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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports Editor

CHARLESTON - The Bearcats battled hard for four quarters in the season opener against Charleston on Tuesday night, but fell victim to a 77-49 loss.

The final score didn't reflect the Bearcats' effort in the contest - they fought hard all night, and pulled within a point of the Blue Jays several times, but Charleston's sheer athleticism and deep bench proved too much for the Bearcats.

"I'm disappointed the way the score ended up, because the kids played better than that," head coach Rob Nichols said after the game. "Fatigue got us there in the end - we played six deep tonight, and when Charleston's going nine or 10 deep off the bench over the course of the game, that pressure is going to get to you and it got us tonight."

Jake Lee had an outstanding performance in his senior season opener, leading the Bearcats with 20 points and 12 rebounds. Tyler Miller chipped in 10 points and 7 boards, while Chase Young had eight points. Sophomores D.J. Dowdy and Cody Neldon both saw extensive time in the contest, and did a pretty good job of adjusting to the tempo of the varsity level.

"Jake [Lee] played great tonight, but our guards will need to play better as the year goes on," Nichols said. "It's one of those things, you've got young kids playing and having to

learn their roles, and trying to learn that against Charleston, Sikeston, and Sikeston again [in the SEMO Tournament], it's a brick wall for them to learn against."

The 'Cats were right there with the Blue Jays throughout the entire first half, never trailing by more than 5 points in the opening two frames. Some great defense by Miller and pure dominance on the defensive boards by Lee helped the 'Cats stay within three at the end of the first and five at the end of the half.

The 'Cats were able to hit a few quick buckets to pull within one at the beginning of the third quarter, but Charleston's dangerous offense quickly rattled off 12 points, aided by a three point play from Gregory Tucker at the 5:45 mark.

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his team didn't do a great job against it.

"The press hurt, but we had kids open in the back of it, we just couldn't see it," he said. "Charleston's a good basketball team - they don't go to the final four and finish third last year by luck or happenstance."

Dowdy hit a big bucket to kill the Charleston run with 4:15 left in the third, but the Jays still held a commanding 53-38 lead heading into the final quarter of play.

Ryan Parham hit back to back threes to open the fourth quarter for the Blue Jays, but the Bearcats kept fighting despite trailing by 20-plus. Lee and Neldon each had a steal, while Miller picked up three offensive boards in the closing frame, and Young showed improvement in his defensive performance in the final quarter.

Despite the lopsided final score, Nichols thought there were still some positive things for the team to take out of the game.

"I saw a lot of good things - we played well all night, and in the first half executed in the half court pretty good," Nichols said. "I had two sophomores out there tonight, and its probably a one point game at the half if we didn't have that technical there at the end of the second. Fatigue got us in the third quarter, and [Charleston] really ramped the pressure up after that."

In the JV contest, the young Bearcats' struggles continued as they dropped a 62-23 decision. Nick Noble and Stevie Payne led the 'Cats with seven points, while Cody

Gibson chipped in six. The JV squad is now 0-4 on the year.

The Bearcats will be in action again on Friday night when they host the Sikeston Bulldogs in the season opener.

Tipoff is set with JV action at 6:00 p.m., and Varsity action immediately following.

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