



JOEL KAIMAN

SPECIAL K

jkaiman@alligator.org

Guard's game resembles old playing form

There was some good for Brett Nelson in the first half of the Gators' game against Tennessee on Wednesday night—he made a three-pointer.

Then there was the bad — everyone acted like it was a big deal.

With less than five minutes left in the first half, Nelson sank a three from the top of the key. All the basket did was add to UF's already-large lead.

Yet the crowd erupted like Anthony Roberson had just hit a game-winning shot against Georgia. His teammates came over during the following timeout and hugged him, patted him on the back and gave him high fives.

The scene was a little emotional, but it also was sad.

Not in a way that made you want to tear up though. It was sad because it was a reminder of how far Nelson's game has fallen.

This is a guy whose arrival at UF was almost as anticipated as that of Christian Drejer's this season.

This was a guy who, as a freshman, was the spark during the Gators' run to the national championship game. As a sophomore, he averaged 15.3 points a game while shooting 45 percent from three-point range.

Now, he's being treated like a hero for making a single three-pointer. You almost expected Mayor Tom Bussing to

SPORTS

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Bonner leads UF in win against Vols

By Jeremy Fowler
Alligator Staff Writer

jfowler@alligator.org

Tennessee was close to good. Matt Bonner was close to unconscious.

On a night where nothing could go wrong for the UF forward, he had his best shooting game of the year with 25 points as the No. 6 Gators outmuscled Tennessee 77-64 in the O'Connell Center.

It seemed the senior couldn't miss. At any time where Tennessee (8-4, 1-2 Southeastern Conference) would make a small run, Bonner was the blockade with his 9-of-14 shooting from the field and 5 of 7 from the three-point line.

He also contained Tennessee forward Ron Slay, who averaged 22 points per game before Wednesday, to 17 points on 7-of-24 shooting.

"What I tried to do offensively with him was make Slay have to run around and guard him," UF coach Billy Donovan said. "I think Matt played an exceptional game on both ends of the floor."

The Gators (14-2, 3-0 SEC) took a 7-4 lead in the first few minutes that they never relinquished. Tennessee reduced the lead to 9 points in the second half, but no one could be the ignition after Slay struggled.

"[Slay] put a little too much

into his head.

"Slay, he's got some antics," said Bonner, who said he played against Slay for the first time when he was 15 years old. "Every time we play against each other it's going to be a war."

By the time Peterson called a timeout with 8 minutes, 43 seconds left in the second half, the Gators were ahead by 15 after a no-look pass to center David Lee from guard Brett Nelson.

"To start the second half, our intensity level wasn't where it was to start the game," Donovan said. "When we subbed, that is when we got our lead."

Lee finished with 14 points and seven rebounds while Brett Nelson may have had his best game of the season.

Trying to return from his nightmarish shooting slump this year, the senior started hitting 15-foot jumpers in the second half instead of settling for errant three-pointers.

He looked more comfortable than he has all season, recording five assists in 30 minutes.

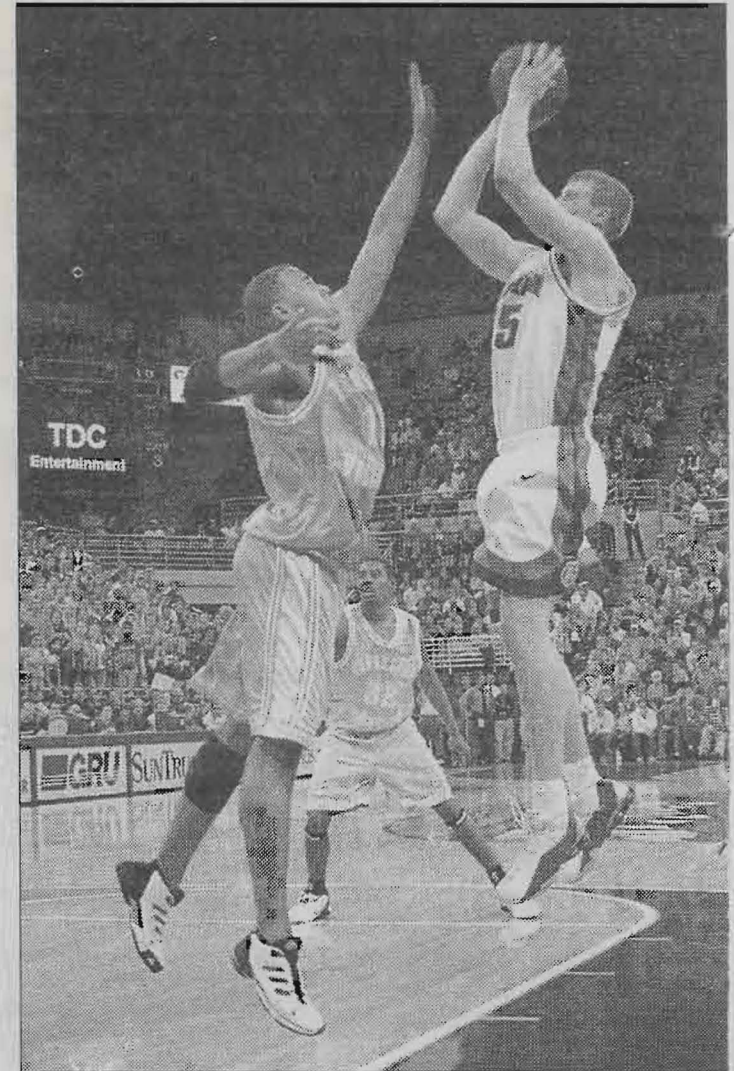
His first three-pointer rimmed out — the story all season — but once he started connecting by taking that extra dribble, everything clicked.

"I've been shooting a lot lately," Nelson said. "I've been coming in at night after practice."

Touted freshman Christian

I DID NOT KNOW THAT ...

The UF men's basketball team has connected on 10 or more three pointers in five of the last seven games.



MEGAN WINSLOW / ALLIGATOR STAFF

UF forward Matt Bonner led all scorers with 25 points on 9-of-14 shooting.