The Cleveland State Vikings opened their much anticipated '08-'09 basketball season Saturday with a come-from-behind 58-55 victory over Summit League contender Oakland. CSU had a miserable shooting first half and didn't get the normal contributions from all-league players J'Nathan Bullock and Cedric Jackson, yet the Vikings were able to claw back into the game behind gritty defense and clutch shooting. In Ryan Aroney's latest, he recaps the win and expresses disbelief at the mild turnout.

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Oakland did a great job of taking Bullock out of his offensive rhythm by dropping its zone into constant double and triple teams into the lap of the 6-5 forward. Bullock fought through the frustrating night by putting up a workman-like 11 points

and 10 rebounds. Point guard Cedric Jackson also had a tough go at it on the offensive end, struggling through a 3-of-14 shooting night. Despite the poor shooting, Jackson still had a major impact on the game for the Vikings with 8 points, 7 rebounds, 6 assists and 3 steals in 29 minutes.

With 5:14 remaining and CSU trailing by one, Jackson left with leg cramps and turned the offense over to Cole. The sophomore looked poised under pressure and eventually nailed a jumper to give CSU its first lead of the game at 55-53. The Vikings never trailed again. Fellow sophomore Brown scored ten of his 15 points in the second half to help bring CSU back from deficits of 12 and 10.

Saturday's exciting season opener was played at the Wolstein Center in front of 2,078 fans.

You read that right.

Just over 2,000 people came out to watch a Vikings team that is the favorite to win the Horizon League and advance to the school's first NCAA tournament since 1986, the same hard-nosed and blue collar team that improved from 20 losses to 21 wins and an NIT birth a year ago.

What gives Cleveland? I'm a Cleveland sports fan since birth and I know quite a lot of people similar to myself. One thing I know is Cleveland is starved for a winner. Not only a winner, but a winner that embodies the qualities of this great city, a winner with players that care and play hard and represent the name on the front of their jersey with the same pride that we take in cheering those jerseys on.

The Cleveland State Vikings are exactly that. There is a reason the Vikings don't have names on the back of their jerseys. These kids leave everything they have on the floor for their team.

Where else in Cleveland sports can you find this? The Vikings have a proven winner as head coach, a roster with players from across the county that chose to live in Cleveland and local players that bring their pride for Cleveland with them to the arena every time they take the court. This roster also features star players that care about winning more than improving their stats and complimentary players that accept their roles without complaint, all of them playing hard through the final whistle without quitting.

The Browns and the Indians each struggle to match many of these characteristics.

The Cavaliers are playing superb basketball during their current seven game winning streak, and I was sure to rush home after the CSU game to watch the Mo Williams-led excitement on my DVR, but the Cavs don't offer eight dollar tickets or buy-one-get-one deals or dollar hotdogs. And tonight's opponent offered Carlos Boozer as a perfect example of everything that's wrong with professional sports.

Plain and simple, the Cleveland State Vikings are the closest of any of the Cleveland sports teams to actually representing the fans, and they do it at half the cost and double the excitement.

The next chance to watch this team is next Saturday at 7 p.m. (after Ohio State-Michigan at noon) against a Kansas State team that played in the NCAA tournament a season ago.

Here's to hoping the fans of Cleveland do themselves a favor and come out to watch the effort.