

A Big Week For The Vikings

Written by {ga=neoleo}

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Cleveland State returns home this week for two early-season conference games against Valparaiso and Butler. After starting the season 1-2, the Vikings won the CBE Classic-Miami Regional last week thanks to victories over Saint Leo, Toledo and Florida International. Ryan Aroney recaps the trip south, and previews this week's two big conference games in his latest article for us.



Cleveland State returns home this week for two early-season conference games against Valparaiso and Butler. After starting the season 1-2, the Vikings won the CBE Classic-Miami Regional last week thanks to victories over Saint Leo, Toledo and Florida International.

For the first time all season CSU started to put it all together and play complete games while in Miami, but outside of the season-opening victory over Oakland, the Vikes have yet to defeat a quality opponent. The opening of Horizon League play will offer that chance in a hurry.

Previewing Valparaiso:

Valparaiso comes to town on Tuesday with a deceiving 2-3 record after dropping three competitive games to San Diego, Iona and La Salle in the Paradise Jam. The Crusaders have yet to play a true road game on the season after opening

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with back-to-back home victories.

Valpo freshman De'Andre Haskins has been impressive during the first five games of his career. The 6-4 guard leads the team with 11.0 points per game, shooting 43-percent from the floor (17-40) and from three (9-21) while also chipping in 4.4 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game. Haskins started the first three games but has come off the bench during the last two contests to lead the Crusaders in points against Iona (19) and La Salle (20).

Valpo interchanges two 6-8 big men in the post and this is a match-up that could give CSU trouble. The combo of Urule Igbavboa and Benjamin Fumey combine to average 17.2 points and 9.6 rebounds in almost exactly 40 minutes per contest.

Igbavboa is a senior that has started 71 games in his career and averages 8.2 points and 5.8 rebounds so far this season. The native of Oakdale, MN was a pre-season all-Horizon League selection after averaging 11.0 points per game on 55-percent shooting and a team high 7.3 rebounds per game last season. Fumey, a sophomore from Bremen, Germany, complements off the bench with 9.0 points per game on 61-percent (20-33) shooting.

Previewing Butler:

Butler comes to town on Thursday with a 5-0 record including victories over Drake, Ball State, Northwestern and Evansville. The Bulldogs have not fallen off despite losing five seniors from last season's Horizon League champion.

Butler has three players averaging double figures, led by sophomore Matt Howard. The 6-8, 230 pound center averages 12.8 points on 55-percent shooting (24-44) while adding a team high 6.0 rebounds per game. Howard was last year's Horizon League newcomer of the year and he had a great deal of success against Cleveland State, averaging 16.3 points, 7.0 rebounds and 2.0 blocks in three

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games with the Vikings.

Howard is joined on the frontline by 6-8 freshman Gordon Hayward. The Brownsburg, IN native has stepped into the starting lineup to average 12.0 points and 5.0 rebounds per game. Hayward stretches the defense by shooting 50-percent (20-40) from the floor and 43-percent (9-21) from three.

Another freshman rounds out the trio of double digit scorers for the young Bulldogs. 6-3 guard Shelvin Mack is averaging 11.8 points per game and is coming off an 18 point performance against Evansville. The Lexington, KY native is second only to Howard in minutes played with 27.2 per game.

Reviewing Cleveland State:

While in Miami, CSU received quality minutes from backup point guard Jeremy Montgomery. The freshman averaged 8.5 points and 3.0 assists in 17 minutes during the last two victories. Starters Cedric Jackson (10.3 points, 6.2 assists), Norris Cole (12.8 points) and D'Aundray Brown (10.0 points 6.7 rebounds) have carried the offense this season but the trio has lacked a consistent threat to replace them off the bench. Montgomery will have another golden opportunity to earn minutes by helping out on Valpo's Haskins while each team's second unit is on the floor and by giving Gary Waters another body to choose from when looking to slow down Butler's Mack.

The Vikings also started to see the real J'Nathan Bullock during the CBE Classic. After getting off to a slow start, Bullock is now leading the team in points and rebounds with 13.3 and 7.0 respectively. Starting center Chris Moore followed up a 17 point (8-8 shooting) night against Toledo with a 2 point (1-3 shooting) night against FIU. Sixth man George Tandy has battled foul trouble during the early season en route to career low stats of 2.7 points and 2.0 rebounds per game. The Vikings will need Moore and Tandy to become more consistent in order to contain the formidable big men rotations of both Valpo and Butler.