

Broncos Survive Bison, Advance in CBI

box score

KALAMAZOO, Mich. - The Western Michigan men's basketball team erased an early deficit and held off a late rally from North Dakota State, with the Broncos holding on for a 72-71 overtime win in the first round of the 2013 College Basketball Invitational, played at University Arena. With the win, the Broncos improve to 21-12 on the season, and will advance to the second round of the tournament; they will face Wyoming on the road on Monday, March 25.

The Bison started the game red-hot, outscoring the Broncos 15-2 to open the proceedings, but WMU chipped away until taking the lead midway through the second half. The Broncos led by as many as 11 points in the second half, but North Dakota State fought back and tied the game at the end of regulation with a jumper from the free throw line by TrayVonn Wright.

Connar Tava gave the Broncos their only lead of overtime at the very end, making a pair of free throws while the Broncos trailed 71-70; he and Shayne Whittington each recorded blocks on the final possession for the Bison, sealing the postseason victory for the Broncos.

Whittington finished with a team-high 18 points, including a perfect 8 of 8 night from the free throw line, while Tava had 10 points, six rebounds, two steals, and a block. Brandon Pokley notched 15 points on 5 of 6 shooting for the Broncos, and David Brown came off the bench for 12 points and six boards. Western Michigan shot just 8 of 25 (.320) in the first half but went 16 of 31 (.516) the rest of the way.

The comeback began in earnest when the Broncos were at their lowest ebb; trailing 15-2 at the 15:56 mark of the first half, Western Michigan began chipping away at the Bison lead, and cut the deficit to single digits at the 7:54 mark when Pokley's pair of free throws made it 23-15. Pokley caught fire from the field late in the half, and made it a one-possession game with a three-ball on the fast break at the 5:08 mark. Pokley tipped in an offensive rebound with 3:30 to play to cut the Bison lead to 27-24, and Brown kept it a four-point game with a steal and a fast break lay-up at the 1:45 mark, making it 32-28 at the half.

The teams see-sawed back and forth early in the second half, with the Broncos taking their first lead of the night at the 11:45 mark when Tava stripped Taylor Braun and laid it in, giving his team a 44-43 lead. Taylor Perry tacked on to the lead with a three-pointer from the left corner to make it 47-43, and Whittington made it a two-possession ball-game with a pair of free throws with 8:52 to play. Pokley nailed a pull-up jumper at the 6:52 mark to stretch the lead to eight points, and Brown gave the Broncos their largest lead of the night with a three-pointer at the 4:24 mark that made it 58-47.

The Bison stormed back at the end of the half, going on a 15-2 run to close the second half and force an overtime period. They opened the bonus period on a 7-2 run, but the Broncos closed the gap thanks to stout defensive play. Pokley stripped Marshall Bjorklund with 13 seconds to play and fed the ball to Tava, who was fouled on his way to the hoop. Tava made the free throws, and the Broncos closed out for the win.

