

Cleveland State begins a critical three-game home stand tonight against second place Green Bay. After winning three straight conference games to pull within a half-game of second place, the Vikings lost two straight in Indiana to Butler and Valparaiso to drop into a tie for fifth. If CSU is to make a run and have any chance at the valuable second seed in the Horizon League tournament, it will have to start this weekend. Ryan Aroney previews the slate of weekend games for CSU in his latest piece for us.



Cleveland State begins a critical three-game home stand tonight against second place Green Bay. After winning three straight conference games to pull within a half-game of second place, the Vikings lost two straight in Indiana to Butler and Valparaiso to drop into a tie for fifth.

If CSU is to make a run and have any chance at the valuable second seed in the Horizon League tournament, it will have to start this weekend.

If you're new to this column, the second seed is so valuable in the Horizon League because the top two teams receive double-byes into the tournament semi-finals. The second seed also holds importance in the rare chance that (presumed) top seed Butler gets knocked off before the championship, as the final game would be played in the home arena of the highest remaining seed.

After tonight's showdown with Green Bay, the Vikings continue the home stand by hosting Milwaukee on Sunday and Youngstown State next Friday in a nationally televised ESPNU game.

Gary Waters has been here before with the Vikings. In each of the past two seasons Waters has led his bunch to a long conference winning streak. Two years ago it was six-in-a-row and eight-of-nine down the stretch to claim the second seed and last year it was eight-in-a-row that catapulted the Vikings into March.

This weekend's games with Green Bay and Milwaukee completes the first half of the conference season for the Vikings and this is traditionally the time of year when Waters has the Vikings gearing up for a post-season run. The first half of the schedule saw CSU play four of the top five Horizon League teams on the road, all losses.

Tonight's game with Green Bay rounds out the Vikings competition against the Horizon League's elite and a victory would put the Vikings a game out of second place in the loss column at 4-4. With the top of the conference in Butler, Detroit, Wright State and Valparaiso all coming to the Wolstein Center down the stretch, Waters and his gang still has a fighter's chance to move up to the coveted second seed.

The second half schedule is important to note, as another staple of the Waters era has been home court dominance in conference play. The Vikings were a combined 16-2 at home against the Horizon League in the past two seasons, and are off to a 2-0 start this season.

The Vikings are led this season by juniors Norris Cole and D'Aundray Brown. Cole is the playmaker and the leading scorer at 15.9 points per game. Brown brings intensity and toughness to the four-guard lineup now being utilized by Waters. Brown, a 6-4 natural wing/forward, is matching up with opposing power forwards and has responded with his usual hustle plays and an improved rebounding

game. The Youngstown native pulled down a double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds in the Vikings last game at Valparaiso and is now averaging 5.6 rebounds per game, including a team-high 7.1 boards during conference play.

CSU has also been sparked lately by the play of sophomore guard Jeremy Montgomery. The Chicago native has been on a hot streak in his last eight games, averaging a cool 18 points per game. On the season, Montgomery is second to Cole in scoring at 12.5 points per game on 47-percent from the floor and 43-percent from three (42-98).

Montgomery has been at his best in his career during big games, and the Vikings will need him to continue his maturation if they are to make their annual run up the Horizon League standings.