

HPU women advance to semifinals

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CHARLOTTE — Offensively, both High Point University and USC Upstate struggled for the most of their semifinal matchup in the Big South basketball tournament.

After a first half in which the teams combined for 11 of 40 shooting and almost as many turnovers (30) as points (31), the second-seeded Panthers put together a couple of consistent stretches that resulted in a double-digit lead and defeated the Spartans 50-43 at Bojangles Coliseum.

"Upstate's defense was much better this time around," HPU guard Jenson Edwards said. "They were sprinting to help and taking charges. In the second half, we were doing as lot better job of finding the open teammate. In the first half, we were turning the ball over a lot (so) one of the messages at half-time was to take care of the ball and find the open teammate."

HPU (16-13), which led 16-15 after the first two quarters, will play the winner of last night's Longwood-Campbell winner in Saturday's second women's semifinal game at 8. Upstate, the No. 7 seed, finishes the season 11-20.

While the Panthers had their issues on offense with 35% shooting and 16 turnovers, their defense held the Spartans to 23.6% shooting (13 of 55), including 1 of 16 from 3-point range, and forced 23 turnovers.

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"Survive and advance, right," HPU head coach Chelsea Banbury said. "The first half we were sloppy. We had too many unforced errors and turnovers and travels. The second half was much better and we did a good job of team defense. We were willing to help each other and made it difficult for them."

"I give Upstate credit. They played yesterday and they stayed with us for 40 minutes. Their pace didn't change, and fortunately we were able to come out on top."

All of HPU's scoring came from its starters, who each played at least 34 minutes.

Skyler Curran led the Panthers with 16 points and grabbed nine rebounds. Jenson Edwards added 10 points and Nakyah Terrell nine. Jordan Edwards had eight points, five rebounds and five assists. Anna Hager, who started in place of injured Claire Wyatt, had seven

Down 26-25 in the middle of the third quarter, the Panthers opened up a six-point lead with eight straight points on a layup from Hager and back-to-back 3s from Jenson Edwards and Terrell. Up 35-30 early in the fourth quarter, HPU scored

six straight — another 3 from Terrell and then a free throw and layup from Curran — for a 41-30 lead with 4:20 to go.

"We were stagnant in the first half," Curran said. "We had some open shots but we were having to rush them. It was important to get the ball to move and it wasn't sticking in our hands. All season, we played our best offense when everyone's touching the ball and everyone is scoring."

HPU held the Spartans to just two field goals in the fourth quarter but was unable to pull away as Upstate hit 11 of 13 free throws, with all of their last nine points coming at the line.