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SLU wins opener in CBI

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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Wednesday, Mar. 17 2010

If St. Louis University felt slighted by not being chosen for the NIT, the Billikens began to make their case that they deserved better on Tuesday.

SLU came out firing against Indiana State, making seven of its first eight shots and racing to a 17-4 lead on its way to a 63-54 victory over the Sycamores in the opening round of the College Basketball Invitational at Chaifetz Arena. The Billikens (21-11) now get nearly a week off before their next game, which will be on Monday at Chaifetz against either Akron or Green Bay, which play tonight.

It also was a big step toward wiping out the bad memories of the Rhode Island loss, in which SLU didn't play well at all. Whichever way SLU goes from here, at least the season isn't ending on that game.

"I was ready to play another game because the sting from the Rhode Island game really hurt," guard Kwamain Mitchell said. "When we came back, everyone was watching TV to see if we made the NIT, so we didn't make it there but Coach told us we had a chance to play in the CBI. It was fun to go back out there."

"I thought the guys responded well," SLU coach Rick Majerus said, "especially psychologically. If a million people are in my ear (about the NIT), imagine how many people are in their ear."

Mitchell had 19 points, including a run of eight in a row early in the second half that included his first dunk at SLU. Willie Reed had 17 points, eight rebounds and four blocks, leaving him one shy of the school single-season record. SLU was in control throughout, though the game got a little dicey late in the second half when an 11-0 run for Indiana State cut SLU's lead to eight.

SLU felt it deserved a spot in the NIT after finishing in fourth place in the Atlantic 10, but the NIT chose two other A-10 schools, Rhode Island and Dayton, ahead of it, teams that finished behind SLU in the A-10 standings but had

better RPIs. Now, they'll use the CBI as a chance to get their young team some postseason experience.

The most telling part of the game were the opening minutes. Unlike the Rhode Island game, SLU came out with vigor, enthusiasm and, most important, good shooting. Mitchell hit two 3-pointers, Kyle Cassity drove to the basket to score, Cody Ellis hit a 16-footer, Reed made a spin move to score, Christian Salecich made a 10-footer, Brian Conklin scored from close range and SLU had six players score in less than 5 minutes.

"We were more confident," Mitchell said. "Against Rhode Island, some guys weren't prepared to play at a high level and it hurt us, obviously, so we didn't get the win."

SLU led by as many as 18 in the first half and by 13 at the break. SLU ran its lead to 19 with 7:16 to play and looked to have wrapped things up before going almost 6 minutes without scoring and seeing the lead cut to eight. But there wasn't enough time left for Indiana State to get all the way back, and SLU made its free throws to close out the win.

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