

The Washington Post

George Washington Colonials lose to Virginia Commonwealth Rams in College Basketball

Invitational

By Mark Giannotto

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George Washington senior Damian Hollis always imagined his college career ending like it began, with an NCAA tournament berth. But with his team relegated to a first-round matchup in the College Basketball Invitational he was faced with a decision: Sulk about his team's fate or try to ensure Tuesday night would not be his final collegiate game.

He did neither as George Washington lost, 79-73, to Virginia Commonwealth despite a career-high 30 points and eight rebounds from Hollis in front of approximately 800 at Smith Center. It was the Colonials' first appearance in the postseason since Hollis's freshman year in 2007, when they lost in the first round of the NCAA tournament.

"I was just trying to extend [the season] for us," said Hollis, who is one of three seniors on a team that features 10 underclassmen. "I just wanted everybody to experience the postseason, so I did everything I could."

With George Washington trailing by 11, Hollis proceeded to score nine of the Colonials next 11 points, including a three-pointer with 49 seconds left that closed the gap to 72-69.

But VCU hit seven of its eight free throws down the stretch and Hollis missed a desperation three in the closing seconds to ensure the Colonials' first meeting with VCU since 1978 ended in defeat.

Hollis was "a guy who was very determined, a guy that wanted to continue to play basketball, a guy who did everything to try to win this game, whether it was getting a big rebound, whether it was pushing someone down, or whether it was making a big shot," Coach Karl Hobbs said.

The two teams traded baskets in the game's first 10 minutes, but with George Washington playing a zone defense to negate 6-foot-10 NBA prospect and VCU's leading scorer, junior Larry Sanders, the Rams entered halftime with

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a 12-point lead after 10 of its 16 baskets came from three-point range.

Freshman Lasan Kromah (18 points) helped the Colonials close the gap to 51-49 to begin the second half, scoring six during a 15-6 run. But it wasn't enough, as the Colonials went more than four minutes without a field goal when the Rams switched to a zone defense.

VCU finished with four players in double figures, led by guard Joey Rodriguez's 16 points. The collective effort ensured Hollis's last-ditch barrage would not be enough.

"The experience for our guys to play in postseason is immeasurable," Hobbs said.

"It motivates them to dream the dream and the ultimate dream for our program is winning the Atlantic 10 tournament and playing in the NCAA tournament."

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