webb scoreless for nearly three minutes, tying the game and sending it to overtime.

"We did a much better job in the second half getting the ball into the paint, which led to second chance opportunities," Craft said.

During the first overtime, both teams went back and forth, before Tyrell Nelson missed three free throws in four attempts, allowing Javonte Green and Radford to gain a four-point lead. Green would score 16 of his game high 28 points in the overtime period. Unlike the end of regulation, this time it was Gardner-Webb who came storming back and Hill would send the game to overtime with a two-point basket with six seconds remaining.

The Runnin' Bulldogs were able to be a bit more dominant in the second extra period behind the tremendous play of guards, Tyler Strange and Isiah Ivey. The duo both hit key shots from the charity stripe to help seal the victory for the Runnin' Bulldogs.

Gardner-Webb was led in scoring by Hill, Strange and Nelson who all recorded double doubles. Hill scored a team high 26 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, while Nelson accounted for 22 points and 10 boards. Strange scored 16 points and distributed the ball all night long, tallying up 13 assists.

The Runnin' Bulldogs will be back in action Saturday night as they host Winthrop.