I've been trying to tell you guys.

Lets all take a moment to welcome the Cleveland State Vikings back into the hearts of Cleveland's sports fans. With Thursday's 56-52 upset of #12 Butler, Viking basketball has officially been put back on the map for Clevelanders. Gone is the tag of disappointing. You can forget about re-building. And after last night's amazing victory in front of 5,352 frenzied fans, Gary Waters' team is no longer this city's best kept secret.

Take notice Cleveland, the Vikings are back.

It was obvious from the opening tap that CSU had no intentions of allowing a repeat of Butler's last trip into Cleveland when the Bulldogs canned a record-setting 20 three-pointers. This time around the Vikings controlled the tempo early, thanks to some intense defensive pressure and an active crowd that more than doubled this season's average attendance at the Wolstein Center.

CSU found Chris Moore under the basket for a lay-up on the first possession and hit George Tandy for a foul-line jumper on the next to jump out 4-0. After two Butler free throws, the Vikings' J'Nathan Bullock countered with a short jumper of his own following two straight offensive rebounds to push the lead to 6-2.

By the time Butler notched its first field goal to cut the lead to 6-4 with 16:46

remaining in the first half, the tone had already been set. Through the first three-plus minutes of the game, the swarming Vikings recorded three offensive rebounds and three steals while holding Butler to zero-for-two shooting from beyond the arc.

In a game within the game, CSU gained a psychological edge and energized the crowd by starting strongly. Not only did the Vikings show themselves, and the crowd, that they could hang with Butler, but they proved to be the more physical team that could take control of the contest.

CSU's three leading scorers, Bullock, Cedric Jackson, and Joe Davis scored 23 of the Vikings 31 first half points, led by Davis who lit up the Bulldogs for eight points in the final 7:20 of the half. The sophomore from Warrensville Heights nailed a deep three with 56 seconds remaining to give CSU its biggest lead of the game at eight.

The crowd rose in unison to cheer on the Vikings at the defensive end, but veteran guard A.J. Graves was able to connect on a three pointer for Butler to cut the lead to five. CSU never trailed in the first half and went into the locker room up 31-26.

The second half feature more of the same, as the crowd never quieted down after Davis' three. The Vikings continued to attack on offense and defense, drawing three quick fouls on drives to the basket and allowing Butler to convert only one of five field goal attempts to start the half.

CSU regained an eight point advantage with 17:05 remaining in the game but from there the Vikings lost their rhythm on offense. CSU missed an opportunity to separate as they split three pairs of free throws and Jackson committed four straight turnovers. Thanks in part to the miscues, Butler slowly chipped away at the Vikings lead. The Bulldogs tied the game at 38 and again at 42 before eventually taking a 44-42 lead on a Mike Green lay-up.

For the second straight game, Gary Waters called the number of Bullock to pull the offense out of its funk. The junior forward responded with a tough inside lay-up to tie the game, 44-44. After the two teams alternated free throws, Bullock again responded with a hard fought lay-up, this time giving the Vikings the lead for good, 48-46 with 4:54 to play.

The final minutes saw Butler get within two points only once, following Green's pickpocket of Jackson and the ensuing lay-up to cut CSU's lead to 50-48. Jackson immediately atoned for the mistake by drilling a three-pointer on the next possession to push the lead back to five.

Butler cut the lead to three on another Green lay-up and had three chances to tie within the final minute, but Pete Campbell, Graves, and Julian Betko all missed contested three-pointers.

Proving how far they've come since last season's disastrous performance against virtually the exact same Butler lineup, CSU held the Bulldogs to 6-23 (.261) shooting from beyond the arc. Butler came into the game shooting .395 from three as a team.

It's been a long time coming for this Cleveland State program. With Waters' fist pump to the crowd following the final buzzer and the students rushing onto the court in celebration, a new era of Vikings basketball has arrived.

Welcome back Cleveland State, we missed you.