

Crusaders Took Down Akron, 62-59

box score

Trailing by five points with just over four minutes to play Friday evening in its opening game of the Valparaiso Subregional of the 2K Sports Classic Benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer, Valparaiso held Akron scoreless the remainder of the game, scoring the contest's final eight points to earn a 62-59 victory at the Athletics-Recreation Center.

A fourth-chance basket by Demetrius Treadwell put Akron, which advanced to the NCAA Tournament in 2011 and won on the road at Mississippi State just last week, ahead 59-54 with 4:22 to go in the game. But the Crusaders' defense locked down, holding the Zips to 0-of-7 shooting the rest of the way, including a pair of key blocked shots by junior Ryan Broekhoff (Frankston, Victoria, Australia/Australian Institute of Sport). Sophomore Jay Harris (Aurora, Ill./Oswego East) also came up with a pair of huge steals in the game's final two minutes.

Offensively, Valpo got a bucket from junior Kevin Van Wijk (Hoofddorp, Netherlands/Katholieke Scholengemeenschap Hoofddorp) on a feed from Broekhoff with 3:18 to go for its final field goal to cut the deficit to 59-56. The Crusaders then went 6-for-8 from the charity stripe the rest of the way to close out the scoring. Junior Matt Kenney (Mooresville, Ind./Mooresville) was fouled on the break after pulling down a defensive rebound with 2:38 to go and hit both free throws, bringing the Crusaders within 59-58. Then, two trips later, Harris came up with the first of his steals and was fouled in the process, knocking down both attempts from the line to put Valpo ahead 60-59.

Akron had a second-chance opportunity on its next trip, but Harris came up with another steal with 1:20 to play. A shot clock violation on the Crusaders gave the Zips the ball back trailing by one with 44 seconds remaining. After a miss on a mid-range jumper, Broekhoff out-leapt everyone to secure the rebound and was fouled, splitting a pair from the foul line to make it 61-59 Valpo with 22 seconds left. After a timeout, Akron's Quincy Diggs misfired on a 3-point attempt and Kenney skied to corral the rebound. The junior was fouled with just over five seconds to play and split the pair of free throws to push the lead to 62-59. A last-ditch 3-point attempt by Alex Abreu was off the mark, giving the Crusaders the big home win.

Playing with just eight scholarship players, Valpo got big efforts from a number of the guys who stepped onto the court on Friday evening. A pair of Crusaders posted double-doubles, with Van Wijk picking up a double-double for the second straight game. The junior went 7-of-10 from the floor and 7-of-11 from the free throw line for a game-high 21 points and also added 10 rebounds. Meanwhile, Broekhoff came up with 13 points and 11 rebounds in 37 minutes of action for his second double-double of the year as well, while also adding three blocked shots.

In addition, Kenney narrowly missed a double-double, finishing the night with 11 points and nine rebounds. He also stuffed the rest of the stat sheet, tallying a team-high five assists while also posting three steals and a pair of huge blocked shots. Harris was the fourth Crusader in double figures, coming off the bench and going a perfect 8-of-8 from the foul line en route to 14 points and four steals.

"It was an unbelievable effort by our whole team tonight," said Crusader head coach Bryce Drew. "We had a number of guys tonight who stepped up and had spans when they carried the whole team, not just offensively, but defensively too. I thought on the inside, our guys did a great job shot-faking and drawing contact, and also really crashed the boards well. I thought that we did a very good job of double-teaming their posts defensively as well."

The Crusaders won Friday night with their inside presence and effort at the foul line, as Valpo failed to hit a 3-pointer, going 0-of-14 from beyond the arc. But the Crusaders hit 19-of-32 from inside the 3-point line and got to the foul line 38 times, connecting on 24 free throw attempts.

"I never dreamed we could survive going 0-for-14 on 3-pointers and having just 11 assists to 17 turnovers, but we told the team after the game you can't judge someone's heart on the stat sheet," said Drew. "The whole team just really showed tremendous heart tonight."

Akron (2-1) led for almost the entire first half, pushing the lead out to 10 points on a pair of occasions, including as late as 4:46 to play in the half with a 31-21 advantage. But the Crusaders fought back, ending the half on an 11-2 run which included five points from Harris. Valpo connected on just nine first half field goals,

but drew 18 fouls to get to the free throw line 21 times, making 14.

The Crusaders carried the momentum from the end of the first half into the final 20 minutes, eventually posting a 21-2 run spanning the two halves. A two-handed tip-in by Broekhoff on Valpo's first offensive possession of the half gave the Crusaders the lead, and the junior would have three of the first four buckets of the second half. A fast-break layup by Kenney with 16:20 to play gave Valpo its largest lead at 42-33, and the Crusaders eventually posted a stretch of over 10 minutes allowing just one Akron field goal.

But the Zips fought back, answering with eight straight points to close within one at 42-41 with 12:30 remaining. The teams started to trade the lead back-and-forth, with a 7-1 Akron run starting with 6:02 to play and ending on the aforementioned Treadwell putback giving the Zips the five-point lead that the Crusaders would rally from.

Treadwell and Diggs tied for team-high honors for Akron with 13 points each, while Nick Harney added 11 points off the bench in the losing effort. Treadwell also grabbed a team-best eight rebounds.

In the other game on the first day of the Valparaiso Subregional, Duquesne earned a 97-81 victory over University of the District of Columbia. Duquesne and Akron will play at 5 p.m. on Saturday, with Valparaiso taking on IU Kokomo at 7:30 p.m. As always, all the Crusaders' action can be heard live on the Valpo Sports Radio Network and seen live on the Horizon League Network. Links to the live audio and video, as well as live stats, will be available at www.valpoathletics.com.