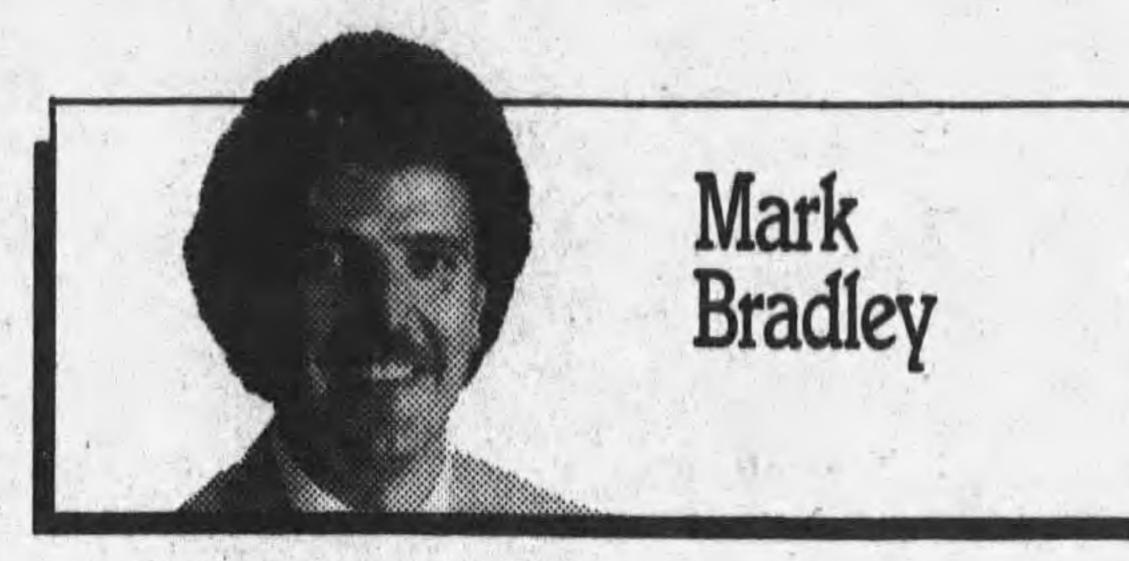
After the Hard Times, Bama's Sanderson Feels Like Proud Parent

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — He'd been off playing golf in North Alabama that day two springs ago, and when he got home his wife told him about the phone calls. One from the SEC office, one from the FBI, both saying the same thing: There was a problem with an agent. Wimp Sanderson had heard the same weeks before and had confronted Derrick McKey and Terry Coner, but both had denied taking money from anybody. This time the charges sounded more ominous, more likely to stick and to tarnish.

Surely folks would forget that Sanderson's team of of the '80s was left in tatters. teams had gone 16-2 in the SEC and had won the league tournament pulling away. Instead they'd remember that McKey and Coner had played two months after taking Norby Walters's and Lloyd Bloom's money, that the mighty Tide had lost ignominiously to Providence in the 1987 NCAA, that a season of light had been cast into legalistic murk.

The Tide had to forfeit \$250,000, its NCAA share. McKey, a junior, was ruled ineligible and entered the NBA draft. Sanderson knew he'd be losing three starters and his sixth man off a sublimely balanced team, but he'd banked on having McKey back. It was too late to sign anybody else, and then Alabama's top recruit, point guard Gary Waites, tore up his knee in an Atlanta summer league. Just like that, the finest SEC team



The Tide won but six league games last season, tying for last place. This year figured to be only marginally better. In November, media types assembled in Atlanta picked the Tide to finish seventh. That same little team won the SEC Tournament Sunday, whipping Florida 72-60. Playing without the injured Dwayne Davis, the Gators had no chance. They mightn't have even with him, so powerful was the

And when it was done, improbable victory complete, Sanderson didn't clamber up and slice down the net and wave it in his hammy fist and break out that scarifying grin/grimace of his. He'd done that in The Omni after his team of teams beat LSU in '87. But all Wimp did Sunday was walk to midcourt and shake

Florida coach Norm Sloan's hand. This wasn't a day for exuberance. This was a day for pride.

"Only those of you who have children and saw them in infancy and watched them mature and grow in the right direction can know what I'm feeling," Sanderson said. "I really don't have the vocabulary to tell you how I feel."

To win with a team of studs is gratifying, but it cannot compare with winning when nobody outside Tuscaloosa can name three of your players. For that reason, Sanderson deemed this the most satisfying of his three SEC Tournament titles and came close to calling this earnest team his favorite.

He spoke of last season. "When you have a year like that," Sanderson said, "maybe it makes you appreciate the good years more. It's funny. The '87 team could've won all 18 conference games without stretching it. Last year we had to milk everything to win six. But you'd have to say that was a great year for that team, one of the best years we'd had."

This has been better still. The Tide opened the SEC season 0-2, the second loss a 20-point thrashing at Vanderbilt. When his team arrived home late that night, an enraged Sanderson had his players dress for midnight practice — only to find that the Coleman Coliseum floor had been set up for student registration. The Tide struggled on the road, losing at Mississippi State, losing at Tennessee by 15 two weeks ago. But Bama went unbeaten at home and tied Vandy for second in the regular season, then won this tournament handily.

Alabama doesn't look pretty on offense, but it plays D and goes to the glass and hustles like crazy. For that, credit Sanderson, whose given name is Winfrey — he once explained it thusly: "I was named after my mother's brother, who blocked a punt and died shortly thereafter" — and whose sideline scowls and stomps would seem better tailored for a man in a strait-jacket than someone wearing horse-blanket plaid. Eccentricities aside, there's no denying that Sanderson has made Alabama into one of the SEC's three finest programs, alongside LSU and pre-Emery Kentucky, or that each of his teams bears his demanding stamp.

Someone asked sub Keith Askins, who'd hit four three-pointers and scored 14 points on four possessions Sunday, why he'd eschewed an open three later. "It wasn't the right time to shoot it," Askins said. "I could get that shot anytime. What we needed was to run time off the clock." Sitting six feet away, the proud parent Wimp Sanderson merely nodded his

Chatman Is MVP of SEC Tournament

By David Davidson College Editor

KNOXVILLE — Florida forward Livingston Chatman was voted most valuable player of the SEC basketball tournament here Sunday, but he found no consolation in the honor after the Gators lost the championship to Alabama 72-60.

Chatman scored 70 points in three tournament games, including 20 against Alabama Sunday.

Also voted to the all-tournament team were Alabama forward Michael Ansley, who was second to Chatman with 55 points in three games, plus reserve forward Keith Askins, Vanderbilt guard Barry Booker and Florida center Dwayne Schintzius.

Schintzius scored only 36 points in three games, including 16 against Alabama Sunday, but led all rebounders with 37 and blocked 18 shots. Ansley pulled down 22.

"Right now it doesn't feel too good," Chatman said of his award, "because we didn't win. Right now it's just a title. We didn't win, so it doesn't mean that much to me."

OLD HAND: Ansley, a senior, played Sunday in his third tournament championship game, an SEC record. He played on the Crimson Tide team that won the '87 tournament as a sophomore and in the '86 game won by Kentucky.

Sunday's game was Ansley's 127th in an Alabama uniform, breaking the record of 126 set by Bobby Lee Hurt between 1982-85.

AT A LOSS FOR WORDS: "This is a great moment for me, the team and the school," said Alabama coach Wimp Sanderson after winning his third tournament championship in six tournament appearances in his nine years as the Crimson Tide's coach, "especially with a team that was so questionable at the beginning of the sea-

Bama was picked to finish no higher than eighth in any preseason

"I don't have the vocabulary to tell you exactly how good I feel," Sanderson said.

GATORS 0-FOR-2: Florida's loss marked the first time in four years the top-seeded team failed to win the tournament after winning the regular-season championship. Kentucky won in 1986, Alabama in '87 and Kentucky again last season. The Gators, who won the school's first SEC basketball title this season, now are 0-2 in tournament championship games. Florida lost to Alabama 41-25 in its only other championship game appearance in

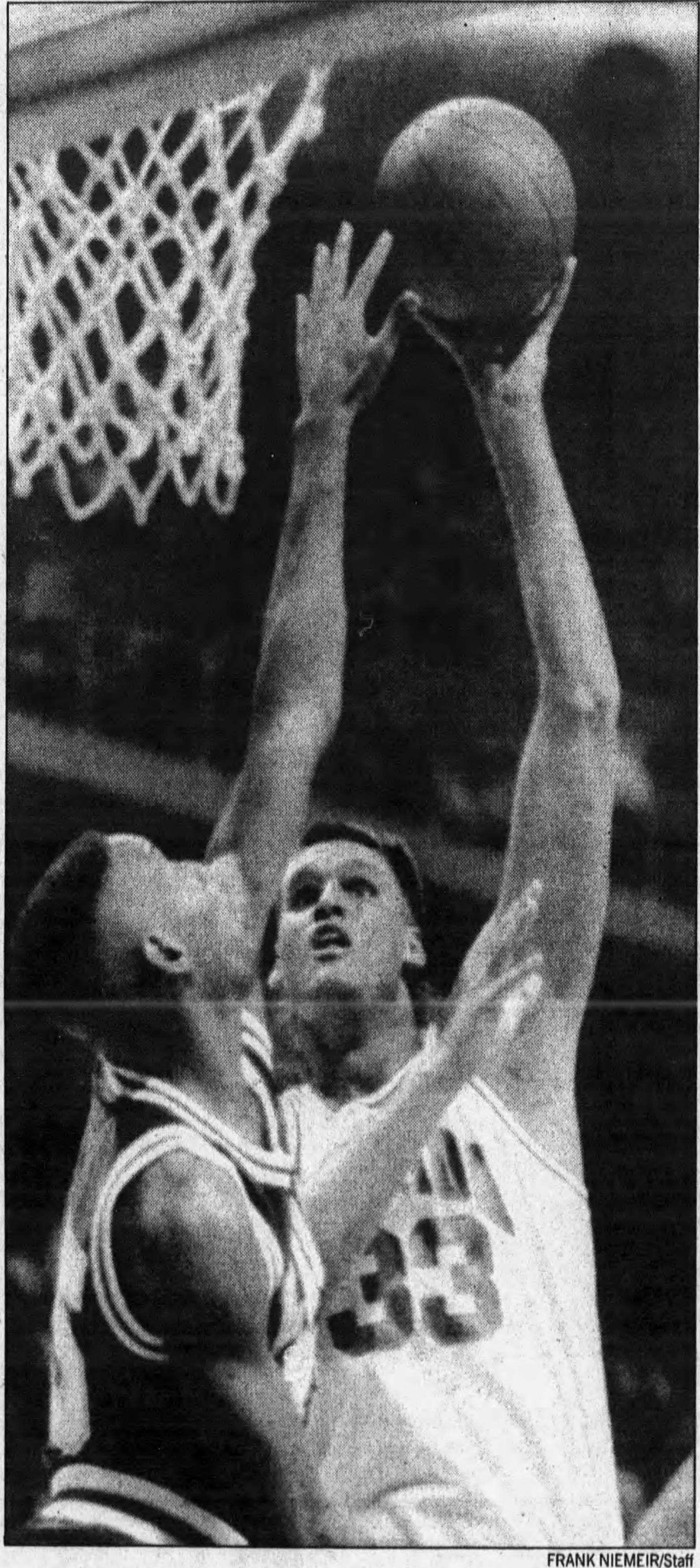
RECORD BOOK: Several SEC tournament records were broken or

Georgia's Litterial Green made 16 free throws, matching Cecil Bowell of Mississippi in 1981 and Ken-

tucky's Kenny Walker in 1986. LSU's Chris Jackson set records for most field-goal attempts (36, breaking the old record of 33 set by Kentucky's Cliff Hagan in 1952), and most three-point fieldgoal attempts (12, breaking the old record of 10 shared by Kentucky's Rex Chapman, LSU's Darryl Joe and Georgia's Willie Anderson).

■ Vanderbilt's Barry Booker set a record for three-point field goals made with six.

Alabama's Askins tied a championship game record by making five three-point shots, a total reached by Chapman in the 1986 final and LSU's Anthony Wilson (1987).



Florida's 7-2 center Dwayne Schintzius goes over Alabama's Kenneth Rice for two points.

Askins Adjusts Sights, Gives Alabama Big Shot in the Arm

By Thomas O'Toole Staff Writer

KNOXVILLE - Two months ago, Alabama's Keith Askins lost his starting job. Sunday afternoon, he shot the Crimson Tide to the SEC tournament championship.

Askins scored a career-high 23 points, including 14 straight in a 2:03 span of the second half, as the Tide wore down Florida 72-60 at Tennessee's Thompson-Boling Are-

"I had a good shooting practice," said Askins, a 6-6 junior from Athens, Ala. "I felt it would be my night, and it was."

Askins came into the championship contest after going 2-for-7 from the field and 1-for-5 from the threepoint line in victories over Mississippi Friday and Vanderbilt Satur-

A 43-percent shooter from the three-point line, Askins said he knew it was just a matter of time before his touch returned, even though he missed his first two three-pointers against Florida.

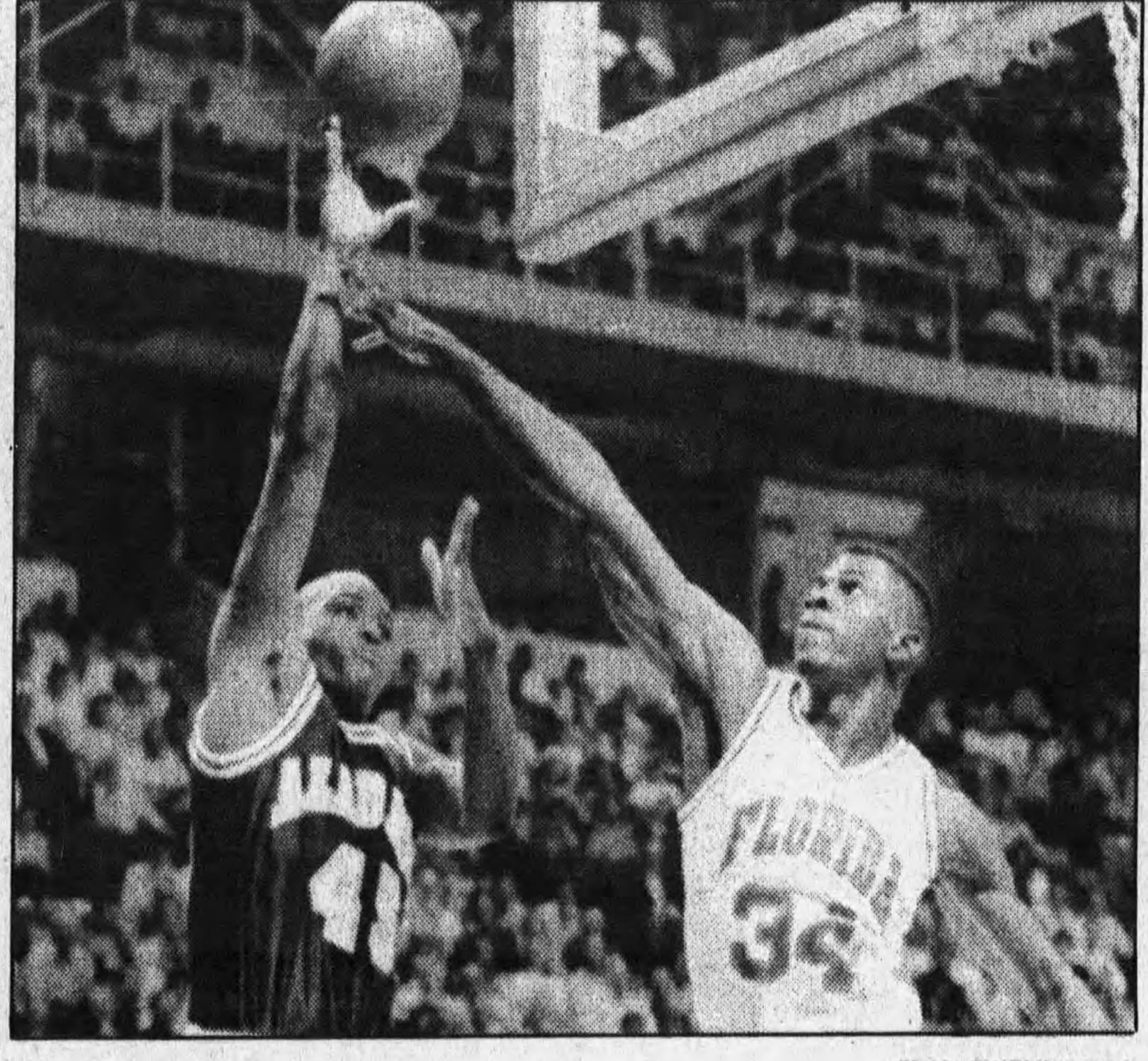
Taking the advice of assistant coach Kevin Gray, who told him to take his time and set his feet, Askins hit eight of his next 10 field goals and five of his next six threepointers.

With the Tide ahead 35-34 early in the second half, Askins hit four straight three-pointers. On two of them, he was fouled by Florida's Livingston Chatman and converted four-point plays.

Chatman, who played the final 13:46 with four fouls, had been helping out under the basket against the Tide's Michael Ansley and David Benoit. That allowed Askins to slip into the corner, wide open. Chatman, arriving late, committed the fouls when his momentum carried him into Askins.

By the time the three-point blitzkrieg ended with 13:46 left, Alabama led 49-38. The Gators came no closer than nine the rest of the

"There's not too much to say,"



FRANK NIEMEIR/Staff

Florida's Michael Kerr (right) can't quite get to shot by Alabama's Michael Ansley in SEC final.

said Chatman. "He shot really well. That's probably the best I've seen him play."

Added Alabama coach Wimp Sanderson, "That was a tremendous shot in the arm at a point when we really needed it."

Askins scored his 23 points in only 26 minutes. He went into the game averaging 7.1 points, and his previous high was 15 this season against Tennessee.

"All my shots had been around the rim, so I knew if I kept shooting something good would happen,' said Askins. "I don't think about going out and hogging the ball. I just do what has to be done to help the team. If you've got the wide-open shot, it's your duty to take it."

Askins started 11 games before being benched after the Tide opened the SEC season 0-2. Head coach Wimp Sanderson told Askins

not to think he was being made a scapegoat. Sanderson felt the team simply needed a change.

"When you put a guy on the bench and his response is, 'Whatever's best for the team, coach,' then you know you have some good people," said Sanderson.

Askins enjoyed the role of championship game hero, but he preferred to look on the victory as vindication for the team instead of himself. He and Ansley, a senior, were members of the 1987 Tide team which won the SEC tournament. Last year, Alabama slipped to 14-17 overall and 6-12 in the league, tying for eighth.

"This means a great deal to me because of last year," said Askins. "We got blown out by people who kept their starters in, even though they were ahead by 20 points. We felt we had a lot to prove this year. I thought I did my part."

Bama Patiently Takes SEC Tournament Title From Florida 72-60

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"Our strategy was to see what happened early," Sloan said, "and when I saw serious fatigue was a factor early, we just wanted to keep it close and run the clock for 25 seconds every time we got the ball. You can't rest on the defensive end. You've got to do it on offense."

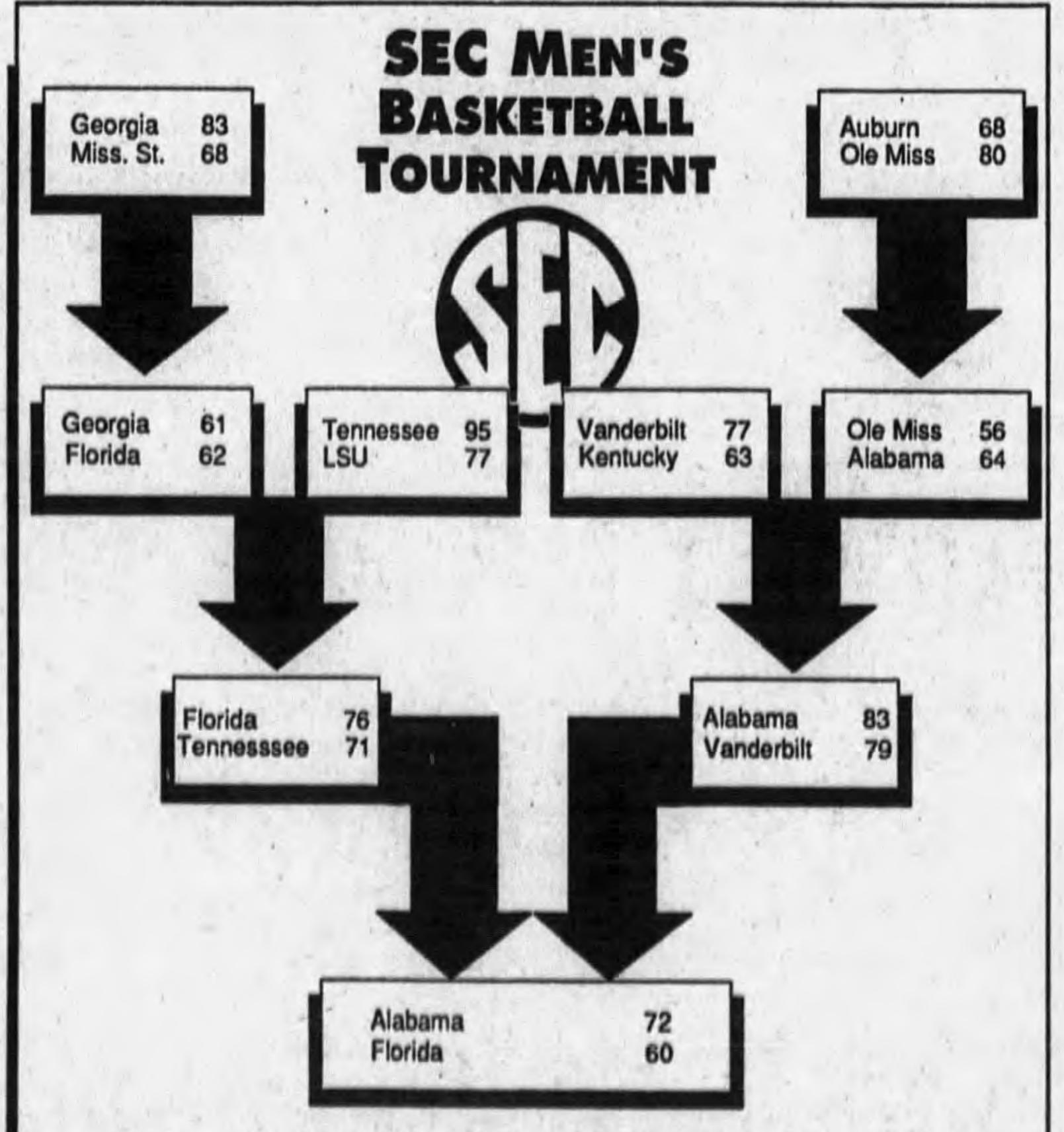
Added Gators guard Clifford Lett, "Fatigue played an important part. We usually get stronger. We had the heart and desire, but our bodies wouldn't let us get the job

Meanwhile, Askins, a starter un-January, played 27 minutes at forward for Bama, and James Sanders played 11 minutes in relief of Gary Waites in the backcourt.

"We wanted to play a 94-foot game," Sanderson said. "We wanted to press on defense and make it difficult for Florida to get the ball up, then run with it when we had the

Although Alabama played the last game of the day in both the quarterfinals and semifinals, Sanderson said, "I thought we had more depth, and if we could get our guys some rest I thought that in the last part of the game we'd have a chance if we could keep it close for 30 to 35 minutes."

Midway though the first half Sanderson had his team abandon its man-to-man defense in favor of a zone. And while the zone was effec-



tive — Florida got one field goal during a stretch of eight possessions — it took full-court pressure off the Gators and allowed them to

conserve energy offensively. went back to its man defense.

Sanderson said.

In the second half, Alabama "We wanted to apply pressure

and do what we set out to do at the start, win in the last five minutes," Askins's three-point binge sim-

ply moved Sanderson's projected time frame up 10 minutes. "When he missed, he didn't quit

shooting," Sanderson said, "and

that was good, although I was starting to hope he would [quit] there for awhile."

Askins was 4-for-5 from threepoint range in the second half and finished with a season-high 23 points, triple his average of 7.4 points per game.

Florida could ill afford to ignore guards Alvin Lee and Waites, who combined for 29 points on 11for-17 shooting in Saturday's 83-79 semifinal victory over Vanderbilt, and that took defensive pressure off

"They were giving me the ball at the right time," Askins said, "and in that situation it's your duty to hit the shot and give them the assist." Waites got seven assists, Lee

"Keith opened up the whole game for us," said Alabama power forward Michael Ansley, who added 14 points. "Once he made one

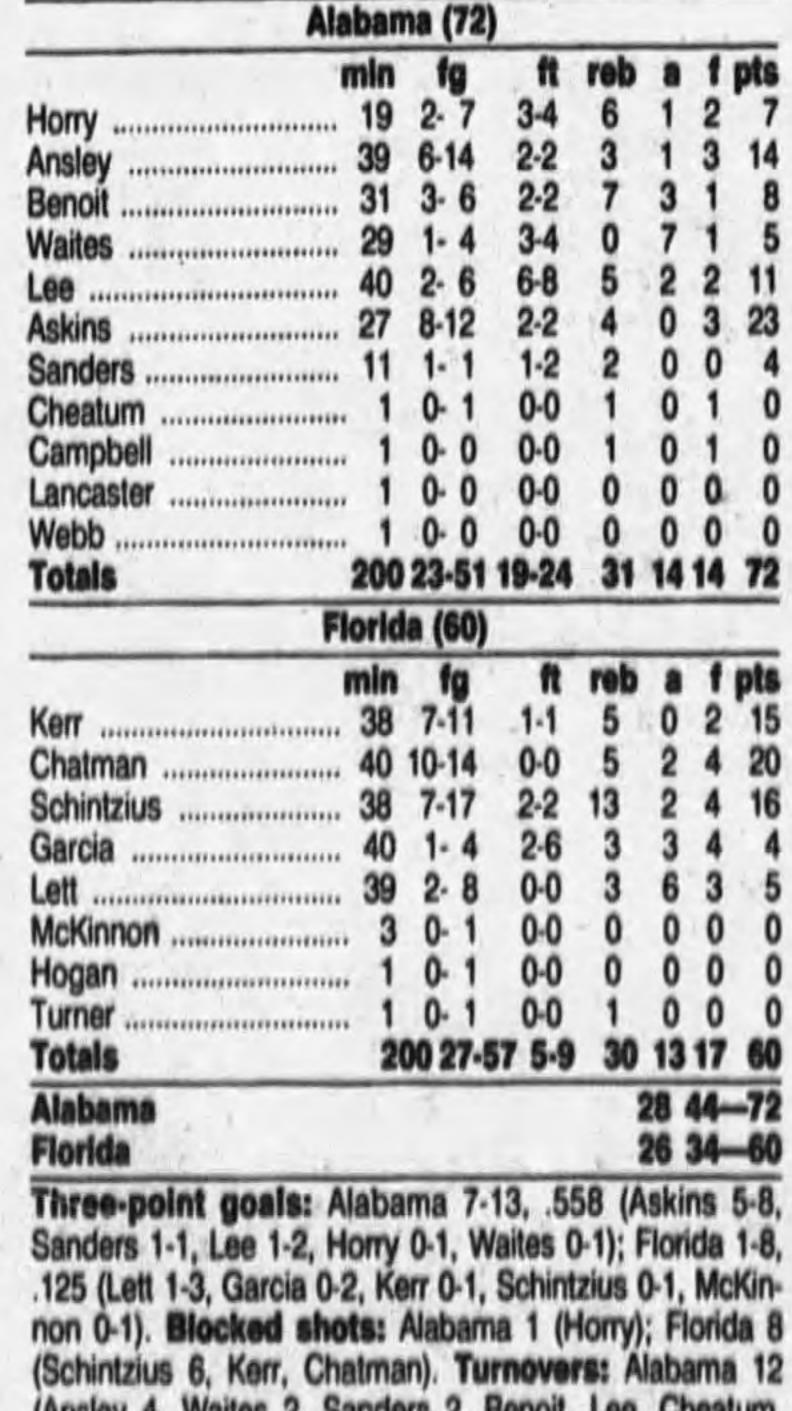
knew he'd make the rest." Said Florida forward Livingston Chatman, "Askins shot well. That's the best i've ever seen him play. In the championship game he showed he's a player."

Sunday's victory was Alabama's third in six championship game appearances in nine seasons under Sanderson, whose team is 23-7 going into the NCAA tournament. The Crimson Tide, seeded sixth in the Southeast, will play 11th-seeded South Alabama (the Sun Belt Conference champion) in Atlanta on

It is Askins's second tournament championship, having played on the 1987 title team.

"Alabama is not just a football school," he said. "It's also a basketball school."

Florida (21-12) was seeded seventh in the NCAA's Midwest Regional and will play 10th-seeded Colorado State Thursday.



(Ansley 4, Waites 2, Sanders 2, Benoit, Lee, Cheatum, Campbell); Florida 15 (Chatman 5, Schintzius 3, Garcia 3, Kerr 2, Lett 2). Steals: Alabama 8 (Benoit 2, Horry, Ansley, Waites, Lee, Askins, Sanders); Florida 4 (Chatman 2, Kerr, Schintzius). Technical fouls: None. Att.-11,285.