

After being soundly beaten by Washington and then losing an almost identical game at home to Kansas State, the Cleveland State Vikings went south to Miami, FL to play in the College Basketball Experience Tournament. The Vikes defeated Division II St. Leo 72-62, won 77-56 over first year Coach Gene Cross' rebuilding Toledo Rockets of the MAC, and held off the Sun Belt's FIU Panthers. Jay Pearlman talks about the Vikings three wins in Miami in his latest.



After a November or early December win the first year of my first coaching gig, our head coach told me that the win "was really more Dan's that it was ours or the kids'"; Dan was our AD who'd scheduled the game (or at least blessed the schedule we'd made for that season).

What Coach was saying was a truth I'd realized but rarely focused on:

more than how a team plays on a given night, more than whether the players hit open shots, guard, protect the ball, more even than how a coaching staff recruits, how big, fast and strong a group is or how they shoot, winning or losing in college basketball is mostly a function of the opponent one is scheduled to play.

If we had visited Lou Carnesecca's Redmen at St John's that night, no matter how our players played or we coached, we'd have lost by a ton;

luckily--for that night--our newly resurrected program no longer competed in Division I, and while I won't name the school, that night's low-Division III opponent wasn't going to beat us in our gym no matter how we played.

The same thing happened to Cleveland State this week in the College Basketball Experience "Tournament" organized by the Gazelle Group. I put the

word tournament in quotation marks because this was a tournament in name only, sort of a silly tournament as tournaments go.

That is, while CSU opened "Tournament" play last week at Washington, even if the Vikings had beaten the Huskies (something they certainly didn't do), they would not have been sent to the CBE "winner's bracket" in Kansas City.

Rather, like it's three opponents in Miami this week, CSU was simply scheduled to play in the consolation bracket at Florida International, and they were playing there no matter the outcome in Seattle.

I guess the Gazelle folks were glad UW defeated the Vikings last week (and also defeated FIU), effectively mooting the point.

That said, after being soundly beaten by Washington and then losing an almost identical game at home to Kansas State, in Miami the Vikings defeated Division II St. Leo 72-62, won 77-56 over first year Coach Gene Cross' rebuilding Toledo Rockets of the MAC (now 0-4 against Division I opponents), and held off the Sun Belt's FIU Panthers 66-58 (while able to beat Toledo, earlier in the week FIU managed to lose at home to Division II West Georgia, a team sharing the fourth spot in the "Tournament" with St. Leo). And while slightly improved from Oakland, Washington and Kansas State, I don't know quite how much stock to put in the Vikings' stats.

They still managed to be outrebounded by both Division I opponents , Toledo and FIU, by a two-game total of 66-57.

As a team the Vikings shot

51% for those two games (54-107), and 33% from the arc (9-27).

Both stars improved individually from the floor, as Cedric Jackson shot 47% in those two games (8-17) including 38% from the arc (3-8), and

J'Nathan Bullock shot 42% for those games (10-24) though didn't make a trey (0-2).

And now two early home conference games loom, Valparaiso coming in on

Tuesday, and Butler on Thursday. While Cleveland State was winning these three in Miami, Valpo was losing three in the more competitive Paradise Jam in St. Thomas, 73-66 to San Diego, 75-55 to Iona, and 75-70 to LaSalle in overtime.

And the Bulldogs remained undefeated, winning at home 64-55 over Ball State and 57-53 over Northwestern (a game this writer heard on 720 am driving across Ohio and Pennsylvania Thanksgiving eve).

So with these two conference foes visiting Wolstein Arena this week, we'll surely find out just how much the Vikings improved Thanksgiving week, or whether their successes in Miami must be primarily credited to the schedule maker.