

As good as last year's senior-laden Butler team was, at one point ranked among the top ten teams in America, that group could not beat Cleveland State in Wolstein Arena, losing 56-52. With four of five starters and virtually all of Coach Stevens' long range firepower gone this season, Butler showed last night that the fall off will not be severe, as they gutted their way to a last second win over CSU at The Wolstein Center. Jay Pearlman recaps the tough loss for the Vikings.



As good as last year's senior-laden Butler team was, at one point ranked among the top ten teams in America, that group could not beat Cleveland State in Wolstein Arena, losing 56-52. With four of five starters and virtually all of Coach Stevens' long range firepower gone this season, Horizon coaches, SIDs and much of the media picked Butler no better than 5th in the ten-team Horizon League. Tonight, with sophomore star center Matt Howard forced to the bench for 15 first half minutes in foul trouble, CSU built a 7-point halftime lead, which grew to 8 fourteen minutes into the second. But just as scripture more than once foretold that "A child shall lead them," eighteen year old freshman sensation Gordon Hayward stepped up in every faze of the game, and led a spirited Butler comeback, one ultimately resulting in Zach Hahn's game-winning three-pointer in the final second. Butler not holding a lead in the game from an 8-6 advantage when Howard left the floor with two fouls at the five-minute mark until 47-46 after a Shawn Vanzant trey at 19:40 of the second, after Bullock scored from the block against Howard to restore CSU's lead, that trey by Hahn gave the Bulldogs a win in Wolstein at the final buzzer, 50-48. A win in a game as intense, physical and exciting as it was low scoring.

Not only did Matt Howard pick up two fouls in the first five minutes, but

he picked up his third as J'Nathan Bullock bulled toward the goal barely two minutes into the second half. Having played just 7 minutes at that point and hardly contributed (no points and two rebounds at that juncture), Coach took a calculated gamble and left Howard in the game with three fouls. And while he would play the rest of the game and not be whistled for his fourth, Howard never regained the ferociousness he's known for, never regained the aggressiveness robbed by fouls. That tentativeness caused Howard to touch but fail to capture ten more than the 7 rebounds he was credited for in the game, and lose the handle on dribbles and passes way more often than his 2 turnovers indicated. Howard finished with just two field goals, a total of 7 points, and even two crucial missed free throws down the stretch.

But despite Howard's worst game of the season (and worst in memory), 6-8 freshman guard Hayward simply would not let his team lose. Blanketed all night long by D'Aundray Brown, CSU's best defender, this would not be the night Hayward took over from the arc, finishing with 8 points on 2-7 shooting, just 1-2 from deep. But in an effort to relieve the defensive pressure applied to his smaller guards by Cedric Jackson and Norris Cole, for much of the second half Coach Stevens had Hayward on the ball as his point guard. And at the defensive end, when it again became clear that the greater threat posed by Cedric Jackson was at the goal rather than on the perimeter, Hayward defended Jackson for much of the second half, taking away all of Jackson's penetration in the half court. In one crucial late second half sequence, on three trips down Hayward guarded Jackson outside, Bullock in the post, and then Jackson again outside, all three successfully. Oh, and with Howard first seated and then uncharacteristically docile, Hayward took over the boards, finishing with a game-high 12.

Then there were the last four minutes, when Hayward wouldn't let his team lose. At the 16-minute mark Hayward rebounded Shelvin Mack's missed trey, was fouled on the follow, and made two free throws, cutting CSU's lead to 5. After CSU failed to convert on a minute-long

possession, at the 17:30 mark Hayward hit a trey from the corner. Then a defensive board at 17:50, fouled at 18:20, hitting 1 of 2 from the line. Then great play in the final thirty seconds.

Down two, Hayward dribbled right across half court against pressure, saw Bullock's failure to switch leave open guard Shawn Vanzant (playing 16 minutes for Ronald Nored this night), and made a long, quick accurate pass to his left to assist on Vanzant's trey that put Butler in front.

Then, after Bullock scored at 19:55 to put CSU back in front, Butler turned to Hayward to play the Tyus Edney role in this night's drama. Again dribbling right across mid-court, Hayward found Hahn to his left behind the arc, with a pass good enough for Hahn to catch in rhythm, shot fake Norris Cole, and launch a trey with under a second on the clock. When the lefty's shot went through, Hayward had assisted on his second trey in the final twenty seconds, and Butler had a most unlikely two-point win.

After the game, Coach Stevens was proud that his team "never conceded defeat," and particularly proud of "Gordon's big play after big play" in the final minutes. Coach was talking about the pass to Hahn when he said "that was a great pass by Hayward," but he just as easily could have been talking about the pass seconds earlier to Vanzant. On the other end of the drama, Coach Waters focused on opportunities lost playing much of the first half with Howard on the bench ("J'Nathan missed four layups in the first half"), five consecutive poor defensive possessions down the stretch, and late missed free throws (most of CSU's twelve misses were in the last 8 minutes).

"We're gonna have to steal one down the road we shouldn't win, to make up for losing tonight," Coach said. Well, it's not a conference game, but Saturday afternoon at West Virginia is as good a

place as any for that.

CSU News and Notes:

- Severely pressured by Butler's man-to-man defense, CSU's shooting reverted to earlier form, as the Vikings shot just 14% in the second half (4-28), 26% for the game (15-58), and 9% from the arc (1-11). Stars Jackson and Bullock were a combined 4-25, with Bullock shooting 2-11 and 0-2 from the arc, and Jackson shooting 2-14 and 0-4 from the arc.

- One of my favorite stats-when I can find it-is rebounds per minute played. In the two conference games this week, senior forward George Tandy could have led the conference-even the nation-in that category, grabbing 10 boards in 24 minutes against Valpo, and then 8 in 22 minutes tonight against Butler. Still though, CSU lost the rebounding battle against Butler, 46-44.

- In the first big night of Horizon action, Valpo rebounded from its loss Tuesday to the Vikings and came back from a 9-point first half deficit, winning at Youngstown State 68-57. Home teams prevailed in Wisconsin, as Milwaukee bested Detroit 71-62, and Green Bay defeated Wright State 57-46. Now 0-5, Wright State will have to go at least another month without junior point guard Vaughn Duggins, whose Thanksgiving Day practice broken finger was surgically repaired yesterday.

- Finally, while the Cleveland and Indianapolis Horizon contingents (and ESPNU) properly focused on Butler-CSU as the big game this week, one perhaps even bigger-and more startling-was played down in Nashville. On Wednesday, Illinois-Chicago visited Vanderbilt and in a win Coach Jimmy Collins called "great for the Horizon League," UIC not only upset the Commodores of the SEC, but did so handily, 74-55. Preseason Player-of-the-Year selection Josh Mayo

hit 8 of 10 treys to score 30 (overall 11-20), backcourt running mate Robo Kreps scored 23 on an even more efficient 10-15 shooting, and Scott VenderMeer grabbed 11 rebounds.