



**NJIT 80, CLEVELAND STATE 77**

**Second Round, Monday March 23, 2015**

NEWARK, Sophomore Damon Lynn, NJIT's leading scorer for the season, got special attention from the Cleveland State defense all night and he used that to his team's advantage to set up Howard's game winning basket. Lynn attacked the Viking defense from the top of the key and when they collapsed on him he kick the ball to an open Howard in the left corner.

In winning the thrilling CIT Round of 16 in front of a sold-out Fleisher Athletic Center crowd of 1,404. With the win, NJIT advances to the CIT quarterfinal and will host again, bringing in Canisius for a 7:30 pm game in the Fleisher Athletic Center Saturday night.

Canisius, which plays in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference, is 18-14 and has beaten Dartmouth and Bowling Green to reach the CIT quarterfinal matchup vs. NJIT. The Golden Griffins clobbered Bowling Green, 82-59, in their Round of 16 game.

NJIT (20-11) reached the 20-win pinnacle for the first time in its nine-season of existence as a Division I program. The last time NJIT won 20 in a season was 1994-95, when the Highlanders won 28 games at the Division III level.

The Highlanders 14-2 at home this season and they are 15-2 overall from December 30 on.

Junior guard Winfield Willis paced the Highlanders with 24 points, including five 3-pointers. Willis was a spectacular 9-for-12 from the floor, including 5-for-6 on 3-pointers, while also making his only free throw of the night.

Lynn added 15 points, including three from long range, with 11 of his markers coming in the second half that saw NJIT outscore Cleveland State 41-33 in the second half after the Vikings took a 44-39 advantage into the locker room at halftime..

All totaled, the Highlanders shot 13-of-26 (50 percent) from beyond the arc, a key stat in their victory.

Besides Willis and Lynn, the Highlanders received 10 points from Tim Coleman. All nine Highlanders that played scored at least three points.

Lynn and Willis shared game honors with 5 assists each and the top two rebounders for the Highlanders were Coleman and senior center Daquan Holiday, each of whom grabbed 7 rebounds.

Anton Grady paced Cleveland State (19-15) with 26 points and 11 rebounds. Marlin Mason added 19 points, 15 of which came in the first half. Kaza Keane added 13 in vain.

After Cleveland State got the first two points on an alley-oop baseline slam dunk from Mason, the Highlanders reeled off 10 straight points to take a 10-2 lead, forcing Cleveland State head coach Gary Waters to burn a time out.

The 6-foot-6 senior Mason hit four three pointers to give Cleveland State a brief 20-19 lead, but the Highlanders responded with eight straight points, four coming from the senior Holiday down low, giving the Highlanders a 27-20 lead with 7:45 remaining in the first half.

The Vikings came back and took a 35-33 lead on two consecutive baskets from Grady with 3:38 remaining in the half and increased the lead to 44-39 lead on a long 3-pointer from Kenny Carpenter right before halftime.

Mason and Grady each had 15 points for the Vikings at the half, while Willis led the Highlanders with 11 points at the break.

In the second half, redshirt freshman center Vlad Shustov hit his second 3-pointer of the season to give the Highlanders a 61-56 lead with 12:40 remaining in regulation.

Willis drained a corner trey with 11:31 left, staking the Highlanders to a 64-58 advantage and added another from almost the same exact spot to push the lead to 67-60 with 9:10 left.

Lynn hit two straight three-pointers to give the Highlanders a 74-68 lead, but the Vikings were relentless, thanks to the play of Grady, who had four inside points to cut the lead to one at 77-76 with 1:43 left.

Grady later hit the first of two free throws after being fouled under the basket with 38.3 seconds on the clock.

That tied the score, setting the stage for Howard's game-winning 3-pointer.

Cleveland State had one last breath, gaining possession with 5.5 seconds left after an NJIT missed free throw, but the Highlanders' Holiday deflected the ball out of bounds with 0.9 seconds left when the Vikings tried to advance.

With NJIT having a chance to set its defense on the ensuing in-bounds play, Grady, the game-high

scorer, had to launch a long off-balance desperation three point try that missed the mark as the final buzzer sounded, leading to the joyous crowd storming the floor to celebrate with their team.