It wasn't always pretty, but it was intense for 40 minutes, the fans at Hinkle Fieldhouse on their feet for the last 5. In a game that was a microcosm of their season, the Vikings came from 10 down at the 10:30 mark of the second half, went on a 12-0 run to lead 52-50, led 56-54 with under two minutes remaining, but gave up the lead in the end, falling to Butler 58-56. Depending on results in Dayton and Valparaiso tonight, the Vikes will be either the 3rd or the 4th seed in the Horizon Tournament, and open play at home on Tuesday against either Detroit or Valpo.

It wasn't always pretty, but it was intense for 40 minutes, the fans at Hinkle Fieldhouse on their feet for the last 5. Cleveland State defended better, reaching less and playing more solidly, especially Norris Cole on Shelvin Mack and D'Aundray Brown on future pro Gordon Hayward. And after Cole kept CSU in the game with 13 first half points (on 4-5, including 3-3 from the arc), even Cedric Jackson woke up offensively in the second half, hitting two of three threes for 7 in the half. Cole finished with 17, Jackson with 11 and J'Nathan Bullock with 13, but it just wasn't quite enough. In a game that was a microcosm of their season, the Vikings came from 10 down at the 10:30 mark of the second half, went on a 12-0 run to lead 52-50, led 56-54 with under two minutes remaining, but gave up the lead in the end, falling to Butler 58-56. Depending on results in Dayton and Valparaiso tonight, the Vikes will be either the 3rd or the 4th seed in the Horizon Tournament, and open play at home on Tuesday against either Detroit or Valpo.

In the last 2:04, first CSU gained that two point lead on an interior shot by George Tandy, off a gorgeous assist by Jackson. For much of the second half, Coach Waters used Jackson corner to corner off baseline screens, and on this occasion Jackson curled into the lane, received a pass, drew defensive help from Butler's Matt Howard, and deftly bounced to Tandy behind Howard for the lay up. In fact, Butler's Gordon Hayward tried to help on Tandy and fouled him, but Tandy missed the free throw; 56-54 CSU at the 17:56 mark. Bullock

rebounded Tandy's miss, and both Bullock and Tandy proceeded to miss contested follows; Ronald Nored grabbed the defensive rebound for Butler at 18:03. On the ensuing Bulldog possession, Shelvin Mack missed a trey at 18:19, and CSU's Brown fouled Hayward in the rebounding action. Hayward made one of two from the line at 18:22; CSU 56-55. Then on offense, Jackson saw a pick and roll to Tandy along the baseline that was not available, and his errant pass was corralled by Butler's Howard. Then, Butler's Willie Veasley missed a trey over Bullock at 19:03, but diminutive Nored grabbed the long rebound and after a single dribble was able to lay up; 57-56 Butler at 19:07. After a timeout, Bullock used a baseline screen to get open to receive a pass in the deep left corner, took and missed an open but low percentage trey, Veasley rebounded, and Cole fouled him to stop the clock at 19:44. Veasely made 1 of 2 from the line (Butler shot a woeful 9-21 from the line in the game, 2-12 in the second stanza), giving CSU the ball after a timeout with :16 seconds remaining, down two, the biggest play of the game yet to take place.

After CSU inbounded, Cole used a Tandy ball screen at the arc on the left, got a look at a game-winning trey as Matt Howard jumped the screen to challenge the shot. To Howard's credit, he jumped straight up to contest, his arms also straight up rather than forward. Whoever initiated the contact, there did appear to be contact, causing Cole to double clutch the trey that became an air-ball; no foul was called. Mack rebounded for CSU, was fouled by Jackson with a second and a half remaining and that, as they say was that. Choosing his words carefully after the game, Coach Waters said generally about the Cole-Howard meeting that "you have to have guts in basketball" (he could have been talking about the officials, but we'll never know). Matt Howard admitted after the game that "I may have gotten away with one" on the last play.

Proud of his team's comeback from ten points down, Coach Waters sounded confident going into the conference tournament. He even

appears to agree with us that with three of CSU's 21 wins having come against sub-Division I opponents, "the third seed gives us a chance to play more games, to get that win number up to the magic number of 20."

After the game I asked Butler Coach Brad Stevens if his starting freshmen had gotten tired, hit the proverbial "wall," a week or so ago when they lost two in a row, including a brutal home loss to Loyola. Coach responded that "I can't view it that way; also, I need to give credit to those two teams who beat us. Milwaukee, and especially Loyola, played very well against us, and we didn't hit enough shots." Then, I asked the opposite question, suggesting that coaches (like the late Al McGuire) sometimes said that by this time of year certain freshmen have played enough games to be like sophomores. Stevens smiled, said "I like that theory better," and continued that "our kids have been more like sophomores for a while now, particularly in terms of their poise, so on your theory, by now they're more like juniors." Good and fun answer, but this writer observed some weakness, some mental fatigue, in Butler this game, manifested in a couple of things. First, the Bulldogs no longer seem to be sustaining their man defense for the full 35-second shot clock. Second, they're shooting poorly from the arc (3-16 for the game, 0-8 for the second half), in addition to the poor free throw shooting. So, as much as I've loved Butler and its freshmen all season long, if I may, even though they're at home, the Bulldogs just might be vulnerable in the conference tourney, to Green Bay, and perhaps even to CSU. They certainly could have been beaten today, so they just might be beatable next week.

Cleveland State News and Notes:

- With the win, Butler clinched first place and the no. 1 seed in the

conference tourney, and after the first round games on campus sites on Tuesday night, quarter and semi-final doubleheaders will be played at Hinkle on Friday and Saturday nights. Coach Waters was unequivocal in his praise for Butler (relative to second seed Green Bay), telling the media after the game that "I feel positive about one thing, that Butler won this championship; Butler deserves this [regular season] championship, not Green Bay."

- In the last ten minutes of the game, Butler's super-freshman Gordon Hayward (well-guarded this night by D'Aundray Brown, limited to 9) wowed the crowd with two monster plays. First, after a Veasley front court turnover, with D'Aundray Brown dribbling ahead of the field, Hayward caught Brown from behind with a great block at the goal at the 9:40 mark. Then at 15:30, Hayward made a beautiful dunk off a pass from Mack.

- We'll see you Tuesday night at Wolstein for the first round tournament game!