

Williams' block, presence key in Wildcats' tough win

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TULSA, Okla. -- Arizona coach Sean Miller took one last deep breath, reached into his coat pocket and seemingly tried to find an answer.

His team led Memphis by three with time running down and Joe Jackson was sprinting up the court for a potential game-tying 3-pointer. Miller was determined to not have his heart ripped from his chest again.

This time, his strategy worked -- barely. Miller instructed his team to foul, Jackson made one of two free throws, and Derrick Williams made the play of the night by swatting away the Tigers' final hopes for a 77-75 victory in the opening game of the West Regional at the BOK Center.

"It's not fool proof either way," Miller said as he discussed his strategy.

Rewind to an identical situation in 2007. Miller's Xavier squad led by three over top-seeded Ohio State and Greg Oden in the second round of the South Regional. Instead of fouling, Miller extended his defense but Ron Lewis drilled a game-tying 3-pointer with two seconds left. Ohio State went on to win 78-71 in overtime en route to losing in the championship game to Florida.

"When you take that medicine, so to speak, we're going to lose a different way next time," Miller said. "And we almost did here tonight."

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Friday against Memphis, "MoMo" Jones followed orders and hacked Jackson as he crossed midcourt with seven seconds to play. Jackson drained the first free throw to make it 77-75. His second foul shot, though, clanged high off the rim, was tipped and fell into the hands of Memphis' Wesley Witherspoon under the basket.

"I knew he didn't have time to pump-fake me, so I just tried to make a hard play on the ball," Williams explained.

The 6-foot-8 Williams contacted Witherspoon and swatted the ball away. Ironically, this time a lack of a whistle benefited the 'Cats.

"You could say I got fouled, you could say I wasn't," Witherspoon said.

The play was eerily similar to one Williams made against Washington earlier this season that helped the Wildcats win the conference's regular-season crown.

"Earlier in the game they might have called it a foul because he did fall on the ground," Williams said. "But late in the game most refs don't call that, that's why I went up so hard to try to block it and save the game."

Miller also wrestled with another strategy throughout the second half.

'Zona hangs on with blocked shot

Williams led all players with 22 points and 10 rebounds, but was held scoreless during a 10-minute stretch during the second half when Memphis coach Josh Pastner -- an Arizona alumnus -- mixed in a box-and-one, a triangle-and-two and a couple of different

zone defenses to combat the Pac-10's Player of the Year.

It was during the box-and-one that Williams floated to the perimeter and swished a long 3-pointer to give Arizona a 68-65 lead with 3:51 to play.

"There's a reason why he got my vote for national player of the year," Pastner said.

Later, Jones found a crease against the zone and rattled in another three that broke a 68-all tie with 96 seconds remaining. Arizona would go on to hit all six of its free throws in the final minute before missing two in the final second to hold off a furious comeback.

Knowing they needed three to tie, Pastner said he resisted the temptation to ask Jackson to purposely miss the second foul shot to allow for a rebound and tying put-back.

"We were going to get into our press and foul immediately or try to get a steal since Arizona didn't have a time-out," Pastner said.

Miller rolled the dice on another tactical decision and came up a winner.

Guards Kevin Parrom and Kyle Fogg were saddled with three fouls at the half. And when Parrom fouled out with just under five minutes to play, Miller inserted freshman Jordin Mayes, playing him alongside Jones for the first time this season.

Mayes, 44 percent from the line, ended up hitting a pair of critical foul shots with 53 seconds left to give Arizona a five-point cushion.

"Coming down to the end I knew I had big free throws to make," Mayes said. "Knowing that I had struggled a lot this year on free throws I just wanted to have the confidence to know I was going to make them."

Memphis felt right at home in a game that featured six ties and 14 lead changes. The Tigers had been 13-1 in games decided by five points or less. Eight previous games this season had come down to the final possession with Memphis winning seven.

The difference for Arizona was Williams.

"He has a way of making big plays and finishing the other team off" Miller added, "and he did it here again tonight."

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