

CBI Championship 2013: George Mason vs. Santa Clara Breakdown and Predictions

By

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Rafael Suanes-USA TODAY Sports

Very few college basketball teams get a chance to end the season with a win. Either George Mason or Santa Clara will be able to finish the year a high note by winning the College Basketball Invitational.

While teams do not usually start the season hoping to play in the [CBI](#), it is often a great stepping stone toward future success. The last three winners (Pittsburgh, Oregon and VCU) were all in the NCAA tournament this season after successful years.

Either squad taking part in this best-of-three series for the championship can build off this performance for next season.

Still, a win will not be easy, as both sides will leave it all on the table in the title round. Here is a breakdown of the championship games that will be played on April 1, April 3 and April 5 (if necessary).

George Mason

How They Got Here



USA TODAY Sports

Things did not go according to plan for Paul Hewitt's team. After a solid nonconference season that featured a win over Virginia and close losses to New Mexico and Maryland, the Patriots fell apart in conference play.

George Mason struggled both home and away and finished fifth in the CAA with a 10-8 record. However, the squad woke up for the CBI and won two close games over College of Charleston and Houston to reach the semifinals.

Jonathan Arledge then led the way with 23 points in the semifinals win over Western Michigan and the squad with only one senior is looking to cap off the season the right way.

Player to Watch: Sherrod Wright



Rafael Suanes-USA TODAY Sports

The go-to scorer in almost every game for George Mason is Sherrod Wright. The junior is the only player on the team averaging double-digit points at 16.7 points per game and has only been held to less than 10 points in six games this year.

Wright is an excellent scorer that can shoot well from the outside or beat a defender off the dribble and finish at the rim.

He is also incredibly efficient and knows when to pass up a tough shot in favor of a better one for a teammate.

However, the guard has to come through with some big scoring games for George Mason to get a pair of wins.

Key to the Game: Win the Rebounding Battle



Rafael Suanes-USA TODAY Sports

George Mason has not been great on the boards this season, but the Patriots will need to win the rebounding battle against Santa Clara to win the game.

The Patriots have a great deal of size for a mid-major team with five players listed a 6'8" or taller. They must use that height to get extra opportunities inside and easy put-backs.

Specifically, Jonathan Arledge and Erik Copes must stay strong inside and secure the ball at every opportunity.

Santa Clara

How They Got Here



James Snook-USA TODAY Sports

Those that say Gonzaga had no competition in the West Coast Conference have never seen Santa Clara play. The Broncos are a very good offensive team that has the ability to play with almost any team in the country.

During the year, they beat Saint Louis and played Duke very tough in Cameron Indoor Stadium.

In the CBI, the Broncos have kept up the solid play with wins over Vermont, Purdue and Wright State while averaging over 80 points per game.

If they keep up the pace, they will be very tough to stop.

Player to Watch: Kevin Foster



Kelley L Cox-USA TODAY Sports

It is obvious that Kevin Foster wants to end his career on top. One of the best scorers in the country averaged 19 points per game this season, which was his fifth in an injury-filled run with the Broncos.

The guard has scored 2,355 points in his career and he just continues to get better. In three CBI games, he is averaging 30 points per game.

While Foster has a great deal of help on the offensive end from teammates like Marc Trasolini and Evan Roquemore, the senior is the one who runs the show for Santa Clara.

If he gets hot from outside, George Mason will struggle to keep up.

Key to Game: Speed Up the Pace



Mark Dolejs-USA TODAY Sports

Santa Clara is at its best when it runs a fast-paced attack. The Broncos have some of the quickest guards around and they can use that ability to get up the floor and attack the rim in a hurry.

Even though George Mason survived a high-scoring game against Houston, this is not how the Patriots like to play. Going fast will get them out of their element, and they will start turning the ball over and forcing bad shots.

Pushing the situation will also create plenty of opportunities on the offense end as George Mason will struggle to guard everyone on the floor.

Predicted Winner: Santa Clara

This battle should be close, and it would not be surprising if all three games are needed after the teams split the first two. However, Santa Clara should be able to come out on top.

The Broncos simply have too much offense, and it will be almost impossible for George Mason to defend them for 80 or 120 minutes of game time.

Look for Kevin Foster to make his mark on this tournament with a few more outstanding scoring performances.