Cleveland State returns home this week to take on the Horizon League's two Chicago schools after splitting the two-game road trip to Wright State and Detroit. Thursday's contest brings Loyola to the Wolstein Center on a hot streak while Saturday's match-up features the UIC Flames and the league's best player in Josh Mayo. Ryan Aroney drops in to preivews the Vikings two upcoming contests.

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The Vikings (11-5, 2-2) will be without the services of sophomore D'Aundray Brown as he misses his second straight game with a shoulder injury. Brown, the catalyst of the Vikings defensive attack, is expected to miss up to three weeks. Senior forward George Tandy started in Brown's place at Detroit and responded with 9 points, 6 rebounds and 2 blocked shots. Tandy will be looked upon to continue his improved play in the expanded role.

Previewing Loyola, Thursday 7:30 pm:

Loyola (9-6, 1-2) did not play a game outside of Illinois during the month of December and won seven-of-nine games in the process. The Ramblers claim victories over Western Michigan and Georgia on the season and defeated Green Bay on Monday on two last second free throws by guard J.R. Blount.

It's not the first time that the veteran Blount has won a game for the Ramblers. The 6-1 senior has started 82 consecutive games and is averaging a career best 15.9 points to go along with a team high 4.1 assists. Blount is not a great shooter from three (4-29, .138) but he's an accomplished scorer that has averaged double figures in all four years at Loyola. The Milwaukee native averages 16 points in five career meetings with CSU, including a career high 27 as a sophomore in 2006-07.

Blount has been joined during the past six games by senior Leon Young. The 6-6, 235-pound forward missed the first 11 games with a broken right hand before returning to post averages of 10.8 points and 6.8 rebounds. The native of Long Beach, CA has come off the bench in all six contests and is shooting 55-percent (23-42) from the floor.

An interesting player for Loyola is senior Justin Cerasoli. The 6-5 guard originally signed and played at Seton Hall as a freshman before transferring to Mississippi as a sophomore. The native Chicagoan eventually transferred again, this time returning home to provide some sharp shooting for the Ramblers. Cerasoli stretches the floor and averages 11.2 points while shooting 36-percent (18-50) from three.

Previewing UIC, Saturday 7:30 pm:

UIC (8-5, 1-2) was picked to finish third in the pre-season Horizon League poll. The Flames have lost three-of-four and are coming off back-to-back home losses to Milwaukee and Green Bay. UIC has already knocked off Vanderbilt and Georgia Tech on the road this season, so the Vikings will need to be up to the test.

As always, the Flames are led by Josh Mayo. The senior guard averages a league high 19.5 points per game while adding 3.6 assists and shooting 43-percent (43-99) from beyond the arc after finishing 7th in the nation a season ago by

shooting 47-percent from three. The 5-11 Mayo possesses one of the purest strokes in all of college basketball and he is not afraid to let it fly, as his 14 shot attempts per game can attest. Despite his small size, Mayo can create his own shot with a trigger-like release and he's adept at using a head-fake to get into the lane to finish or get to the line. Mayo is also an 89-percent (46-52) free throw shooter.

Complimenting Mayo on the inside is one of the league's better big men in Scott VanderMeer. A 7-foot center, VanderMeer is UIC's all-time leader in blocked shots and a two-time member of the Horizon League all-Defensive team. The native of Dyer, IN came up big in UIC's two upsets, grabbing 11 rebounds at Vanderbilt and leading the way with 19 points and 7 rebounds at Georgia Tech. On the season, VanderMeer is averaging 13.4 points while leading the Horizon League with 9.0 rebounds and 2.7 blocks per game.

Something will have to give Saturday night as the Flames come into the week averaging 69.8 points per game, which is good for third in the Horizon League, while the Vikings surrender a league best 55.1 points per game.

Following the home stand, CSU heads back to the road and into Wisconsin to take on Green Bay and Milwaukee.