

Vikings Get Set To Take On #13 Syracuse

Written by {ga=neoleo}

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Cleveland State, coming of a 66-47 drubbing of Marist on Saturday, will take on 13th ranked Syracuse at the Carrier Dome tonight at 7 p.m. on STO. The Vikings offense has been hot and cold all season and it was hot over the weekend after a week-long layoff for final exams. CSU (6-4) will need to continue the momentum as they look to solve Jim Boeheim's notoriously strong 2-3 zone defense. Ryan Aroney previews the contest for us and looks back at CSU's last couple games.



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On the other hand, the defense for the Vikings has been consistent and stingy since the season's opening tap. The Orange enter the contest averaging 83.4 points per game. The Vikings surrender only 57 per game and are holding opponents to 38-percent (192-512) shooting. If the Vikings can turn this into a scrappy defensive contest, it has a chance at being competitive game, but CSU will have to find ways to penetrate the strong Syracuse defense that is holding opponents to 40-percent (239-598) shooting.

Even when the CSU offense has been productive, the perimeter shooting has been poor. The Vikings are shooting 26-percent (35-136) as a team from beyond the arc but they shot an improved 44-percent (4-9) on Saturday. Senior forward J'Nathan Bullock has turned into a reliable shooter from the outside and he leads CSU in three-point shooting at 40%, but Bullock

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has only connected on eight shots in 20 attempts.

CSU needs to see continued improvement from big men Chris Moore and George Tandy. Moore had a solid contest against Marist with 10 points on 4-of-5 shooting and it seemed as though the Vikings made a better effort to get the ball to the 6-9 St. Edwards graduate. Tandy has been an energetic force off the bench during the past four contests where he is averaging 6.0 points and 8.3 rebounds in 24.5 minutes per game. After struggling for most of last season and getting off to a slow start this year, Tandy finally seems to be returning to the form that made him the Ohio Valley Conference Freshman of the Year at Eastern Illinois in 2004-05.

The Orange enter the game 9-0 including victories over Florida, Kansas and Virginia. Syracuse is led on offense by sophomore guard Jonny Flynn. The 6-foot Niagara Falls, NY native leads the team in points (18.3) and assists (5.0) while shooting 53-percent (50-94) from the floor and 41-percent (14-34) from three. Flynn was the Big East co-Rookie of the Year last season.

The Syracuse frontcourt compliments Flynn and guard Eric Devendorf (14.0 points per game) very nicely with a pair of players capable of pulling down double-doubles on a nightly basis. Forwards Paul Harris (13.7 points, 8.6 rebounds) and Arinze Onuaku (13.3 points, 7.6 rebounds) are monsters on the glass and around the basket. The 6-5 Harris entered the season with 19 career double doubles and has already added three on the season while shooting a scorching 79-percent (50-63) from the floor. Onuaku is a 6-9, 258-pound beast that was second in the Big East and ninth in the nation a year ago with a shooting percentage of .628. The Maryland native is an experienced red-shirt junior after missing all of his true sophomore season with a knee injury.

The Syracuse game marks the end of the hardest part of the CSU schedule that also featured Washington, Kansas State, Butler, and West Virginia. The Vikings return home and sandwich two winnable games in La Roche and Notre Dame (OH) around one final non-conference test with Kent State on December 23rd before going full swing into conference play.