Wisconsin-Milwaukee came into the Wolstein Center last night without the services of their leading scorer, Tone Boyle, and were facing a Viking team that's on a roll right now. So it was no surprise when CSU rolled to a large halftime lead. But the Panthers fought back, and gave the Vikings a second half scare before finally succumbing and running out of gas. Jay Pearlman writes about the big win for Cleveland State.

Just in case playing the rematch on Cleveland State's home floor wasn't enough to change the outcome, Wisconsin-Milwaukee came into Wolstein Center last night with junior JUCO transfer and sharpshooting guard Tone Boyle unable to play. And it may not have been Boyle's team-leading 15 points a game that the Panthers missed the most, his 2½ treys per game, his 37% from the arc, or his 4 rebounds per game as a guard (though all of those were surely missed); no , it was more his leadership, and maturity, and-oh yes-his 36 minutes per game.

No one else on the team even plays 30.

Back on January 17th in UWM's two-point home win, Boyle played all 40 minutes, scored 12 on 4-7 shooting (2-5 from the arc), grabbed 8 rebounds, had 2 assists and no turnovers.

And he was sidelined last night with back spasms.

On the CSU side, Gary Waters' best defender, middle-sized rebounder,

"loose-ball getter" and all around hustler, D'Aundray Brown, had missed the earlier meeting in Wisconsin with a rib injury, and having returned to action last weekend in Chicago made his first Wolstein appearance last night in nearly 7 weeks. Averaging 8 points, 6 rebounds, 3 assists and nearly 2 steals, D'Aundray had returned last weekend with a bang-literally-as he grabbed 10 rebounds in both road wins. This night he found himself open for mid-range jumpers (when he gains confidence in his mid-range game D'Aundray is going to be all-Horizon), and in just another night at the office Brown scored 13 on 5-7 shooting (making his only trey), grabbed 6 boards, made 4 steals (mostly without digging and lunging), had 2 assists and just 1 turnover, in 34 minutes.

And oh yes, CSU zoomed out to a 19 point first half lead, led by 14 at the break, and won much more easily than the 70-61 final score indicated.

Isn't it nice to have Brown back!

Doubly nice is the progress made by fellow sophomore Norris Cole in Brown's absence, and the two of them now being out there together. C ole has increased his offensive production over the last three weeks, providing both perimeter and slashing offense, scoring in double-figures in five straight games though last Thursday's three-point win at UIC, 20 points or more in three of those 5.

Cole came into last night's game averaging 12½ points a game, second on the team to J'Nathan Bullock, good for ninth in the conference.

But it has been on the defensive end that Cole has shown the most growth of late, in Brown's absence becoming the lock-down backcourt defender Coach Waters needs.

Against prolific Josh Mayo of UIC, Kelvin Bright of Youngstown State,

and two weeks from tomorrow, Shelvin Mack of Butler.

And now that Brown is back, watching the new and improved Cole along with Brown is a joy, particularly at the defensive end.

The Milwaukee game was interesting, as even before Boyle's injury the Panthers were featuring more and more the player they call "Big Lumber," 6-7 350 pound junior JUCO transfer James Eayrs. Start ing his second game last night (but UWM's third leading scorer at 10 points, 12 in conference), Eayrs belies his physical dimensions by playing on the perimeter, displaying quickness (if not speed), incredibly good hands, a quick release and superior perimeter jump-shot.

Enhanced this night by two treys that clanged in off the backboard, Eayrs kept his undermanned team in the game by scoring 19 points (on 8-18 shooting, 3-9 from the arc), and grabbed 9 boards.

But against the tandem of Brown and Cole (along with Bullock's 16 points and 10 rebounds, and Cedric Jackson's 9 assists), Eayrs' occasional highlight-reel performance wasn't nearly enough.

Now, the more difficult half of the home-for-Wisconsin weekend, as Wisconsin-Green Bay visits Wolstein Saturday night.

Cleveland State News and Notes:

- Perhaps the Phoenix of Wisconsin-Green Bay were looking ahead toward Saturday night in Cleveland, as they stumbled at fiesty YSU last night in Youngstown, falling 77-73. Down 22 points to the Penguins early and 38-22 at the break, Green Bay managed to put up 51 during a furious second half rally, pulling to within 2 twice in the last minute before losing by 4. Ra hmon Fletcher led the losing Phoenix with 17 on 7-11 shooting;

guard DeAndre Mays (yes, we have three good players named DeAndre in the league, all spelling the name differently) led the winners with 21 on 5-11 shooting, and 4 big rebounds.

- With CSU's win over Milwaukee and Green Bay's upset loss at YSU, the "race for second" in the Horizon tightened up considerably. Yes, one-loss Butler seems in the clear for the first seed. But second-place Green Bay now has three losses, and Milwaukee, Wright State and CSU all have five.

Those records make Saturday's CSU home game against Green Bay a monstrous one in the league, with Milwaukee and Wright State now rooting for CSU to make Green Bay oh-for-Ohio this weekend.

And remember, along with Milwaukee, Green Bay still has to visit Wright State, that game to be played the last day of the season on Saturday February 28th.

Of course, earlier that day Cleveland State will finish its regular season at Hinkle against Butler, and while that last regular season home game is special ("Senior Day," though Butler has no seniors on its roster), it is possible that CSU will have much more to play for that afternoon in Hinkle than the Bulldogs will (and that the firm of "Brown and Cole" would be playing its best basketball).

By the way, CSU's game at Butler at 2 pm on Saturday the 28th has been designated the league's wild-card game, and will be carried on ESPNU.

(And I'm wondering if I can watch CSU-Butler from 2-4 pm in Indianapolis, and then get to Dayton in time for Wright State's 7 pm tip

against Green Bay).

- The Horizon League's Friday night ESPNU game returns tonight after a one-week hiatus, featuring UIC at Butler. U nlike other games in the package, tonight's game will tip at 7 pm eastern.