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With offense in overdrive, Jays in CBI semifinals

By Steven Pivovar

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

Creighton's Antoine Young shoots around Davidson's Nik Cochran in the first half. Young scored 22 points and had nine assists.

- **Box Score:** [Creighton 102, Davidson 92](#)
- **Photo Showcase:** [Creighton vs. Davidson, March 21](#)

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The College Basketball Invitational is bringing out the best in Creighton's offense but is doing some damage to coach Greg McDermott's defensive pride.

The Bluejays have recorded two of their top three offensive showings of the season in the tournament, including a season high in Monday's 102-92 victory over Davidson that moves them into Wednesday's 7:05 p.m. semifinal against Central Florida at Qwest Center Omaha.

"Offensively, we are functioning at a high level," McDermott said.

McDermott's team has needed to be clicking on all offensive cylinders in order to battle its way through the first two rounds. San Jose State pressed the Bluejays in the opening game before they pulled out an 85-74 win.

Monday, Creighton scored 82 points in the first 35 minutes but found itself trailing by one when Davidson's JP Kuhlman buried a 3-point shot with 4:21 to play. Kuhlman's basket capped a dogged comeback from an eight-point deficit and appeared to put momentum on the Wildcats' side.

Creighton grabbed it right back in a decisive 14-3 run that featured three-point plays by Antoine Young and Gregory Echenique and two 3-point baskets by Josh Jones.

"I think we're showing just how much we've grown as a team," said Young, who had 22 points, nine assists and no turnovers in 37 minutes. "The chemistry we have on this team is huge at this point.

"We've been in most games all the way up until the end during the season, but we've had some trouble finishing some games off. We're doing that now, and I think that's a good sign of growth."

Doug McDermott, who led Creighton with a career-high 31 points and 10 rebounds, agreed.

"We're showing that we can stick together and stay the course," he said.

Most in the crowd of 4,832 at the Qwest Center wouldn't argue. A team that let a handful of wins slip away at points during the regular season showed steely resolve with its season on the line.

Young followed Kuhlman's 3-pointer with his three-point play that put Creighton ahead 85-83 with 3:36 remaining. Jake Cohen countered with a basket to tie the game but missed the free throw that would have completed the three-point play.

The Wildcats got the rebound, but Chris Czerapowicz misfired on a 3-point attempt.

“We had our chances,” Davidson coach Bob McKillop said. “We had a chance to retake the lead there with three minutes to play, but we miss a free throw and a wide-open 3. Then, we couldn’t get stops on the defensive end.”

Echenique’s three-point play when fouled on a monster dunk put Creighton back in front with 2:32 left. Jones’ 3-pointer on the next possession hiked the lead to 91-85. After a free throw by Kuhlman, Jahenns Manigat made two free throws and Jones put the final touches on a career-high 21-point game with another 3-pointer from the corner.

“We refused to panic when we fell behind,” Young said.

Actually, Creighton had plenty of chances to get jittery throughout the game, falling behind 7-0 and trailing for all but 11 seconds of the first half. Davidson led by 50-43 with 1:25 left before halftime, but the Bluejays strung together a 6-0 run to close the half.

“Coach always emphasizes to play well the entire half,” said De’Mon Brooks, who led Davidson with 21 points. “We played well for about 19 minutes and 30 seconds, but then we got out of attack mode and let them have some easy baskets. We relaxed, and it turned out to be huge.”

Jones, who had 17 points in the second half, gave Creighton its first lead of the second half with a jumper, then followed it with his first 3-pointer for the Bluejays’ first lead of more than a point. He made 7 of 11 shots, including all four of his shots from beyond the arc.

“The guys were kidding me in the locker room, calling me, ‘Legend,’ ” Jones said with a broad smile. “I just tried to make some plays. And if they want to call me ‘Legend,’ I’ll take it.”

Jones had not scored more than eight points in a game in more than a month, but he came up big when his team needed him. So did Wayne Runnels, who filled in admirably when fellow big men Echenique, Kenny Lawson and McDermott got in foul trouble.

Runnels, a 6-foot-6 senior, played a season-high 23 minutes, scored nine points and grabbed five rebounds.

“This one means the world to me,” he said. “I’ve just tried to do my best to stay positive and stay ready even when I wasn’t playing a lot. That’s the key — stay ready.”

Davidson, too, experienced foul problems, as the Wildcats were called for 32 that allowed Creighton to shoot 43 free throws, making 36. That helped offset the Wildcats’ advantage of four field goals built on 53.1 percent shooting.

The 92 points Creighton allowed were a season high. It also marked the first time in 10 seasons as a Division I coach that one of Greg McDermott’s teams had won a game when allowing 90 points or more.

“I’ve always taken great pride in teaching defense,” McDermott said. “Bob McKillop made a mockery of that tonight.”

Contact the writer:

402-679-2298, steve.pivovar@owh.com

twitter.com/PivOWH

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