For the second time in as many nights, Cleveland State showed the toughness and resilience that Gary Waters has been instilling in his troops since he first stepped foot on campus. After trailing by six at the half, the Vikings put the clamps down on the defensive end and clawed their way back into the game, not leading in the game until the 10:48 mark in the second half. Behind a gritty defense, clutch baskets and a highlight reel dunk from George Tandy, the Vikings pulled out a 73-67 victory over second-seeded Green Bay to move onto the Horizon League championship Tuesday against top-seeded Butler.

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A night after a furious come-from-behind rally pushed CSU past UIC in the quarter-final, the Vikings (24-10) were sure to be low on energy against a well-rested Green Bay (22-10) team that had received a double-bye into the semi-finals. The game started off as one might expect under the circumstances, CSU started the game off sluggish as the amped-up Phoenix played an up tempo, full court game while rushing out to a 16-4 lead in the first five minutes.

The tide started to change after a Waters timeout. The Vikings were able to control the tempo and stop Green Bay from pushing the ball and getting open three-pointers in transition. Cedric Jackson, who has played the best ball of his senior season during the tournament, did his best to keep the Vikings in the game offensively, scoring 10 of CSU's next 14 points to close the gap to six at 23-17.

The rest of the first half became a shooting exhibition for Green Bay's Mike Schachtner as the 6-9 senior repeatedly found holes in the Vikings pressure defense while pouring in 16 first half points on 3-for-3 from beyond the arc.

Waters and his staff obviously made an adjustment at the half because the holes in the CSU defense disappeared and the pressure intensified to an immeasurable level. Tre Harmon was inserted into the starting lineup in place of the injured D'Aundray Brown and responded by displaying his nose-to-nose defense in taking the Green Bay guards out of their rhythm and forcing the Phoenix into settling for contested jumpers instead of getting open looks in the flow of the offense. Schachtner, the hot hand in the first half, was held scoreless in the second half as the Vikings pulled their way back into the game.

The Vikings finally took their first lead of the game when a three-pointer by Cedric Jackson put CSU up 52-50 with 10:48 remaining. After a Green Bay basket tied the game, George Tandy put the early finishing touch on the game with a tailor made Sportscenter tip dunk. With 9:58 remaining, J'Nathan Bullock missed a turn-around jumper and as the ball bounced high off the rim, Tandy flew in from the top of the key and threw down a thunderous one-handed jam over the top of the Green Bay defender to put the Vikings up 54-52.

The Vikings never trailed again. Tandy's highlight reel play embodied the spirit of this Vikings team. Playing its third game in five nights and its second in 48 hours, the Vikings never let up and never quit. When things were going tough and to give in to fatigue would have been a perfectly acceptable way to close the season, the Vikings fought through and forced their will on the opponent, making it look as though the Phoenix were the team that should be gasping for air. With Tandy's

dunk, the Vikings proved once again that they refuse to give into adversity and will fight through the final buzzer to ensure nothing less than a championship.

CSU will have its chance on Tuesday against #22 Butler (26-4) at Hinkle Fieldhouse at 9 p.m. on ESPN. The Bulldogs swept the Vikings during the regular season, winning both contests by a mere two points. Since taking over at CSU, Gary Waters is 1-6 against Butler, including a 70-55 loss in last season's championship game.

Just another obstacle for this tough-minded Vikings team to overcome.