



Philequity Corner (May 23, 2022)

By Wilson Sy

Destiny vs. Dynasty

The UP Fighting Maroons capped a miraculous season by beating the Ateneo Blue Eagles in Game 3 of the UAAP Finals. In winning the UAAP basketball championship, UP snapped Ateneo's 39-game winning streak and stopped its dynastic reign.

Ending UP's title drought

The Fighting Maroons ended a title drought that lasted for 36 years. The last time UP won a title was in 1986. However, in the years that followed, UP became a cellar dweller and perennially placed last in the standings. For two years, the UP squad was winless in the UAAP tournament. In 2014, the UP community held a bonfire to celebrate a solitary win which ended the team's 27-game losing streak.

The Ateneo dynasty

UP's initial championship run in 2018 was stifled by the three-year title reign of the Ateneo Blue Eagles. Since snatching the UAAP title from DLSU in 2017, Ateneo had built a team that closely followed the basketball system devised by its renowned coach Tab Baldwin. The Ateneo squad played with unselfishness, crisp passing, proper spacing, patience to find open teammates, as well as defensive tenacity and discipline.

Aura of invincibility

Ateneo played with an aura of invincibility after establishing a dynasty in the UAAP. The 2018 Ateneo squad competed in the William Jones Cup and was able to defeat some national teams filled with professional players. Last year, Ateneo coach Tab Baldwin led a Gilas team of Ateneo standouts and national team recruits to an impressive showing in the FIBA Asia Cup Qualifiers, even beating regional powerhouses such as Korea. In the final game of the UAAP eliminations, going against the Fighting Maroons, the Blue Eagles were riding on a 39-game winning streak that lasted for four years.

Building a UP championship team

The Fighting Maroons gradually received more support from the UP community, the Nowhere to go but UP Foundation, and alumni supporters such as Robina Gokongwei-Pe. After its 2018 campaign, UP focused on acquiring the necessary pieces to build a championship team. UP had a unique mix of veterans, transferees, and rookies which made it a strong and complete squad. As the season wore on, trust among teammates and coaches solidified, further encouraged by support from the UP community. In their last few outings, the Fighting Maroons displayed grit and courage in bouncing back from sizable deficits in order to win tightly-contested games.

Rookie coach – final piece of puzzle

The last and arguably most important piece of the championship puzzle came with the hiring of Goldwin Monteverde as UP head coach. Goldwin is the son of film producer Mother Lily Monteverde. Goldwin is a multi-titled high school coach. He guided Chiang Kai Shek, Adamson, and National University-Nazareth School to championships in the junior leagues. Though a newcomer to college competition, Goldwin

brought his experience and culture of winning to UP. Goldwin was often seen as the team's stabilizer during tense moments. His players praise his calmness in the face of pressure. Moreover, Goldwin's trust in his players boosted their confidence in the clutch moments of their games. Indeed, the never-say-die attitude of the UP Fighting Maroons is fueled by the winning mentality of their brilliant coach.

Toppling the dynasty

One of UP's most important wins was its one-point victory over Ateneo in Round 2 of the eliminations. UP broke Ateneo's dominant 39-game winning streak which spanned four years and stopped the Blue Eagles from sweeping the eliminations. In doing so, the Fighting Maroons forced a traditional Final Four instead of a step-ladder format which would have given Ateneo a twice-to-beat advantage. More importantly, UP's win changed the complexion of the tournament, shattering Ateneo's aura of invincibility while also establishing UP's championship mettle.

Never give up

But even after winning against Ateneo, the Fighting Maroons had to overcome adversity to reach the Finals. UP lost its first semifinal game against DLSU despite mounting a late comeback. UP was consequently forced to play the Green Archers in a do-or-die match. In defeating DLSU, UP staged a miraculous and gritty recovery from a 13-point deficit at the start of the 4th quarter.

When the stars align

Game 3 of the UAAP Finals between UP and Ateneo was an epic showdown between two determined squads. UP was able to send the game into overtime after making a crucial 3-point shot. In overtime, UP sank the game-winning 3-pointer to end Ateneo's dynasty and win its first UAAP title since 1986. Many have pointed that it took the 13th point of player no. 13 on Friday the 13th to finally break UP's 36-year UAAP title drought.

After the contest, Ateneo coach Tab Baldwin said, "It was an epic game. I'm very proud of our team, but I acknowledge that UP's fighting spirit was... it just felt like destiny. You know the shots they hit, those aren't normal shots that normal teams make in normal games, much less in a championship game. You just got to give a lot of credit to their players and their coaches and I wish that they enjoy this championship."

We are immensely proud of the Ateneo Blue Eagles for establishing new records in the local basketball scene and for creating a dynasty in the UAAP. The UP Fighting Maroons may have won the championship because of their grit, tenacity, persistence, dedication, and never-say-die attitude. But perhaps, the Fighting Maroons were able to topple the Ateneo dynasty simply because it was their destiny.

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