

[print](#) | [close](#)

SLU loses CBI title series

BY TOM TIMMERMANN

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Thursday, Apr. 01 2010

The longest St. Louis University basketball season finally came to an end Wednesday, and the Billikens certainly looked like the grind had taken its toll.

By advancing to the best-of-three final of the College Basketball Invitational tournament, SLU was one of the last eight teams in the nation still playing, along with the NCAA's Final Four and the NIT's final two. SLU's season went longer than any in the program's history and almost 2½ weeks past what looked like would be the end at the Atlantic 10 tournament. SLU got itself some valuable playing and practice time while pushing its fatigue level pretty much to the limit.

But if SLU was pushing itself to a limit physically, it couldn't push the series to the limit. SLU fell 71-65 to Virginia Commonwealth before 5,612 at Chaifetz Arena, giving VCU a 2-0 win in the best-of-three series and the championship crystal vase that goes with the event. No nets were cut down. VCU coach Shaka Smart got doused with some sort of energy drink in the locker room.

It was different for SLU. Already down to eight scholarship players because of injuries, SLU had three more players in pain at times Wednesday. Kyle Cassity hurt his leg during the game, and that limited his effectiveness. "He was like a dying dog," said SLU coach Rick Majerus, who wanted to take Cassity out, but the guard pleaded to keep playing. Center Willie Reed left the court late in the game with cramps and Kwamain Mitchell was getting his thigh rubbed during every stoppage of play down the stretch. SLU was so banged up it had to rely heavily not only on freshman Cory Remekun, who had the best game of his Billikens career, but on freshman walk-on Darrin Young, who kept SLU going in the first half.

"It was tough," Reed said. "We were getting tired because we were so short of players on our team on the bench. We've got to fight through it and that's going to come with strength and conditioning in the summer."

"Those guys are fatigued out, obviously," Majerus said.

The season ended on an awkward note for the Billikens. SLU (23-13) couldn't shoot well enough from outside, making just two of 18 3-point tries, and couldn't stop VCU enough, especially in the second half, when the Rams shot 56.7 percent from the field. VCU's overall percentage of 52.9 from the field made it the first SLU opponent this season to exceed 50 percent. Brandon Rozzell came off the bench to score 27 points for VCU.

Reed had 16 points and six rebounds before fouling out, and Christian Salecich and Remekun each had 13 points. Remekun also had seven rebounds. Mitchell, Salecich and Cody Ellis were a combined eight for 37 from the field.

"We get so many open shots we can't hit," Majerus said. "I told those guys, you've got to be able to make shots."

SLU led by nine early in the second half, but VCU quickly closed the lead to two and from the 12-minute mark to the two-minute mark of the half, neither team led by more than three points.

The game was tied at 61-61 with 2½ minutes to play when VCU's Jamie Skeen drove to the hoop for a basket to put the Rams ahead. SLU was called for a shot-clock violation on the next possession and Skeen scored on another drive with 1:05 left to put VCU up four and turn up the pressure on SLU.

Salecich missed a 3 with 40 seconds left, and that started a procession to the free throw line for VCU. SLU couldn't catch up.

If you enjoy reading about interesting news, you might like the 3 O'Clock Stir from STLtoday.com. Sign up and you'll receive an email with unique stories of the day, every Monday-Friday, at no charge.
Sign up at <http://newsletters.stltoday.com>
