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## SLU takes licking in first game of CBI series

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RICHMOND, Va. — There were a number of reasons St. Louis lost to Virginia Commonwealth 68-56 Monday night in the opening game of the best-of-three College Basketball Invitational.

The Billikens committed too many turnovers (16), allowed the Rams to shoot considerably better from the field than most of their previous opponents and went to the foul line only twice.

But, according to SLU coach Rick Majerus, the main reason had nothing to do with statistics.

"They took it to us in every way possible," said Majerus. "They were more physical. They were more aggressive, played with a heightened sense of intensity. We didn't match their physical presence or their intensity level in things like blocking out and ball screens.

"This game was not so much about anything technical as it was about pressure, energy and tentativeness."

The good news for the Billikens (23-12) is that this loss doesn't end their season. In this unique CBI setup, a team has to win twice to take the championship.

Game 2 will be Wednesday night at Chaifetz Arena at 7 p.m., and Game 3, if necessary, is also scheduled for SLU's home court Friday at 7 p.m.

"I'm just discouraged tonight," said Majerus. "We got our butt kicked. Hopefully, we can make some adjustments by looking at our mistakes. The biggest mistake was not matching their intensity level."

It didn't help SLU's cause that guard Kwamain Mitchell had to sit out brief periods of each half when he got banged around.

The sophomore, who finished with 10 points (six below his average), played only 27 minutes because of a knee injury in the first half and a shoulder mishap in the second.

"It kept me out of my groove," said Mitchell. "The first time I went out I banged knees with one of their players and my knee got kind of tingly. The second time I got hit on the peak (of his shoulder) real hard. I was trying to fight through it but it kept bothering me."

After staying close to the Rams (26-9) for most of the opening half, the Billikens were outscored 13-4 in the final two minutes and trailed 36-25 at the break, to the delight of a Siegel Center crowd of 4,386.

SLU came out strong to start the second half, posted the first six points and eventually narrowed the gap to 41-38 on a basket by Mitchell at 14:38. VCU guard Joey Rodriguez then took matters into his own hands and outscored the Billikens 14-4 by himself to all but put it away.

"I guess we got too comfortable and they went on a run," said Mitchell. "We came back fighting but it was too late.'

VCU scored 25 points off turnovers, compared to only nine for SLU, and shot 48.2 percent from the floor. The Rams also nailed six of their first eight attempts from behind the arc and ended the evening at 43 percent on 3-pointers in improving to 18-1 at home.

The Billikens entered the game holding foes to 28.2 percent from 3-point range.

Willie Reed had 11 points for SLU, while Cody Ellis added 10 but was 0 for six on 3's.

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