



DES MOINES, Iowa-Junior Ben Simons scored a game-high 24 points and sophomore Rayvonte Rice added 19, all in the second half, to propel the Drake Bulldogs to a 70-64 win over North Dakota Wednesday in the first round of the CollgeInsider.com Postseason Tournament at the Knapp Center.

It was Drake's first win in a postseason tournament beyond a conference tournament since 1975, and improved the Bulldogs' record to 18-15. It is the highest win total for Drake under head coach Mark Phelps, and best since the 2007-08 team won 28 games.

Drake will now play at Rice in the second round on Saturday, March 17, at 7 p.m. (CT).

Junior Jordan Clarke (Rockville, Md.) led the team with 14 rebounds to go along with his six points. Clarke's steal and feed to Simons with 24.5 seconds to play helped seal the win, as Simons (Cadillac, Mich.) was fouled and converted two free throws to give the Bulldogs a 68-64 lead. Clarke then rebounded a North Dakota miss and quickly found Simons again, who was fouled, and again knocked down both free throws to cap the 70-64 win.

The Bulldogs trailed 49-43 with 10:07 remaining in the game before embarking on an 11-1 run over the next three minutes to reclaim the lead for the first time since late in the first half. Drake's rally began with Simons' fourth three-pointer of the game to cut the deficit to 49-46. After two free throws by redshirt-freshman Jeremy Jeffers (Wilson, N.C.) Simons grabbed a defensive rebound and went coast-to-coast for a layup to take the lead at 50-49.

North Dakota continued to battle and tied the game on three occasions, but never led, before Drake was eventually able to put the game away in the final minute.

For the game the Bulldogs shot 38.2 percent from the field (21-of-55), including a 50-percent mark in the second half (12-of-24). The Fighting Sioux shot 43.1 percent (25-of-58), including 51.7 percent after halftime (15-of-29). North Dakota won the rebounding battle 39-31.

Key to the Bulldogs' win was its 77.8-percent shooting from the free-throw line (21-of-27), including 80 percent on 25 second-half attempts (20-of-25), as Rice (Champaign, Ill.) set the tone for the Bulldogs' comeback by driving the ball in the lane. Rice was 6-of-8 from the line.

North Dakota led 26-24 at halftime, using a 10-0 run to take a 24-22 lead late in the half, part of a larger 16-5 run.

Simons led Drake with 11 points in the first half. He made three three-pointers before the break, including the Bulldogs' first two field goals of the game to stake an early 6-0 lead. Rice was saddled with two fouls early in the half and played just eight scoreless minutes.

The Bulldogs played without starting point guard Karl Madison (back) and Kraidon Woods (hamstring), with senior Kurt Alexander (Toronto, Ontario) starting at the point for the third consecutive game.

Drake won its first game in postseason play beyond Missouri Valley Conference tournaments since 1975, when it won three games in the National Commissioner's Invitational to claim the event's championship.