When CSU's Cedric Jackson buried his 60-foot buzzer beater to upset #11 Syracuse on Monday night, it ended more than just a great college basketball game. It also marked the end of the Vikings' brutal non conference, early season road schedule. In the first month of this season, Cleveland State traveled nearly 8,000 miles-from Washington on the west coast, south to Florida and then to New York on the east coast-to battle teams from the Pac-10, Big 12 and Big East. In this column, CSU coach Gary Waters talks about the importance of scheduling in college basketball and the lessons his Vikings (8-4) have learned so far this year.

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Most fans don't realize how important scheduling is in college basketball. Unlike the NFL, NBA, MLB, etc. where schedules are set by the league, college teams have to develop a non-league schedule-that complements their predetermined league schedule.

One of the primary lessons I have learned thus far this season is the importance of scheduling. It is one of the most important factors to having a successful season. It starts with who you schedule in the non-conference, which will

enhance and prepare you for the conference season. My philosophy is to build a non-conference schedule that is strong, competitive and provides learning situations that will further prepare you for your conference schedule.

We try to schedule a number of high-major schools (like Syracuse, West Virginia and Washington) along with mid-major schools and sprinkle in some few low-major schools. But playing too many high-major schools will deter the confidence of your young players and may overwhelm the time commitment of your veterans.

Another factor that we need to consider when building a non-conference schedule is the effects of travel on the development of your team. College teams also need to consider the timing of mid-term and final exams when putting together a pre-conference schedule.

Non-conference college scheduling also takes many forms: there are standard home-and-home series, two- or three- for one deals between teams competing at different levels and finally, there are games involving a financial guarantee to the visiting team. Those ‘guarantee' games also become an important part of your non-conference schedule because they help finance your program. But at the same time, guarantee games can bring you a higher level of competition that might entice better quality recruits to play in your program.

The last factor that needs to be considered is home vs. away games. I believe in order to have a successful season, you must prepare to win at least 85% of your home games and put yourself in a position to succeed in at least 50% of your away games. This will give you a balanced success ratio with your schedule. If we accomplish these key components in our scheduling, I believe this will provide a greater chance for success.

Here at Cleveland State, we are committed to scheduling major conference opponents. I believe it will give us an edge in recruiting, provide a better strength

of schedule for NCAA tournament consideration, and better prepare us for the conference schedule. However, scheduling too many major conference opponents can be overwhelming. There is a fine line between scheduling these types of games and playing games that will boost your confidence.

Another important factor in scheduling is building up your RPI resume. The RPI (or Ratings Percentage Index) is one of the main factors the NCAA committee considers when choosing the 65 NCAA tournament teams. They assess your strength of schedule, your won-loss record and consider your record against the top 50 and top 100 teams in the RPI.

This season, we've played a very, very strong non-conference schedule. And we've traveled extensively to do so. I feel that our experience of playing on the road against tough teams has made us a stronger and more resilient team vs. strong competition. I believe that this experience will also make us competitive during Horizon League play.

All in all, a competitive schedule can lead to a successful season if monitored properly and tailored to your team's strengths.

Cleveland State's men are home for the holidays this week with games at the Wolstein Center against Kent State (Tuesday, Dec. 23 @ 7 p.m.) and Notre Dame College (Saturday, Dec. 27 @ 1 p.m.). Tickets start at $8 with great promotions for both dates. Visit www.csuvikings.com or call (216) 687-4848 for information.