

Vikings Post Two Wins, Get Ready For Kentucky

Written by {ga=neoleo}

Saturday, November 21 2009 7:00 PM -

The Cleveland State Vikings jump started their season by winning a pair of games this week behind the play of junior guard Norris Cole. After losing the opener at Saint Bonaventure, CSU has now won three-in-a-row. The improved play comes just in time as the Vikings travel to Cancun to take on fifth ranked Kentucky and either Virginia or Stanford next week in the Cancun Challenge. Ryan Aroney takes some time to look back at the Vikings last two wins and also to look ahead to their game against Kentucky.



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In the opening portion of the Challenge, the Vikings hosted Florida A&M and Sam Houston State. FAMU came to the Wolstein Center on Thursday after opening the season with losses on the road to Georgia Tech and Creighton.

Despite their 0-2 record, the Rattlers gave the Vikings a test in the early going. Leading by just one midway through the first half, CSU used a 19-3 run to take control of the game heading into halftime. FAMU didn't stay down for long as they

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used a 13-2 run of their own to start the second half to close the deficit to two at 42-40.

From there it was all Norris Cole. The native of Dayton completely took over the game with driving layups, pull-up jumpers, deep threes and a sweet stroke from the line. The 6-1 junior finished with a career high 38 points on 11-16 shooting, including 3-of-4 from three and a perfect 13-13 from the line.

Cole's marvelous play pushed the Vikings over the top as they cruised to a 78-64 victory.

"I took it as it came. I wanted to have the offense under control and take what the defense gave me," said Cole. "My teammates were coming to me and the shots were falling tonight.

"Our goal is to get better every day, even if it's little because it will pay off in the long run."

Cole was joined in double figures by sophomores Trey Harmon (14) and Aaron Pogue (11). Pogue also pulled down 10 rebounds for his first career double-double.

"Norris' play today was tremendous. He controlled the offense and he scored some points and that shows that good things are ahead for him if he can continue to do those two things," said CSU head coach Gary Waters. "He took control of the game out there and played the best that I have ever seen him play this year. Not only did he play well offensively, but he defended against their best player."

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The Vikings came back two days later on Saturday to finish the campus site portion of the Cancun Challenge against Sam Houston State.

The Bearkats came into the game at 2-1 after giving Kentucky a scare in a 10-point loss on Thursday. SHS hit a record 18 threes in the game against the Wildcats, including 11 by senior guard Corey Allmond.

The Vikings were not impressed as they jumped on the 'Kats early with a 20-4 run to start the contest. Hot shooting contributed to the early run as Harmon netted a pair of three-pointers and Jared Cunningham and D'Aundray Brown also connected from beyond the arc.

SHS pulled back into the game by hitting 7 of its next 8 threes to cut the CSU lead to three at 31-28. More deep shooting by the Vikings pushed the lead back out to double digits as CSU connected on 9-of-10 threes in the first half.

Cole was up to his old tricks as he took control and scored 15 of his game-high 24 points in the second half. Cole finished the game 6-10 shooting, including 2-2 from three and 10-12 from the line. The dynamic guard also added a game-high six assists and held Allmond to 11 points on 4-12 shooting in the 80-65 CSU victory.

Cole was again joined in double figures by Harmon. The sophomore from Pasadena scored 16 points and tossed in 3-of-4 from deep. Cunningham was next in line with 10 points for the Vikings.

“At times I thought that we played very good basketball. Other times, we played pretty loose,” said Waters. “We lost our focus a couple of times and they were back in it. Sam Houston State is a very good team and they played Kentucky tough a few nights ago.

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"We gave them opportunities in the first half, but this is a young team. Don't get all up or down with this team because they will be better in January and February. We are just taking it one game at a time."

The next game for the Vikings comes Tuesday in Cancun against the Kentucky Wildcats (4:30 p.m. on CBS College Sports). Kentucky enters the game ranked 5th in the coaches poll with a perfect 4-0 record. The Wildcats were nearly knocked off at home by Miami (OH) early in the season and also had the scare against SHS.

If the Vikings continue to improve on their defense as they did against FAMU and SHS, and Cole is able to take charge, CSU will be able to stay in the game. The key for the Vikings will be for others to step up to help Cole. Harmon, Cunningham and Pogue have all showed the ability to be the second scorer for the Vikings. In order to pull the upset, CSU will need production from all three.

The Cancun Challenge concludes Wednesday with the Vikings taking on either Virginia or Stanford.