

Patriots Hold California-Irvine in Check

George Mason's Jai Lewis leads with 18 points

[box score](#)

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. -- During preseason workouts, George Mason's basketball team spent a lot of time on its defense.

Will Thomas contributed 12 rebounds to George Mason's effort.

The work paid off, as the Patriots held California-Irvine in check for a 79-56 victory Thursday in the first round of the 2K Sports College Hoops Classic.

The Anteaters shot just 32.1 percent from the field (18-of-56) against George Mason's defense, including 2-for-18 from 3-point range, and were outrebounded 42-31.

"We weren't very good defensive team last year in long stretches," Patriots coach Jim Larranaga said. "We would play good defense for short periods of time. But this year, in our preseason games and in practice, we have been more consistent.

"Other than some silly fouls, I think we showed that we can be a good defensive team for longer periods of this year."

Jai Lewis had 18 points to lead George Mason (1-0), which plays No. 18 Wake Forest -- a 78-64 winner over Mississippi Valley State in Thursday's second game -- in Friday night's regional final at Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

"Tomorrow is another day -- I'm just going to enjoy this win and see what happens," said Lewis, who also had 11 rebounds.

Folarin Campbell scored 17 points and Tony Skinn 15 for the Patriots, who shot 54.4 percent from the field (31-of-57), including 10-of-20 3-pointers. Will Thomas had 12 rebounds.

Campbell scored 12 points in the first half as the Patriots -- behind 7-of-14 shooting from 3-point range -- took a 35-23 lead at halftime.

"We played a little better defense than last year, but they got a lot of offensive rebounds," Campbell said. "That's one thing we've got to work on, everybody crashing the boards and going for the rebounds."

George Mason then opened the second half by pounding the ball inside, with Lewis scoring eight points during a 12-4 run that pushed the Patriots' lead to 47-27 with 16:20 remaining.

Lewis also gave George Mason its biggest lead of the game, hitting a 3-pointer with 9:14 left that put the Patriots up 63-37.

Aaron Fitzgerald scored 11 points and Ross Schraeder had 10 points for the Anteaters (0-1), who will play the Wake Forest-Mississippi Valley State loser in a consolation game Friday.

"We never had a chance to get going or get over the hump," California-Irvine coach Pat Douglass said. "We didn't handle the pressure well. They were in control, and shot the three well. Hopefully we can learn from today and do better with the rest of the season."

