

Vikings Party Like It's 1986

Written by {ga=neoleo}

Friday, March 20 2009 7:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, February 27 2012 1:25 PM

When we started covering CSU hoops 2.5 years ago here at TCF, I got some strange looks and critical emails. Suffice it to say we aren't getting those looks and emails anymore. The Vikings shocked the world last night, laying a wire to wire good 'ole country whoopin' on a Wake Forest team that was #1 in the country earlier in the season, and spent the last two months in the Top 10. It was a glorious night for those of us that have been chronicling Gary Waters' resurrection of the best kept secret in this city. And Ryan Aroney talks about the win in his latest.



If you're looking for journalistic credibility and an un-biased opinion on last night's Cleveland State - Wake Forest matchup, stop here.

As a young, unmarried guy with no kids, last night ranks as one of the greatest nights of my life, right up there with the free last minute tickets to see the Tribe clinch the Central Division on the same day I first saw KRS-One perform live, and that night those girls mistook me for an actual CSU basketball player because of my team-issued warm-ups, but I digress (and my girlfriend may be reading this).

You see, I'm a proud alum of Cleveland State University. As a kid I always dreamed about working in sports and attending CSU offered me a chance to work with a division one basketball team. Somehow I got lucky and landed a job with the basketball team in my first week on

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campus. Over the years, I had the pleasure of working with two different coaching staffs while a student at CSU. I saw first-hand the changes made from the Mike Garland era to the Gary Waters era. I was there with these guys during the 5:30 a.m. workouts that were intended to change the losing culture that had taken over the program. If the players couldn't handle the hardest three-hour practice of their lives, day-after-day, before the sun had risen, then they weren't going to be able to play for Coach Waters.

The tone was set early. No earrings or hats, no cell phones, no swearing. Go to class, do your work, graduate. Play hard, pressure on defense, win.

Last night was the cultivation of three years of hard work and it could not have been any sweeter. Not only did my alma mater win a game in the NCAA tournament for the first time in 23 years, but those guys on the TV were my friends and I could not have been any happier for a great group of men.

I've been writing a bout it all season. This team embodies the city of Cleveland. The Vikings are by far the hardest working team in town, they care about each other and they have bought into Waters' system while leaving it all on the court every game.

This team is good.

Wake Forest never had a chance. The blueprint to defeat the Deacons had been laid before last night. Cut off the driving lanes, slow the tempo, don't let them throw it over the top to their bigs, and force them to shoot from the outside.

Waters and his coaching staff put together the perfect game-plan because that's exactly what happened. After the Vikings quick 9-0 start, the Deacons never seriously challenged the Vikings. Wake pulled it to within six in the second half but that didn't last long.

Watching the prestigious Wake Forest squad out of the powerful Atlantic Coast Conference get dominated by the Cleveland State Vikings was a beautiful sight.

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My favorite part of this whole run, the four wins in a week during the Horizon League tournament and last night's amazing win in the big dance, has been hearing from my fellow CSU alums from around the country.

Text messages and emails haven't stopped coming in since last Tuesday. Friends in Texas, D.C. and Los Angeles and countless others from around Ohio have all written to share their feelings. We've often been overlooked, both as a university and as a basketball program, but we now have a group of guys that represent us in a positive light.

The greatest feeling in all of this is having a reason to be proud again. The story of the first round tournament is CSU. How cool is that? As a lifelong Ohio State Buckeye fan, I was disappointed to see the Bucks lose last night, but in the end, it was the best thing for CSU. No more ridiculous scheduling by CBS and the NCAA that would keep the Vikings in the shadow of OSU.

The best story of the first round of the big dance on a national basis can now get its due locally as well. The 13th seeded Cleveland State Vikings are playing for a spot in the Sweet 16. Sunday at 2:40 p.m. all of Ohio will be watching the Vikings.

It's about time.