Is there life after Holy Cross Basketball?
Not much of it for Kentucky and Florida

By Brad Holzwart
CRUSADER SPORTS STAFF

As the Holy Cross Men’s and Women’s Basketball teams were forced to accept the termination of their season, the world of hoops continued to turn. After edging past the Crusader Men 72-68, the Wildcats of Kentucky continued their ascent through the East bracket with a 92-79 victory over seventh seeded Iowa.

The Sweet Sixteen, however, was as far as UK would advance as they were downed by number six USC, 80-76. In the Women’s tourney, playing at home in Gainsville, the heavily favored Florida Gators came up short in their second round match against Washington, 86-75.

Taking on number seven Iowa, the Cats fared much better than their opening round game versus the Cross. It was an epic battle outside as Kentucky’s Tayshaun Prince and the Hawkeyes’ Dean Oliver sought to out duel one another from the three point line. Prince, who plagued the Crusader defense with 27 points, struck again with two of his three threes in an attempt to keep pace with Prince.

Marquis Estill helped the University of Kentucky bid by contributing 22 points of his own. Estill proved to be the solution to the Hawkeyes’ Reggie Evans. Evans was the nation’s leading rebounder, entering the tournament averaging 12 boards per game. Estill shutdown Evans before triggering his offensive front.

Prince and Estill paired up to lead Kentucky on a 12-0 run to close out the first half. Before the run began, Iowa had played the Wildcats even and were knotted at 33. It was three consecutive three-pointers from Saul Smith and Prince that began the run. Estill put the nail in the coffin with a three point play immediately followed by another bucket from outside. Kentucky went into the locker room well in control with a 45-33 cushion.

The senior from Iowa took charge coming out on fire in the second half by knocking down a pair of threes and eight straight points to try and lead his team back. Despite the Iowa run, Prince’s three point clinic continued as he hit three more to propel the Wildcats into the Sweet Sixteen.

On March 22, Kentucky faced off against sixth seeded USC who just pulled off a 74-71 upset over Big East Champ, Boston College. Kentucky’s final four hopes were dashed as the Trojans routed Kentucky 80-76 in their second upset of the tournament. The game was decided in the first half as the Wildcats dug themselves into a 21 point hole caused by numerous turnovers and forced shots. The Trojans took a 43-24 lead with them at the end of the first half.

The big key for USC was containing Prince. He was rendered useless as the Trojan defense blanketed him.

“We knew there were two guys who could beat us, [Keith] Bogans, and Prince,” commented USC coach Bobbie. “We concentrated on Prince, forced him to put the ball on the floor and kept him from shooting threes.” Bobbie’s strategy worked as Prince was 0-4 from outside and tallied a mere six points.

It was Dematha grad Keith Bogans who aided the Kentucky comeback. Scoring 21 of his 23 points in the second half, Bogans brought the Wildcats to within one. He worked in tandem with Jason Parker who scored a career high 22 points.

The comeback brought UK within one with 32 seconds remaining. It was USC’s David Bluthenal who kept his composure. Bluthenal led all scorers with 27 points including five straight clutch freethrows to maintain and solidify the victory. “I knew if I was going to the line,” said Bluthenal. “I was going to make those shots.” Bogans and Prince each missed two apiece down the stretch.

After advancing to the Elite 8, USC met number one Duke where their Cinderella dreams ended with a 79-69 loss.

The Lady Gators pulled within four until their shooters went ice cold again and missed their final five shots. The fresh sensation from Washington, Lalum, had the answer to the Gators rally each time. “To have that kind of talent and poise in March from a freshman,” senior guard Megan Franz noted. “I’m proud of her.”

The Huskies advanced to the Elite Eight to take on fifth seeded Southwest Missouri State. The Lady Bears had just pulled off an enormous 81-71 upset over top seeded Duke. Their run continued as they defeated Washington 104-87 on March 26 to advance to the Final Four.

The Crusader Scoreboard