

Vikings Two Wins Away From The Big Dance

Written by {ga=neoleo}

Friday, March 07 2008 7:00 PM -

As we've been chronicling all year here on The Cleveland Fan, it's been an exciting season for Cleveland State basketball, reborn under coach Gary Waters. Today, at 4:30 on ESPNU, the Vikings get set to take the first step towards what will hopefully be the team's first NCAA Tournament berth since their magical run back in 1986. They take on Valparaiso in the semifinals of the Horizon League Tournament. This morning, Ryan Aroney takes a look at who's left, and what has happened so far in the Horizon.



Ten days ago Cleveland State stood in third place in the Horizon League standings. The Vikings needed exactly five things to happen in order to jump Wright State for the coveted second seed heading into the conference tournament. The second seed is so important in the Horizon League because of the league's extreme rewarding of the top two teams, each of whom receives a double-bye. While the top teams get some much needed rest during the first few days of the tournament, the remaining eight teams battle it out for two rounds for the right to take on the top two seeds in the semi-finals.

The scenario that CSU needed in order to take over the second seed read like an impossible check-list. Wright State, winners of 11 of its last 12 games, needed to lose both of its remaining games. Valparaiso needed to win both of its games, one of which happened to be against the red hot Raiders and Illinois-Chicago also needed to lose one of its remaining two games. Not getting left out of the equation, the Vikings needed to take care of their own business during the season ending road trip to Youngstown State.

Vikings Two Wins Away From The Big Dance

Written by {ga=neoleo}

Friday, March 07 2008 7:00 PM -

It seemed to be too much to overcome in one short weekend. The Vikings were preparing to host a first round game as a number three seed against Detroit. Then a funny thing happened last Thursday, things started playing out perfectly for the Vikings. CSU spent its off day hoping for a Valparaiso win and losses from Wright State and UIC.

Check.

All three teams cooperating set up an important nationally televised showdown between Valpo and Wright State on Saturday. The Vikings could see two birds killed with one stone. With both Valpo winning and WSU losing in the same game the Vikings would control their own destiny going into the Youngstown State contest later that night.

Check.

With four of the five needs already crossed off the check-list, the Vikings only needed a win over YSU to make the improbable jump up the standings.

Check.

The Vikings responded to the final task with a 65-58 victory over the Penguins. After falling behind early, CSU took control and led for the entire second half. A late YSU rally made the game interesting, but Cedric Jackson and J'Nathan Bullock took charge down the stretch. Bullock led the CSU with 17 points and 12 rebounds while Jackson added 10 points and 11 assists. The perfect storm of

Vikings Two Wins Away From The Big Dance

Written by {ga=neoleo}

Friday, March 07 2008 7:00 PM -

events sent CSU to its first conference semi-final since 2001.

First Round

The Horizon League Tournament tipped off Tuesday night at campus sites with seeds three through six hosting seeds seven through ten.

In CSU's bracket, 3rd seed Wright State, fresh off its late season collapse, hosted 10th seed Detroit and bounced back with a 60-37 victory. In the six-seven game, 6th seeded Valparaiso knocked off Wisconsin-Green Bay 75-67.

On the other half of the bracket, 4th seeded UIC topped 9th seed YSU 70-59. In the only upset of the first round, 8th seeded Loyola surprised 5th seeded Wisconsin-Milwaukee 57-51.

Quarter-Finals

The weekend portion of the tournament moved to Butler's historic Hinkle Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. In the early game, #6 Valpo won a hard fought contest over #3 WSU, 72-67 to set up a semi-final match-up with CSU. The crusaders overcame a halftime deficit in a game that saw 14 ties and 16 lead changes. Shawn Huff led Valpo with 21 points. The senior from Finland averaged 13.5 ppg in two games against CSU this year.

Vikings Two Wins Away From The Big Dance

Written by {ga=neoleo}

Friday, March 07 2008 7:00 PM -

In the late game, #4 UIC defeated #8 Loyola, 60-49. The Flames will face-off with host Butler in Saturday's other semi-final game. Josh Mayo led UIC with 17 points, 12 coming in the second half.

Semi-Finals

Valpo has won six straight games and seven of eight since losing 77-58 to CSU on Valentines Day. The Vikings beat the Crusaders in both meetings this year, taking a 69-63 decision in January. As always for the Vikings, the key to the game will be perimeter defense. Valpo is tops in the league in scoring offense at 71.1 ppg. The Crusaders are second in field goal percentage and three-point percentage (.452 and .398 respectively). The Vikings, on the other hand, are third in scoring defense (63 ppg) and field goal percentage defense (.419) while leading the league in three-point percentage defense (.322).

The Vikings will be outnumbered as the Valpo fans are sure to travel the 150 miles to Indianapolis. It is a big game for both schools as Valpo hasn't reached the NCAA tournament since 2003-04 and is playing its first year in the Horizon League. The Vikings are looking to advance to the Horizon League finals for the first time.

Both semi-final games will be televised nationally by ESPN U. CSU plays Valpo in the first game at 4:30pm followed by Butler-UIC at 6:30pm.

The Horizon League final is Tuesday at 9 pm on ESPN. If CSU wins Saturday and Butler loses to UIC, the Vikings would host the championship game at the Wolstein Center.