



MOSCOW, Idaho – University of Idaho men’s basketball raced out to a double-digit lead early, then fended off a furious rally by UC Santa Barbara in an 86-83 win in the opening round of the CollegeInsider.com Postseason Tournament on Wednesday at the Cowan Spectrum.

Idaho (19-13) advances to the second round of the tournament for the second time in three appearances, and the Vandals will face a familiar opponent in Western Athletic Conference rival Utah State (18-15), which beat CSU Bakersfield on Wednesday.

“Our administration, Vandal nation and the Vandal boosters stepped up to allow us to host this game,” Idaho head coach Don Verlin said after the game. “I think it shows a real commitment to our basketball program and I was very, very happy we were able to deliver a win for them.”

The Vandals led by as many as 17 points in the first half at 35-18 with 4:42 to play in the period and took a 13-point advantage, 43-30, into the break. UCSB roared back in the second, shot 61.8 percent in the period and outscored Idaho, 53-43, but the Vandals got the key plays they needed down the stretch.

UCSB went on an 8-1 run, starting at 6:44 of the second half with Idaho leading, 73-64, and drew within two points, 74-72, with just under five minutes remaining. From that point, Idaho never trailed – but also never led by more than five.

The Gauchos got the lead down to one on three separate occasions in the final two minutes, but the Vandals answered with a Kyle Barone layup, a crucial Stephen Madison jumper in the key and two free throws to regain its edge each time.

UCSB’s James Nunnally, who led all players with 25 points, missed a 3-pointer with 10 seconds remaining and Idaho senior Landon Tatum hit a pair of free throws with 5.8 ticks remaining. UCSB freshman T.J. Taylor made it interesting by draining a running 3-pointer with one second left, but Deremy Geiger made one free throw, missed the second and time expired before the Gauchos could get off a tying shot.

“We wanted to give back to our school, because they were able to put on the home game for us,” Tatum said. “We wanted to come out and have a good showing for them, as well.”

Idaho improved to 14-0 this season when shooting at least 50 percent from the floor as the Vandals went 30-of-59 (.508) in the game and also drained eight of their 18 long-range attempts for a 44.4 percentage. UCSB actually made four more field goals than Idaho, but the difference was the Vandals’ 18 made free throws, compared to the Gauchos’ seven.

Tatum's 10 assists and zero turnovers led a brutally efficient Vandal offense that dished up 18 assists and committed just five turnovers – its fewest in seven years.

"I thought he was excellent," Verlin said of Tatum. "Any time you go 10 assists, no turnovers, that's a good basketball game."

Idaho also capitalized on nine Gaucho turnovers to the tune of 16 points. Idaho also grabbed 11 offensive boards and turned those into a season-high-tying 19 second chance points.

Geiger went 5-of-7 from long range and led Idaho with 22 points, while sophomore Stephen Madison added a career-high 20 points on 6-of-11 shooting. Junior center Kyle Barone went 8-of-12 from the floor for 19 points, along with eight rebounds.

The Vandals added all-around boosts from senior Djim Bandoumel, who had eight points, four rebounds, four assists and one steal, and Mike McChristian, who pitched in four points, six rebounds, two assists and two steals in the game.

As expected, All-Big West senior guards Orlando Johnson and James Nunnally put up big numbers for the Gauchos, but UCSB also got a big boost from fellow senior forward Jaime Serna, who had 17 points and 12 rebounds on 8-of-12 shooting.

"They physically overpowered us in the second half. I think Orlando Johnson and James Nunnally showed what kind of players they are, and that was my concern – their two big wings against our littler guys," Verlin said. "In the second half, I thought we scored it well – we just couldn't stop them."

Nunnally went 10-of-14 from the field for his 25 points, along with four assists, three rebounds and two steals, while Johnson scored 19 points on 7-of-15 shooting, with six rebounds and two assists.

UCSB's 54.8 shooting percentage is the highest allowed to a non-conference opponent by the Vandals this season. The Gauchos matched Idaho from 3-point range with an 8-of-18 (.444) performance. They also out-rebounded Idaho, 37-29, including 12 offensive boards that led to 12 second-chance points.

Now awaiting the Vandals is familiar foe Utah State. The Vandals and Aggies split the season series in WAC play this year, with the home team winning each time. It will be the first meeting outside regular-season play between the teams since the 2002 Big West Conference Tournament.