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## CBI a treat of everyone

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TROY — OK, so this wasn't the Big Dance, or even the Little Dance.

But the College Basketball Invitational matchup in Trojan Arena on Wednesday night between visiting College of Charleston and Troy was something special to watch.

Coached by the crafty veteran Bobby Cremins, the former Georgia Tech boss, Charleston hung on for dear life to beat Troy 93-91 after the Trojans rallied from a 19-point halftime deficit.

Fun, fun stuff to witness.

It was a delight to watch if you love seeing teams get up and down the court at a furious pace.

And especially fun if you enjoy wonderful shooting behind the 3-point line.

Putting on a shooting exhibition which left the 1,000 or so fans in attendance oohing and aahing, the Cougars fired in a season-high 16 3-pointers — 13 of those coming in the first half.

By the break, Troy was already behind 56-37. It looked as if the game was over, really.

"It was a classic in the first half," Cremins said. "I was ready to get on the bus."

Hold on, there. Troy wasn't ready to call it a night.

"You could see it in their eyes they weren't going to quit," Troy coach Don Maestri said.

We shouldn't have expected anything less.

It was during the last 20 minutes that Charleston and everyone else in attendance got a first-hand look at the true heart of the Trojan basketball team.

Troy went into a man-to-man defense in the second half and the fight was on.

"I knew eventually they would go man-to-man, and our big men didn't deliver," Cremins said.

With the defensive pressure turned up, Charleston cooled off a little. In contrast, the Trojans caught fire behind senior Mario Telfair, who played like a man possessed.

Sporting a new hair-style — the dreadlocks now gone — Telfair had a career-high in points (27), rebounds (9) and free throws made (9).

“I feel a little lighter now,” Telfair said of his haircut.

But that had nothing to do with his performance. It was all about a will to win.

“I just felt like I didn’t want the season to end,” Telfair said. “I played my heart out. (The performance) feels OK, but I still wanted to win and play with my team another game.”

Troy pulled within one at 90-89 with 18 seconds left when Richard Delk made one of two free throws, and missed on a chance to tie when sharpshooter Brandon Hazzard missed a long, long 3-pointer after Charleston went up 92-89.

By the way, this Charleston team owns a 27-8 record, which includes wins over the likes of South Carolina and Davidson. Those two teams faced off last night in the NIT.

“I’m just glad to get out of here with a win,” Cremins said.

Maestri was glad to have his team together once more.

He said this bunch of Trojans is among the most enjoyable he’s been around during his 27 years at the school. He loves the way they have meshed on and off the court.

“I really hate to see these guys leave,” Maestri said of the seniors.

Because of the CBI, in its second year of existence, Maestri and the Troy fans got a final look at a special group.

Maestri raved about the tourney — calling it first-class and something that is needed in the college basketball world.

After watching this game, who could argue?