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Wright State players grateful for chance to play in CBI



Wright State's AJ Pacher dunks in the final seconds of the first half. David Jablonski/Staff

By [David Jablonski](#)
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FAIRBORN — The crowd at the Nutter Center gave Wright State a standing ovation as the final seconds of the 2012-13 season ticked away. It didn't matter that the Raiders had just the lost game. The fans understood what the team had accomplished by getting this far.

The 81-69 loss to Santa Clara on Wednesday in the semifinals of the College Basketball Invitational ended the longest season in Wright State history, and the players expressed their gratitude after the game for the chance to play three more home games in the CBI.

“Obviously, we were all hungry to play,” Wright State junior Matt Vest said. “I think the entire university wanted us to go to the NCAA tournament. We did, too. Once we got in this, I think coach (Billy) Donlon's personality really took over. Whether it's 3-on-3 pickup at the Y, or whatever, you want to win every game. I'm just really grateful to the administration, (athletic director) Bob Grant and President (David) Hopkins for letting us getting into this thing. It's not free. We know it's not free. The fan support has been unbelievable.”

Barring offseason changes, the Raiders will return everyone next season. A team that had no seniors this season will have five next season.

“We have to be hungrier than ever,” junior AJ Pacher said. “The six guys that remained here after last season were so hungry after everyone told us we were going to be bad. We were picked to finish last. It's got to be the same way wherever we're picked next year. We've got to have the same attitude this offseason.”

Foster stars: Santa Clara's Kevin Foster, a redshirt senior who's the school's all-time leading scorer, scored 33 points. He had 34 Monday against Purdue. Donlon said Foster was the best player the Raiders saw this season.

"With a player like that, you've got to be almost perfect," Vest said. "He hit some tough shots. Once he hits one, it turns into two, and he starts feeling good. We made some mistakes, but you've got to credit them. They're a real high-powered offense."

Perspective: The Raiders finished the season 23-13. It's the sixth time the program has won at least 23 games in 43 seasons. That's counting the years it competed in NCAA Division II. The program's overall record is now 729-501.

Donlon said the Raiders were playing their best basketball at the end of the season.

"When you think about not having Cole Darling," Donlon said, "they just continued to fight, rally and claw and made it to the Horizon League championship game and beat two quality opponents in Tulsa and Richmond in the CBI and lost to a very quality team in Santa Clara."

Loose balls: The Raiders didn't get many lucky bounces against Santa Clara, and a lot of that had to do with the Broncos. They out-rebounded Wright State 34-27 and 13-4 on the offensive end.

Santa Clara outscored Wright State 19-7 in points off turnovers and 11-4 in second-chance points.

"The two things we kept repeating were, 'Don't get spread, and they're beating you to every loose ball,'" Donlon said. "Every rebound the entire night, you held your breath hoping you'd get it, and that should only happen on a few of them. Some of that is their size. They're big boys. When somebody weighs a lot more than you at every position, it's impactful. We were freezing when the shot went up, and you can't do that against a good team."