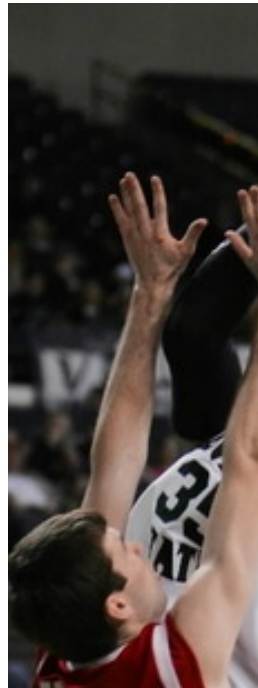


From that first night of the year when Cleveland State eked out a three-point home win over Greg Kampe's Oakland University Golden Grizzlies, films of CSU games have told opposition coaches one thing more than any other: play a tight, sluffing zone against the Vikings, and you'll have an excellent chance to win. A winning strategy most nights against the Vikings, but not this night, thanks to freshman guard Jeremy Montgomery, who allowed the Vikes to sneak out of the UIC Pavilion with a stirring 66-63 victory. Jay Pearlman recaps the big win.



From that first night of the year when Cleveland State eked out a three-point home win over Greg Kampe's Oakland University Golden Grizzlies, films of CSU games have told opposition coaches one thing more than any other: play a tight, sluffing zone against the Vikings, and you'll have an excellent chance to win.

No, pure man-to-man teams like Butler and Wright State don't do much of that-perhaps if Wright State had played some zone they'd have won at Wolstein last Saturday night.

But with no such man-to-man mantra to protect, it wasn't exactly rocket science for veteran Illinois-Chicago Coach Jimmy Collins to play 40 minutes of 2-3 zone last night.

And as is the case with virtually all zones, the success of Coach Collins' 2-3 last night was based on the decision as to which outside shooter or shooters to take away-a tight zone can't take them all away and also protect the inside.

And that film Coach studied suggested taking away (&quot;pointing to&quot;) the perimeter game of starting second guard Norris Cole and back-up second guard Trevon Harmon (both even more than J'Nathan Bullock), and letting CSU's other

guards and forwards shoot threes under less pressure.

A winning strategy most nights against the Vikings, but not this night.

Enter freshman guard Jeremy Montgomery. Coming into last night's game averaging 4 points in 15 minutes of playing time, Montgomery had been coming on of late for the Vikes, joining if not supplanting Trey Harmon in Coach Waters' rotation. Montgomery's 8 points on 3-4 shooting against Detroit a week ago (including 2-2 from the arc) earned him 25 minutes two nights later against Wright State, 13 more than hot-shooting Harmon, and his two last minute free throws iced the game for CSU.

Now in his home town of Chicago and performing in front of friends and family, the Lincoln Park High School product told his coach before the game "I'm ready," and he surely was.

And in a game that the Flames took over in the last three minutes of the first half, dominated for the first 7½ of the second, and led for 19:33 of that second stanza, Montgomery was the best player on the floor for either team, first keeping CSU in the game and then winning it for them.

Montgomery finished with a personal high of 21 points, on an incredible 7-9 shooting, including 5-7 from the arc.

He was so hot that even the UIC Flames couldn't touch him.

CSU had the game at its quick pace in the first half, with Norris Cole holding conference leading scorer Josh Mayo in check, and the lead by as many as 6. But a trey by UIC sophomore forward Tori Boyd (over D'Aundray Brown, back from injury) and two more by sharpshooting sophomore Robo Kreps (8

th

in the league in total treys and 8

th

since conference play started in three-point percentage at 41%) led a UIC rally to end the half, the Flames grabbing the lead from the Vikes at the break, 33-31.

The hot-shooting rally continued into the second frame and two more Kreps treys and one more by Boyd mushroomed the lead to 11 at the first media timeout.

Then for the final 16 minutes CSU clawed back, often extending its defense into UIC's backcourt, and using Bullock to help off of forward Jeremy Buttell to double UIC guards.

But while CSU was effective in increasing the tempo, forcing turnovers and closing the gap, UIC's zone remained effective, and after two Kreps free throws UIC still led by 4 with 1:04 remaining.

Then Montgomery took over the offense, scoring on a gorgeous Mark Jackson teardrop from the lane with 46 seconds left (here in Cleveland we should start calling that a Norris Cole teardrop), cutting UIC's lead to 2. Then an aggressive Bullock double team of Kreps as he crossed midcourt on the left sideline-aggressive but without fouling-caused Kreps to lose control of his dribble and travel, returning the ball to the Vikes. And after crisp movement of the ball against UIC's zone, Cole passed to-who else this night-Montgomery at the arc on an angle from the right, and calmly Jeremy launched a trey that was good from the moment it left his hand. More good defense by CSU caused a turnover by UIC giant Scott Vandermeer, Bullock hit two free throws, Cole made Mayo's final shot a prayer, and the Vikes snuck out of the UIC Pavilion with a stirring 66-63 win.

Hurry up before they change their mind!

Back from injury, D'Aundray Brown had as good as game as one could have with just 2 points, grabbing 10 boards in just 21 minutes, dishing 3 assists, and resuming his habit of seemingly coming up with every loose ball. Once again Norris Cole held Josh Mayo way under his average, this night to 10 on 3-8 shooting, and it's becoming a habit for Cole to keeps the opposition's best guard well below his usual shot total. Cole add 12 points of his own this night (5-12, 2-6) 3 rebounds, 5 assists, and no turnovers. MVP candidate Bullock was human, scoring just 7 points and grabbing only 4 rebounds. But the star this Chicago night was Montgomery.

And the Vikes are now 7-5 in conference, enjoying a non-travel off-day in Chicago before facing Loyola tomorrow afternoon.

### **CSU News and Notes:**

- In the best game of the year so far in the Horizon, Wisconsin-Green Bay managed to hold off No. 11 Butler at home on Monday night, 75-66. That win went a long way toward solidifying the second seed for the 10-2 Phoenix, and the only team with a legitimate chance to catch them, 9-3 Milwaukee, visits frigid Green Bay for an 8 pm eastern tip tomorrow night. While still not the case mathematically, Green Bay's win over Butler basically served to eliminate Cleveland State from contention for the coveted second seed in the Horizon Tournament.

- And here's a surprise it took this writer way too long to learn about: the on-line Horizon League Network (HLN) is FREE!

I signed up Monday evening to watch Butler-Green Bay, and on my computer screen I was treated to Green Bay's super television production of that game, with WACY's Ted Stefaniak and Dean Leisgang making it a fun couple of hours.

- In the middle of the Horizon pack, CSU drew Wichita State in the ESPNU Bracket Buster, a non-tv game to be played in Wichita at 3 pm eastern on Saturday February 21. In a much-anticipated matchup, first place Butler will play its Bracket Buster at Davidson.

- Fresh off a home loss to Detroit, Youngstown State joined CSU in winning in Chicago last night, besting Loyola 60-49. Prolific Kelvin Bright led all scorers with 16 on 5-8 shooting.

- Having drawn Northeastern at home in its Bracket Buster on the 21<sup>st</sup>

, Wright State first gets to host Butler in its building tomorrow night at 7, a game this writer will attend.

- Cleveland State at Loyola tomorrow will be at 4 pm eastern, and once again televised on SportsTime Ohio.