

VCU Takes Down Rockets in Home Opener, 87-78

[box score](#)

Senior Briante Weber's strong second half helped propel the Rams past a feisty Toledo Rockets squad in an 87-78 victory for VCU. Weber scored 13 of his 18 points in the final 20 minutes, while junior Melvin Johnson and senior Treveon Graham led all scorers with 22 points apiece.

While Toledo showed a willingness to keep up with the Rams in the first half, even jumping out to a halftime lead, but the Rockets' just could not keep up with the Rams as the game wore on, surrendering three turnovers in the final two minute to seal their fate.

Graham opened up scoring with a trey as the shot clock was winding down, sending the crowd into a frenzy, but Toledo's Julius Brown quickly answered with a three of his own, a harbinger of the Rockets' ability to stick with VCU all night.

Neither team was able to keep the other down for very long, but Toledo did hold a lead for the majority of the first half, thanks in large part to center Nathan Boothe's shooting range. The big man poured in 14 points in the first half, including two clutch threes: one to give his team the lead and one to extend the lead the six, Toledo's largest advantage of the game.

The Rockets' ability to get to the line in the first half really helped their cause. Toledo was 15-of-18 from the charity stripe in the first 20 minutes, while VCU attempted just seven free throws, making five.

Weber's big second half started with his trey at the 18:16 mark to give VCU its first lead in over 10 minutes of game time, making the score 47-46.

Sophomore Jordan Burgess' five-straight points, capped off by a big 3-pointer at 10:31, put VCU out in front 62-61, giving his squad a lead that it would not relinquish.

Toledo was not without chances in the final minutes of the game, but the Rams turned the heat up on defense, forcing turnovers and crashing the boards to create chances for themselves and take chances away from the Rockets. After Burgess' five-point streak, VCU outrebounded Toledo 10 to 5.

A 9-0 run in the waning moments of the game ended up being the death knell for Toledo, as it helped VCU's advantage balloon to 10 points, 82-72, with just 1:14 remaining, the largest lead either team would have on the evening.

The Rams have now won 21 consecutive home games, the fifth-longest current home winning streak in the nation.

After today's win VCU is now 7-0 under Shaka Smart when facing teams from Ohio, and also 7-0 in games that tipoff at 6 P.M.

The last time two Rams each scored 20 points was last season's February 12 tilt with George Washington; Johnson and Graham were the 20-point scorers that day as well.

Tonight was the second-straight game that Johnson had a huge first half. Against Tennessee he went into the locker room at halftime with 20 points, including four 3-pointers. In this game he had 17 first half points and was a perfect 5-5 from the free throw line.

VCU will host Maryland Eastern Shore this Thursday at 7 P.M. before continuing play in the Progressive Legends Classic. The Rams travel up to Brooklyn to play Villanova on Monday at the Barclays Center, then play either Michigan or Oregon the following day.