

Gators stay ahead of Seminoles

By Gerald Ensley
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GAINESVILLE — Consecutive loss No. 9 arrived — pretty much as expected — for the Florida State men's basketball team on Monday, as a flat-but-still powerful team of Florida Gators defeated the Seminoles 86-79 in the O'Connell Center.

It was a loss featuring two distinctly different halves for the Seminoles, now 7-12 and losers of 11 of their last 12 games. Following a mistake-filled first half in which FSU shot a desultory 31 percent from the floor, the Seminoles trailed by 14 points, 38-24. But pulling together in the second half, the Seminoles shot 55 percent and out-scored Florida 55-48 in the final 20 minutes.

Much of the firepower for FSU in that second half was furnished by 6-foot-11 center Al Gipson. After missing his only six shots of the first half and grabbing only one rebound, Gipson exploded for 25 points and nine rebounds in the second half.

"I'm very relieved," said Florida head coach Norm Sloan. "I know Joe (Williams) club has been struggling. That was apparent in their record, and it was apparent in the first half. They did not play a very good first half.

"But Florida State did play a very good second half, especially Gipson, who was exceptional. But we did not play as well as we're capable of playing, and after three (Southeastern Conference) games like we've had, that's to be expected.

"Thank goodness, it was Florida State, and thank goodness we were playing at home. If this had been a non-conference game on the road, I'm pretty sure we would have lost."

Florida, tied for the lead in the SEC with Mississippi State (both 7-3 in the conference), has won its last four games — including hard-fought victories over SEC foes Alabama, Mississippi State and Tennessee — and is 15-4.

FSU never led in the game, and was never closer to the Gators than five points after the first six minutes of play. But it was the first half that did the most damage to FSU.

Making only six of their first 20 shots, the Seminoles trailed only 13-8 with 14:10 remaining in the game. But hurrying to catch up with the Gators, the Seminoles began forcing shots which would not fall, giving the ball back to Florida.

At their end, the Gators seemed to get three shots to every one of FSU's, and though they shot only 48 percent for the half (and 45 percent for the game), they converted almost every trip down court. That soon had the Gators pulling away from FSU, moving to their first double-digit lead, 22-12, with 10:02 left in the half.

See FSU. 3D

Most effective, as usual for this edition of Gators, were the guards, as Andrew Moten's nine points and Vernon Maxwell's eight in the first half helped push the Gators to their largest lead of the game, 16 points (38-22), with 3:24 to play in the half.

A jumper by Jerome Fitchett, with 2:18 to play in the half, cut the Florida lead to 38-24. But that proved to be the last points of the half, as substitute-filled squads for both sides scrapped without result.

FSU came out more patient in the second half and, despite Randy Allen's fifth foul causing a serious breach for FSU, began to rally.

Three times, the Seminoles cut the Gator lead to 10 points before Gipson — who connected on 12 of

16 second-half shots — scored consecutive baskets to cut the lead to 55-49 with 10:32 to play in the game.

Gipson would go on to score five more points over the next three minutes but still FSU was out-scored 10-7 as the Gators pushed to a nine-point, 65-56, lead with 7:42 to play.

FSU made another run, drawing to 69-62, with 6:01 to play. But in an exchange while rebounding at the Florida basket, Maurice Myrick was whistled for a foul and teammate Joe Farrar was charged with a technical foul, with Darryl Gresham sinking two of the three free throw attempts. Moten then scored from deep in the corner, and Randall Leath put in an offensive rebound to complete a six-point Gator run.

That put Florida up 75-62 with

4:53 to play, and FSU was essentially history. But, of course, FSU played the the obligatory foul-every-time ploy, with the final minutes of the game turning into a foul-shooting contest. And Florida, led by Moten's six-of-six effort, did that well enough to hold off the Seminoles, though a pair of Myrick free throws with 56 seconds brought FSU to within five points.

FSU now comes how for three straight games, beginning with Tulane on Wednesday.

"The only thing I hope is that the fans will target their criticism at me, and get behind the team," said FSU head coach Joe Williams. "Our guys are playing hard. Nobody's quit. I'm paid to take the criticism."

"But what we need is a crowd to get behind the players and give us a home-court advantage."

Florida State (79)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
Myrick	2-8	4-4	6	2	1	36	10
Allen	4-11	1-2	5	0	1	17	9
Gibson	12-22	1-2	10	3	1	25	25
Farrar	6-12	3-4	3	9	4	40	15
Shaffer	5-15	0-0	6	7	4	30	10
Fitchett	2-5	2-2	7	0	1	28	6
Soelights	1-3	0-0	1	0	1	10	2
Martin	0-1	0-0	1	0	0	8	0
Mabry	1-2	0-1	0	1	0	5	2
Carler	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	1	0
Totals	34-79	11-15	45	22	13	200	79

Florida (86)

	FG	FT	Rb	Asst	S	Min	TP
Gresham	5-10	3-4	3	3	1	30	13
Leath	1-3	1-4	10	3	1	30	3
McDowell	6-11	3-4	11	2	0	34	15
Moten	6-16	13-14	7	3	1	30	25
Maxwell	6-10	5-6	5	1	1	26	17
Sheldon	4-9	0-0	1	0	1	14	8
J. Lawrenc	2-2	0-0	1	0	0	15	4
Leon	0-1	0-0	1	2	1	9	0
Montgomery	0-1	0-0	2	0	0	3	0
P. Lawrenc	0-1	0-0	0	1	0	6	0
McClary	0-0	1-2	0	0	0	3	1
Totals	30-64	26-38	46	15	6	200	86

Halftime score: Florida 38 FSU 24.
Fouled out: Myrick, Allen and Shaffer (FSU); McDowell (Florida); Technical fouls: Farrar (FSU); Total fouls: FSU — 31, Florida — 21; Attendance: 7624.