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Rams cap season with CBI championship sweep



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VCU's Larry Sanders, (left) T.J. Gwynn, (center) and Brandon Rozzell celebrate after VCU defeated Saint Louis in the second game of the CBI championship series on March 31, 2010, in St. Louis.

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By [Tim Pearrell](#)

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ST. LOUIS -- CBI championship series

The disappointment of the regular season and the frustration of not getting into the NIT melted away for the Virginia Commonwealth basketball team last night.

The Rams got some measure of redemption, winning the College Basketball Invitational with a second-half performance that put their road ghosts to rest.

Down nine to Saint Louis at halftime, VCU rallied behind a career-high 27 points from Brandon Rozzell, brilliance inside from Jamie Skeen (16 points) and some shut-down defense at the end to beat the Billikens 71-65 before a crowd of 5,612 at Chaifetz Arena.

VCU, which finished 27-9, won both games of the best-of-three championship series. The Rams took the first game 68-56 at the Siegel Center.

VCU fell short of its ultimate goal of winning the Colonial Athletic Association championship and getting an NCAA bid. Then the Rams were shocked that they were snubbed by the NIT, despite an RPI of 66 and a solid nonconference résumé.

But they regrouped in the CBI.

"This is the way to cap off a year," Rozzell said. "Twentyseven wins, you can't complain about that. We had different goals at the start of the season. We just took advantage of this tournament and will carry it on to next year, building chemistry and building confidence."

Said Skeen: "It's just a momentum builder going into next year. We're losing some seniors, but it's going to give us some confidence for next year. We went out this season with a bang."

Given the Rams' troubles holding leads on the road this season -- VCU was 6-7 away from home -- and the fact Saint Louis was 32-6 all-time at Chaifetz, that seemed improbable.

But VCU shook off a miserable first half and fought back.

Rozzell, quiet in the first game (five points), was brilliant in the second. He had 10 points in the first half and 17 in the second, burying a tendency to be good at home and so-so on the road.

"I try not to think about it every time I step into a different arena on the road," Rozzell said. "Me and Coach [Shaka] Smart had a talk before the game today. We wanted this to be our last game. I kept that in mind. I just put aside I wasn't in the Siegel Center for one night and just went out there and played as hard as I could."

Rozzell got the Rams even at 46 with 11:33 left with a 3-pointer. The game went back and forth until Joey Rodriguez, the tournament MVP, finally put VCU ahead, just beating the shot-clock buzzer with a 3-pointer from the corner. He finished with 13 points last night and totaled for the 89 for the tournament.

Skeen took over from there, scoring seven consecutive points. That, and some tough defense -- something the Rams have lacked in some of their road meltdowns -- enabled VCU to pull away.

Saint Louis didn't score from the 3:04 mark until 16 seconds remained.

"Just trying to get home," Skeen said. "I like St. Louis a lot, but I'm ready to go home."

Said Rozzell: "We handled adversity in the second half. It's all about maturing. We matured some since the regular season."

The Rams dumped a bucket of Gatorade on Smart in the locker room afterward. He apologized for his postgame attire -- a gray CBI championship T-shirt under his coat -- but didn't need to apologize for the smile.

"I couldn't be more pleased with the way our team responded," he said. "We talked all year about responding to adversity and having a level of resolve when you hit tough times. We certainly have had tough times at different periods this year. We've had a lot of good times, too. This one right here ranks up at the top."

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[Flag Comment](#) Posted by Clark_Griswold on April 01, 2010 at 1:47 pm

Richnative, going 5-0 against the A-10 is significant, especially since you've pointed out that 3 of the A-10 teams finished in the top 25. VCU mopped the floor with the A-10 and in case that wasn't enough for you, UNC will add insult to injury when it mops the floor with Dayton tonight. Richmond was in the CBI in '08 and '09 and couldn't bring home the banner. If you want to see what it looks like it will be hanging in the Siegel Center.