

# Agudio Stuns Dukes

## Hofstra Guard Heroic In 86-85 Win

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By [Dustin Dopirak](#)

HARRISONBURG — In one heartbeat, Pierre Curtis saw nothing but hardwood separating him from a game-winning layup. The next, the ball was out of his hand and loose on the ground.

Hofstra senior guard Antoine Agudio, who was about to make his last shot stand as the game-winner, dove on it like a linebacker on a fumble. He lay on the ground smothering it, making sure he didn't move lest he be called for a travel, for about two full seconds before the buzzer finally sounded, then leapt to his feet to release 40 minutes of tension in a primal yell.

The ball didn't leave its position on the floor — on the right elbow just inside the 3-point line — until James Madison assistant coach Mike Kelly came off the handshake line and kicked it off the floor. Just in case the James Madison basketball team hadn't suffered enough heartbreak in recent seasons, Agudio provided yet another dose, and one that could prove fatal for JMU coach Dean Keener's hopes for job retention. Before the steal, Agudio hit two floaters in the lane in the game's last 24 seconds to finish with a game-high 30 points and rally the Pride to an 86-85 victory in a wild game in front of 4,664 at the Convocation Center.

"I don't know how many guys in the country go do that," Hofstra coach Tom Pecora said of Agudio, the Colonial Athletic Association's leading scorer. "They make the game-winning shot. They're their team's leading scorer, and then they dive and get the loose ball to win the game. That's what great players do."

All of Agudio's heroics led to Madison's third straight loss, and its ninth in its last 10 games. At 11-14 overall, 4-11 in the CAA, the Dukes need to win each of their last four games to go into the conference tournament with a record above .500. It is believed that a break-even record could be necessary for Keener to survive.

This defeat was Madison's fifth by three points or fewer this season, and ranks with the 66-65 home loss to Delaware and 112-110 overtime defeat at Seton Hall as the season's most excruciating.

"These games are tough," JMU freshman guard Heiden Ratner said. "When it's right there, when it's 15 seconds left, you win or you lose, and it goes the wrong way for us, it kills us. It breaks us down, but ... the only positive thing about this is we were in control. We had a chance to win the game."

Indeed they did.

With Curtis back after a knee injury and the team finally close to full strength, the offense was firing unlike it had in a month. Junior guard Abdulai Jalloh led the Dukes with 24 points, seven rebounds and five assists. Junior forward Juwann James had 22 points, four rebounds and a steal, becoming just the second JMU player — the other being Eugene Atkinson — to compile 1,000 points, 500 rebounds, 100 assists and 100 steals in his career. Junior forward Kyle Swanston had 17 points and four assists, while senior forward Terrance Carter added 11 points and seven rebounds as the Dukes shot 52.7 percent from the field.

But the Pride was clicking just as much, shooting 58.1 percent, including a boiling 63.3 percent in the second half. Backing Agudio were freshman guard Charles Jenkins, who had 22 points, as well as junior forward Darren Townes (13 points, six rebounds) and junior center Dane Johnson (11 points, six re-bounds).

"At the end of the day, you've just got to come up with a stop," Keener said. "Whether it's securing a rebound or not allowing a middle drive. We just weren't able to do that."

The Dukes bolted to a 13-4 lead, then a 19-8 lead, but the Pride rallied back and took a 46-45 edge at the break, and the game saw-sawed until the final minute. After a Charles Jenkins jumper cut a Madison lead to 85-82, the Dukes tried to run the clock, but were blocked twice in the shot clock's last five seconds and gave the ball away on a 35-second violation with 26 seconds to go. The Pride went for a quick two on the next possession, and Agudio got an easy drive to the lane for a floater with 18.9 seconds left to make it 85-84.

The Dukes got the ball in the hands of Curtis — who ranked second in the CAA in free-throw percentage coming into the game at 84.5 percent — on the in-bound and the Pride fouled quickly. Stunningly, however, he missed the front end of a one-in-one, and a tussle for the rebound between James and Townes ended with the ball going out of bounds off James.

"It felt good," Curtis said. "I guess it just hit the back rim. I guess you can't make 'em all. It felt like the rest of them, it just didn't go in." That gave the Pride the ball with 16.6 seconds left, and Agudio had little trouble getting past a double team, knifing to the hole for another floater with 9.3 seconds left.

"When it came down to the end of the stretch, I knew I had to drive the ball and be poised," he said. "As soon as the ball left my hand, I felt like it was going down."

Keener decided to put the ball in the hands of his fastest player, Curtis. The Pride made it a little more difficult, however, by using a 2-2-1 press. Curtis beat that, but with the seconds quickly draining away, Agudio got his hand on the ball and knocked it free.

"I've been making plays since I got in to games like that," Curtis said. "It was just give me the ball, and just try to make something happen. They threw a little half-court trap at us, but I got by it. Somebody who I didn't see tapped the ball away from me. I had a wide open lane, but at the last second, somebody hit it."

And dove on it, and broke the Dukes' heart.

## Agudio has it covered for Hofstra

### In last 18.9 seconds, he scores four points, steals ball, falls on it

RODERICK BOONE

February 17, 2008

Curled in a fetal position, Antoine Agudio looked like Michael Strahan pouncing on a fumble, covering up to make sure no one could pry the ball away as the closing seconds ticked off the clock Saturday.

After poking the ball away from James Madison's Pierre Curtis with four seconds left, Agudio scrambled to dive on the loose ball just outside the three-point line. He remained on top of it until the buzzer sounded, clinching Hofstra's 86-85 CAA win in Harrisonburg, Va.

Agudio may have made a game-saving play, as Nathaniel Lester had gotten caught up in a screen by Terrance Carter and Curtis was about to get into the lane. "It felt so good, man," said Agudio, who let out a scream upon hearing the buzzer and immediately was put in a joyous headlock by Dane Johnson. "We competed and shot the ball real well. We got a good defensive stop at the end and a lot of people played well for us."

Agudio had 30 points - 24 in the first half - and moved past former teammate Loren Stokes into second place on Hofstra's career scoring list with 2,161. After being held scoreless for 16 minutes, he scored the game's final four points to give Hofstra (9-16, 6-9) its third road win in 12 tries.

With the Pride down 85-82, Agudio split Abdulai Jalloh and Curtis and hit a floater in the lane over Juwann James with 18.9 seconds left. After Curtis missed the front end of a one-and-one with 16.6 seconds left, the 6-10, 290-pound Johnson set a screen on Jalloh, and when Jalloh tried to go under it, Agudio had just enough space to hit a tough pull-up jumper with 9.3 seconds left for an 86-85 lead.

"I came out and forced a couple of shots and Coach told me, 'Take your time and those shots will come to you,' " said Agudio, who has 2,161 career points and is 62 from breaking Steve Nisenson's record of 2,222 set in 1965. "Those shots came and they were big shots, which I just knew I was just going to make. I felt it in my bottom line."

With Agudio shut down, Charles Jenkins had 11 of his career-high 22, Darren Townes had 10 of his 13 and Johnson scored all 11 of his points in the final 20 minutes. Jalloh had 24 points and James 22 for the Dukes (11-14, 4-11). Kyle Swanston had 17, 14 in the second half.

"This gets us back on track," coach Tom Pecora said. "After we lost at home on Wednesday, I said now we've got to go steal one on the road. So I feel like we did that and now we have to come back home and play the way we are capable of playing at home."

# Rams offense stays hot in win over JMU

MATT DOYON- Associate Sports Editor

James Madison upset VCU Jan. 2 with a Juwann James buzzer-beating layup. VCU earned a 75-56 revenge victory while shooting 55.6 percent from the floor Wednesday at the Stuart C. Siegel Center. The win was the fourth in a row for the Rams.

"We knew they would play better, being at home," said James Madison head coach Dean Keener. "They had their 'A' game."

Freshman Larry Sanders (Fort Pierce, Fla./Port St. Lucie) started the last eight games for the Rams but didn't see action until more than four minutes into the second half.

"It was my decision," said VCU head coach Anthony Grant, who declined to give further explanation.

Jamal Shuler (Jacksonville, N.C./Jacksonville) was 4 of 5 on 3-point shooting, helping the Rams go 53.3 percent from behind the arc for the game. One of his long-range jumpers came from well behind the 3-point line, but the senior felt compelled to take the shot.

"The defender backed up. I thought that was disrespectful," Shuler said with a grin.

Shuler led all scorers with 22 points, the 12th time he has led the Rams in scoring this season.

"I thought our ball movement was good," Grant said. "They have very good perimeter defense."

Abdulai Jalloh had torched opponents for 26.5 points per game in the last two contests to earn CAA co-player of the week honors. The Dukes' leading scorer was held below his season average Wednesday with 13 points.

The absence of James Madison point guard Pierre Curtis gave the Rams an advantage starting with the opening tip.

"I thought he would be back for this game," Grant said. "Without Curtis, they've had to make some adjustments ... he's a huge part of their team."

Keener said Curtis, who participated in pregame warmups, was feeling pain in his sprained knee acquired Feb. 2 at George Mason. Curtis' inactive status was a gametime decision. The sophomore netted 11 points and added four assists in the first meeting with VCU.

The Rams jumped to a 23-11 lead 11 minutes into the first half and maintained a double-digit lead for the rest of the game.

James Madison started the second half on a 13-6 run to cut the lead to 10, but then struggled in frontcourt offense.

"We did well against the press," said Dukes' freshman guard Heiden Ratner. "It was really turnovers after the press" that caused problems.

Ratner suffered a cut above his left eye, causing the game to be paused several times to treat the blood from the wound.

Eighteen of VCU's 25 converted shots came off assists. Junior Eric Maynor (Raeford, N.C./Westover) tallied a gamehigh five assists and added 16 points.

The Rams improve to 12-2 in the conference and 19-5 overall. The team is 11-0 at home this season and has not lost to the same opponent twice under Grant. Next on the schedule is Saturday's 8 p.m. game against Old Dominion at the Siegel Center.

"It'll be an electric game. It's a great rivalry," Grant said.

# Curtis Returns For Dukes

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## Point Guard Back For Hofstra Game

By [Dustin Dopirak](#)

**HARRISONBURG** - Dean Keener may have as few as six games to make bid to save his job, but the good news for the James Madison basketball coach is that he'll likely have close to a full squad for that stretch run.

Keener, James Madison's basketball coach, said Friday that sophomore point guard Pierre Curtis is considered "probable" for the Dukes' noon home game today against Hofstra (8-16 overall, 5-9 in the CAA) at the Convocation Center. The game will be televised regionally on Comcast Sports Net as well as SportsNet New York.

Curtis missed Madison's last three games since suffering a sprain and a bone bruise in his left knee in the Dukes' Feb. 2 loss at George Mason. He was finally cleared to practice Friday, and made it through the session without much pain.

"He did enough today where if he feels good tomorrow, then he should be able to go," Keener said after practice Friday. "... He did a little bit with [JMU's training staff] and did a little bit today. I think it was as much him getting out there and knowing that the knee was going to be stable."

Said Curtis: "I'm excited. I'm just ready to play."

The question, of course, is how much he'll be able to play. Keener said that decision would likely be made during the game. He said Curtis is unlikely to start, but he doesn't think he will be severely limited when he is on the court.

"He was pretty good today," Keener said. "I was really encouraged in him cutting and guarding and pushing the ball in transition. ... As long as he doesn't have any pain when he wakes up tomorrow, soreness or whatever, we anticipate him being able to go. I don't know for how long, but anything's better than what we've had."

Curtis also said he didn't expect to be limited.

"There's still a little pain but not a lot," he said. "I think I should be able to do everything that I could before, honestly."

If he can, that's big news for the Dukes (11-13, 4-10). Before the injury, he was averaging 10.7 points per game and a team-best 4.2 assists, and started every one of Madison's games. His speed and ability to push the ball in transition were a big reason why the Dukes led the Colonial Athletic Association in scoring until this week.

"It's a big deal to have him back because he gets us into our offense and he puts pressure on the defense," junior forward Kyle Swanston said. "He's the person that starts our break, he's a good defender on the ball. It doesn't matter what team he comes back against, it really helps to have him."

It also helps to have Swanston, who will be in his fourth game back since missing seven games with an avulsion fracture in his left knee. Junior guard Joe Posey is still suspended, but this is as close to full strength as the Dukes have been since Swanston was hurt on Jan. 9.

"That's two guys that you haven't had together in a long time," Keener said.

Madison is 2-8 since then, and Keener has gone from early CAA Coach of the Year candidate to hot seat resident. It is believed that a .500 record could be a key to saving Keener's job, as he's carrying a 29-81 career record in the fourth year of his five-year contract.

But of Madison's five remaining games before the CAA tournament, four are at home, where they are 7-3 this season. Three, including today's game, are against teams in the bottom half of the CAA.

The Pride, however, aren't used to being in that bottom half. They've won 20 games each of the last three seasons and earned NIT bids in each of those seasons.

Hofstra coach Tom Pecora knew he was in for a rebuilding year this season after the graduation of guards Loren Stokes - last year's CAA Player of the Year - and Carlos Rivera. He has just three seniors on the squad, two of which have played a combined 24 minutes, and five freshmen, including two that have started.

But even with that knowledge, he didn't think it would be this rough.

"I kind of thought we'd be a .500 team this year," Pecora said by phone Friday. "But you know, any season in the last three seasons, we had great luck. In every close game, every ball that needed to roll in did. Every block/charge call went our way. We got every loose ball. That's what happens when you have great seasons. And this year, I could go back to four plays that would make us a .500 team. That's college basketball, and when you're losing, you realize how fragile of an equation it is."

The Pride have been buoyed by senior guard Antoine Agudio, the only remaining member of the backcourt triumvirate that combined for over 73 percent of the team's scoring last season.

Agudio ranks first in the CAA and 12th in Division I in scoring with 22.2 points per game, and with 2,131, he's on pace to break Steve Nisenson's school record of 2,222. He's second in the league in 3-point percentage (.422) and first in made 3's with 65 (3.10 per game.)

But this season has certainly been more difficult than his previous three.

"It's been frustrating for him, because he knows this is part of his legacy," Pecora said. "I know it's been frustrating for him trying to do all of the things we need him to do to win, and there's not many nights that he hasn't played well that we've been able to win."

# Madison falls victim to Shuler show

## VCU swingman shows JMU the door

By Matthew McGovern, assistant sports editor  
Posted on February 14, 2008

VCU senior guard Jamal Shuler felt disrespected when Kyle Swanston backed up to the three-point line to defend Shuler with 9:04 left in the first half, and the senior used the daylight to nail a 25-foot 3-pointer and extend VCU's lead to 23-11.

Shuler put on a show against James Madison on Wednesday, as he scored a game-high 22 points on 7-of-9 shooting and led the Rams to a 75-56 win, avenging their 61-62 loss earlier this season at the Convocation Center.

"Jamal's got the ability to make tough shots," VCU coach Anthony Grant said. "He's got a gift. Some guys take tough shots, and some guys make tough shots."

Shuler nearly delivered the Rams a win at JMU on Jan. 2 when he made a running jumper with 10 seconds left for a 61-60 advantage, but Wednesday he left nothing to chance as he scored a game-high 22 points and made 4-of-5 three-point attempts. Madison (11-13 overall, 4-10 in the CAA) lost for the eighth time in nine games as VCU improved to 11-0 at home.

JMU sophomore point guard Pierre Curtis, who has a sprain and a bone bruise in his left knee, was warming up at the Siegel Center before the game, but his injury bothered him enough that he sat out his third straight contest. Curtis' absence contributed to a stagnant half-court offense, as JMU freshman guard Ben Louis and junior guard Abdulai Jalloh repeatedly beat VCU's press only to have Madison force up shots with the shot clock winding down.

"Being on the road without our starting point guard, we knew we would have to do an awful lot right," JMU coach Dean Keener said. "Unfortunately we didn't there in the first half where we had some critical turnovers, as well as allowing four offensive rebounds that really got them going."

The Rams (19-5, 12-2) had little trouble running their offense as junior point guard Eric Maynor scored 16 points and had a game-high five assists. Maynor used a gliding crossover and driving floater to dissect Madison's defense and jump out to a 38-21 halftime lead.

"Coach always tells us if we have a good shot then try to get the teammate a great shot, and I think we did a good job of that tonight," Maynor said.

While VCU moved the ball well, Shuler's sharp shooting may have been the key to the Rams' success.

JMU senior forward Terrance Carter and junior forward Juwann James led the Dukes with 13 points each, and Carter had a game-high nine rebounds in the physical match. VCU ran a 1-2-2 three-quarter-court press for much of the first half as the Rams hounded JMU ball handlers, but Madison had most of its trouble in the half court.

"Ben [Louis] and Abdulai [Jalloh] really had some key turnovers in the first half that were live-balls and led to some run-outs and transition baskets for them, and then that allowed them again to set their defense," Keener said.

JMU will regroup and prepare for a home game Saturday against Hofstra, one of four conference games left for the Dukes. Keener said Curtis might be back for that game, but indicated that the situation is day-to-day.