



LAFAYETTE, La. - In a game which featured 13 leads changes, it was a second-half exchange of three-pointers which helped spark Rice to a 68-63 win over Louisiana-Lafayette in the first round of the CollegenInsider.com Postseason Tournament Wednesday in the Cajundome.

With the win, Rice improved to 18-15 and will play host to Drake Saturday at 7 p.m. in the second round of the CIT. The winner will advance to the postseason tournament's quarterfinals to take on an opponent to be determined.

Against Rice on Wednesday, Louisiana's Josh Brown hit a three-pointer to give the Ragin' Cajuns a 54-51 lead. Lucas Kuipers answered for the Owls, nailing a triple off a pass from Connor Frizzelle and the basket would start a 12-0 Rice run.

With the game tied at 54-54, the Owls' aggressiveness would give them the lead for good. Dylan Ennis tracked down an offensive rebound following a missed free throw and scored on a second-chance jumper that gave Rice the lead for good with five minutes to play.

Tamir Jackson would later make two free throws and Arsalan Kazemi would go one-for-two at the line after grabbing a defensive board. The Owls extended their lead to seven on a Jackson reverse layin.

After a couple missed three-pointers by the Cajuns, Connor Frizzelle's two free throws with 1:25 to play put the Owls up 63-54.

"We came out in the second half and held them to 28 percent shooting so our defense got better," said Rice head coach Ben Braun. "We did a better job rebounding and we made key free throws down the stretch in a tight game."

The Owls converted on seven of eight free throw attempts in the final 1:25.

Rice trailed by as many as five points in the first half but went to the locker room holding a 33-32 lead. Both Frizzelle and Kazemi made a pair at the line in the final 1:15 to account for the half's final four points.

UL's biggest lead of the period, 27-22, came on a three-pointer by Alan-Michael Thompson but DeBose answered at the other end with a trey of his own.

Still, the Cajuns forced 11 first-half Rice turnovers and scored six of their eight fastbreak points in the first period.

"Bob's teams (UL head coach Bob Marlin) have been so successful over the years in transition and on the glass," Braun said. "We had to make a difference and cut into that in the second half. We did limit the turnovers which limits their fastbreaks and transition. At the same time, we didn't give them as many second chance putbacks. I thought we challenged their shots better in the second half."

Rice won a postseason game for the first time since beating Wisconsin 77-73 in the 1993 National Invitation Tournament.

Rice, which prior to this year had not played in the postseason since 2005, will now host a postseason game for the first time in the history of the program.

"I'm excited," said Rice senior Connor Frizzelle. "Since I have been here, we have never played in the postseason. We were excited to play in the CIT and now advance with our first win in a long time. To win on the road and to win in March is a great feeling."

Frizzelle scored 18 points and had four assists to lead Rice. Kazemi had 12 rebounds to go along with seven points for the Owls.

"Arsalan had 12 big rebounds for us," Braun said. "He got every significant rebound tonight."

Tamir Jackson scored 11 points while freshmen guards Julian DeBose and Dylan Ennis each finished with 10 points. DeBose made his first start since mid-December.

Brown scored 22 points for UL to lead all scorers while Thompson came off the bench to score 11, including a 3-for-7 performance from beyond three-point range.