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College basketball: Sluggish Lady Wranglers find a way to win

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[BY LEE SCHEIDE](#)



The Odessa College women did just enough Monday night.

In order to keep winning, the Lady Wranglers are going to have to do much better.

Smiljana Cuk, with 15 points off the bench, led the Lady Wranglers to a 53-50 victory over visiting Western Texas College in the Western Junior College Athletic Conference opener at the OC Sports Center. Judith Tabala added 13 points in the victory, which improved 18th-ranked Odessa to 18-1 overall, 1-0 in conference.

"We have to play better, with more intensity," Cuk said. "I think we can do better if we play more as a team, more disciplined."

Teisha King led the Lady Westerners (0-1 conference) with a game-high 22 points.

Cuk scored nine of her points in the second half, including a three-pointer from above the key with 17:26 left in the game to put the Lady Wranglers up, 27-25. The lead lasted as long as it took King to drive the floor and convert a layup to pull Western Texas back into a tie.

Ali Bills that put Odessa College up for good with a pair of free throws with 17:12 left in regulation, 29-27.

Tabala extended the lead with a put back after an offensive rebound and then Bills, on a nice crosscourt pass from Shon Redmond, increased the margin to six (33-27) with a fast-break layup.

The Lady Westerners, however, refused to go away and when King converted a rebound into a field goal with 5:04 left in the game, the teams were tied, 45-45.

That's when Cuk, on the right wing, calmly hit a 12-footer for a 47-45 lead and Odessa College never trailed again.

"When we needed a spark on offense, Smiljana made two big baskets for us," Odessa College coach Ara Baten said. "I thought that we had a lot of trouble because Western came in with a very good defensive plan and stayed with it. They outplayed us and outcoached us and I'm going to have to do a better job in getting us prepared.

"But I liked the way we battled and found a way to win. That's a good sign."

The first half was a sluggish effort by both teams as they combined for just 39 points.

After the Lady Westerners opened the game with a field goal by Sanders, the Lady Wranglers had three consecutive possessions where the ball wouldn't fall. But Western Texas was struggling as well and when Tabala converted a rebound with 16 minutes left in the first half, the game was tied, 2-2.

Odessa College then took its first lead of the game on a free throw with 14:12 left before halftime and the teams then began trading baskets throughout the rest of the first half, with the Lady Westerners holding a 21-18 lead after 20 minutes.

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