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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Alabama survived two separate 14-point deficits and a 49-point outburst from Arkansas star Darius Acuff to win a grueling double-overtime thriller Wednesday night, a comeback the Crimson Tide credited to toughness, defensive adjustments and an unwavering belief that the game was never out of reach.

Head coach Nate Oats called it a “fun game” for the fans at Coleman Coliseum, but acknowledged the Razorbacks’ shorthanded roster made the performance even more impressive from their side.

“I give Arkansas a ton of credit, they are down men and to play a 50-minute game with basically seven players,” Oats said. “At the end of the game they played a couple guys that never really played because of foul trouble. Acuff played 50 minutes and scored 49 points.”

Acuff’s shooting display, combined with freshman Meleek Thomas, kept Arkansas in control for most of the night. The two combined to go 12-for-18 from 3-point range, scorching Alabama’s perimeter defense early and building multiple double-digit leads. The Tide entered halftime down 10 and briefly trimmed the deficit to seven in the second half before the Razorbacks surged back ahead again.

“Obviously, our defense wasn’t very good on him, especially in the first half,” Oats said of Acuff. “We gotta do a better job... even though we got better as the game went on.”

That defensive improvement was noticeable in the second half and in both overtime periods. Freshman forward Amari Allen, tasked with guarding Acuff down the stretch, said the Tide had to shift both their mindset and their coverages to keep the explosive guard from completely taking over.

“We had to pick up our pressure,” Allen said. “He had some tough shots in the first half — I mean, he had tough shots all game. He’s a great guard. But we changed our coverage a little bit, picked our pressure up, kept making them take tough twos, tough threes, and that really slowed them down.”

Alabama’s offense gradually caught up, led by a breakthrough performance from Aiden Sherrell. The freshman forward, who rarely plays more than 30 minutes, logged nearly 40 on Wednesday and finished with 26 points and 13 rebounds. Oats praised Sherrell afterward, saying he “played hard and won our hard hat,” Alabama’s internal award for effort and toughness.

The Tide also leaned on clutch shot-making from Houston, who was held scoreless through regulation before drilling a three-pointer in each overtime period — both momentum-shifting moments in a game that swung wildly back and forth.

“Houston didn’t score in regulation and hit a big three in each of the overtime periods,” Oats said. “Our guys fought hard... To be down 14 in both halves and fight your way back to force overtime. We need to do better, but it’s great to learn from a win.”

The emotional anchor of the comeback, though, came from sophomore guard Labaron Philon Jr., who delivered critical baskets late in regulation and again in overtime. Philon said the team’s poise under pressure came from the adversity they’ve faced throughout the season.

“You know, we just been through a lot of adversity throughout the season,” Philon said. “So, I just told my guys don’t break. We can change this around in a quick fashion, in a hurry. And once we locked in and just got it all together, we started pushing back into that lead. We just kept chopping it down.”

Philon said the moment the deficit began to shrink, the entire team could feel the momentum shift.

“Once guys see that, you know, we gained a lot of confidence,” he said. “We just kept rolling with that momentum.”

That momentum ultimately carried Alabama through both overtime frames, allowing the Tide to finally pull away as Arkansas’ thin rotation showed signs of fatigue. The Razorbacks were forced to play deep reserves due to foul trouble, and several starters logged close to the full 50 minutes.

Still, the Tide needed every defensive stop and every shot to escape.

“We gotta do a better job,” Oats stressed again, pointing to the slow defensive start and lapses that let Arkansas build multiple large leads. But he also left the arena proud of how his players responded when the game demanded toughness.

“Our guys fought hard,” he said. “We need to do better, but it’s great to learn from a win.”

Alabama now turns its attention to the next matchup in conference play, carrying with it the momentum — and the lessons — of one of its most dramatic victories of the season.