

Arkansas Triumphs Over ORU in Come-From-Behind Win, Advances to NCAA Elite Eight

The “expect a miracle” team walked away with heartbreak tonight as the No. 15-seed ORU Golden Eagles lost to the No. 3-seed Arkansas Razorbacks, 72-70, after dominating for most of the game. Arkansas now heads to the Elite Eight for the first time since 1995, when the team also reached the Final Four.

The Razorbacks will face top-seeded Baylor—who beat No. 5 Villanova earlier today, 58-51—in a Monday night game.

What a run #ORUMBB! #GoldenStandard

— ORU Basketball (@ORUMBB) March 28, 2021

The team from the Tulsa, Oklahoma-based charismatic university began its Cinderella run in the 2021 March Madness by beating No. 2-seed Ohio State March 19 in a 75-72 overtime upset. Two days later, the team earned its spot in the Sweet 16, beating Southeastern Conference champion Florida in a stunning 81-78 win.

ORU’s last five games have been decided by four points or less, including all three of its March Madness games this year.

What a run by Oral Roberts:

- *finished 4th in Summit League*
- *won conference tournament to make NCAA Tourney*
- *beat 2-seed Ohio State*
- *beat 7-seed Florida*
- *came up one shot short of becoming first 15-seed to advance*

to Elite 8

– CBS Sports (@CBSSports) March 28, 2021

With a game high of 25 points, Max Abmas became “the first player since Steph Curry in 2008 to score 25 points in each of his first three NCAA Tournament games,” per a SportsCenter tweet. His 3-point shot at the buzzer bounced off the rim. Kevin Obanor had 12 points and 11 rebounds overall, while Jalen Tate led Arkansas’ scoring with 22.

Max Abmas is the first player since Steph Curry in 2008 to score 25 points in each of his first three #NCAATournament games.

Put himself on the map @ORUMBB

– SportsCenter (@SportsCenter) March 28, 2021

ORU showed its strength throughout the game, particularly during the first half, with Abmas scoring 12 points and Carlos Jurgens adding 11 on 5 of 7 from the floor. Normally mild-mannered ORU coach Paul Mills received a technical foul for expressing his displeasure with a call against Jurgens, after which Arkansas’ Moses Moody hit two free throws. Overall, ORU shot 43.3% to lead 35-28 as the half closed.

The second half proved more of a battle, with ORU widening its lead to 12 points early on, then watching the Razorbacks unravel that lead to a tie at 58 points with only 6:36 remaining.

From then on, ORU’s lead teetered, with Obanor’s 3-point shot at just 1:48 left putting ORU back in the lead 69-68. Tate’s jumper then put the Razorbacks back up 70-69 with just 1:34 to play.

With a mere 3.1 seconds on the clock, Arkansas’ Davonte Davis

made a contested jumper to give the Razorbacks the win. This was the second time the Razorbacks defeated ORU this season; a Dec. 20 meeting also ended in an Arkansas victory, 87-76.

Franklin Graham, CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse, tweeted earlier today in support of the school "believing, teaching, and standing with the Word of God. This infuriates those who deny and want to override what the Bible teaches," a reference to earlier criticism of the NCAA for allowing ORU to participate in the tournament despite its policies against homosexual behavior.

.@OralRobertsU made the Sweet 16! I applaud the school for believing, teaching, and standing with the Word of God. This infuriates those who deny and want to override what the Bible teaches.

– Franklin Graham (@Franklin_Graham) March 27, 2021

ORU fans showed their support online during and after the game, one tweeting out, "You were everything a Cinderella team is supposed to be and more":

A marvelous run, ORU. You were everything a Cinderella is supposed to be and more. Tulsa is proud of you.

– ORAL ROBERTS FAN (@GeorgeStoia) March 28, 2021

In a press conference following its win over Florida, Mills reminded the team and its fans that Jesus matters much more than any tournament game or players, also taking the opportunity to share the gospel. Tonight, ORU Basketball's Twitter account may have said it best, referencing Ecclesiastes 3:1a :

*There's a time for everything.
And this time, we made #MarchMadness history!!!*

– OralRobertsU (@OralRobertsU) March 28, 2021

The University of Houston faces the University of Syracuse in tonight's remaining tournament game. Earlier today, in addition to Baylor's 62-51 win over Villanova, No. 12 Oregon State defeated No. 8 Loyola Chicago, 65-58. The Sweet 16 continues Sunday night with Creighton facing Gonzaga, Florida State versus Michigan, UCLA against Alabama and Oregon battling the University of Southern California. The Elite Eight games will take place Monday and Tuesday night, March 29-30. {eo}

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