



With a 87-83 loss to Wisconsin-Milwaukee on Thursday night at the Wolstein Center, Cleveland State let another golden opportunity for the No. 1 seed and homefield advantage throughout next week's Horizon League Tournament slip away.

The loss drops CSU to 23-7, 12-5 in the Horizon League and in a three-way tie for first-place with Milwaukee (17-12, 12-5 Horizon League) and Butler (20-9, 12-5) with one game to go.

However, with the loss, CSU no longer control its own destiny for the No. 1 or No. 2 seeds and a bye into the semifinals.

If CSU wins at home against Wisconsin-Green Bay on Saturday they will lock up at least the No. 3 seed. That's because both Milwaukee and Butler hold the tie breakers over CSU and would need help from them in order to get one of the byes.

"Now we got to go the long route and this team isn't built to go the long route," said CSU coach Gary Waters. "Two years ago that team was built to do that because we had a bench. This team with five guys to go the long route will take a lot out of them."

Without the bye, CSU would host a game next Tuesday and would have to win four games in eight days to win the championship.

"They outplayed us at every phase of the game," said Waters. "You got to take care of business at home and we didn't take care of business tonight. All I can say is this team is not ready to win a championship."

The Vikings fell behind by 17 in the first half and they fought hard to close to within, 41-32, at the half.

"They were ready to play," said Norris Cole. "They came out got a good start and that hump was too much to overcome."

In the second half, CSU came out more aggressive taking the ball to the rim, instead of relying on jump shots. They would cut the lead down to, 41-36.

Then Aaron Pogue picked up his fourth foul and took a seat on CSU's bench. Without Pogue on the floor, Milwaukee took advantage of the undersized Vikings frontcourt and went on a 20-6 run over the next four minutes.

The 19-point deficit (61-42) in the second half proved to be too deep of a hole for CSU to climb out of.

CSU would make one last run to try to save its season. Using a full-court press, they closed to

within, 86-83, with nine seconds left on a pair of free throws from Josh McCoy.

With eight seconds left, Milwaukee's Tony Meier would sink one of two free throws to make it a two possession game again for the final score.

"Down the stretch, I thought we could have still won the game, but we turned the ball over twice, missed two free throws and gave up three offensive rebounds," said Waters. "We had the opportunity and we didn't capitalize and when you don't do that you are not going to win a championship."

Cole did his best job to try to keep CSU in the game, scoring 19 of his 27 points in the second half.

"I said before the game that if we keep (Norris Cole) to 30 points that we would have a chance to win the game," said Milwaukee coach Rob Jeter.

The Vikings also had strong contributions from Trevon Harmon (22 points), McCoy (13) and Jeremy Montgomery (12).

The Panthers had three players in double-figures, led by Meier's career-high 28. Anthony Hill and Tone Boye, each scored 16 for Milwaukee.

"Every game we have lost the four-man has gone off," said Waters.

Milwaukee shot 57.4 percent (27-of-47) from the field. But it was their 3-point shooting (8-of-21, 38.1 percent) and nine offensive rebounds in the second half, which led to nine second chance points that really hurt CSU.

CSU shot 44.9 percent from the field (31-of-69), including 55.9 percent in the second half, but they only made 4-of-21 (19 percent) from 3-point range.

"When you have no bench and didn't rebound the basketball. Those are two things that will beat you every time you play," Waters said. "There will be some bench here [next year] and there won't be no smoking mirrors anymore. And I told a lot of people that in the locker room. This will change."