

Demon Deacons Advance to Next Round

Williams leads No. 18 Wake Forest past Mississippi Valley State

[box score](#)

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. -- Eric Williams had 22 points and nine rebounds Thursday night to lead No. 18 Wake Forest past Mississippi Valley State 78-64 in the first round of the 2K Sports College Hoops Classic.

Justin Gray scored 10 points and a career-best eight assists

Trent Strickland added 16 points and a career-best 12 rebounds for the Demon Deacons, who have won 12 straight season openers. Wake Forest hasn't lost a home opener in 17 years.

Richard Cannon scored 19 points for the Delta Devils, who gave the Demon Deacons fits much of the game before Wake Forest pulled away in the final minutes.

The 6-foot-9, 280-pound Williams led the way for the Demon Deacons, going 10-for-12 from the field and throwing down several dunks against the undersized Delta Devils. He went 9-for-10 in the second half, helping Wake Forest shoot 72 percent after the break.

Still, this was not how the Demon Deacons wanted to come off one of the most successful seasons in program history. All-American point guard Chris Paul led Wake Forest to a 27-6 finish and helped the school earn its first No. 1 ranking in 2004-05, but he took his game to the NBA after two seasons.

And with the departure of seniors Taron Downey, Vytas Danelius and Jamaal Levy, the Demon Deacons were left with just five returnees with Division I experience.

The Demon Deacons shot 66 percent for the game and had a 36-26 edge on the glass, but they committed 19 turnovers and gave up plenty of uncontested looks at the basket. Mississippi Valley State scored 18 points off those turnovers, got 17 more shot attempts and hit nine 3-pointers to hang around.

Mississippi Valley State - which trailed by 14 midway through the first half - even tied it at 52 when Stanford Speech banked in an open 3-pointer with 9:42 left.

But Wake Forest pushed the ball upcourt to Strickland, who hit a hanging layup in the lane only 5 seconds later. His free throw completed the three-point play, putting the Demon Deacons ahead to stay at 55-52.

Then, with Wake Forest holding a 59-56 lead, Michael Drum hit a spinning shot and drew the foul. It was the first of two three-point plays from Drum, the first non-scholarship starter for the program in five years, and helped the Demon Deacons take a 65-58 lead with 6:16 left.

Wake Forest gradually increased the lead to as many as 16 points late.

Justin Gray, a returning all-conference performer for Wake Forest, had 10 points and a career-best eight assists as Paul's successor as starting point guard. But he didn't hit a 3-pointer, snapping his streak of 53 games with at least one made 3.

