The Cleveland State men's basketball team celebrated the new year by continuing its winning ways as the Vikes defeated Illinois-Chicago, 83-59, Saturday afternoon at the Wolstein Center.

With the win CSU improves to 15-1, 4-0 in the Horizon League heading into next Friday's pivotal league game against arch-rival Butler.

"This could have been a trap game," said CSU men's basketball coach Gary Waters. "Last night was a tough night. It was a go out and enjoy yourself night. We didn't allow them to have that, so they understood that this game was very important for you to come out and play your best."

The Vikes ended any possible chance of a let down by jumping out to an early 6-0 lead. CSU never trailed in the game and led by as many as 13 in the first half as the Vikes built a comfortable 40-28 lead at the half.

Junior guard Trevon Harmon scored 13 of his career-high 24 points in the first half and Norris Cole scored 11 of his 21 in the first 20 minutes.

"We wanted to start off well and get things rolling," said Cole who also added six assists, six

rebounds and six steals. " When teams have to fight from behind, it's hard. We have the confidence that if we can get them down, we can keep them there."

CSU's ferocious pressure defense took UIC out of the game early, causing the Flames to turn the ball over 24 times, which CSU scored 21 points out of.

The Vikings' defense caused 15 steals and held the Flames to 40.5 percent from the field.

"They played with a tempo and a velocity that I don't think anyone in our league can emulate or can match," said UIC coach Howard Moore. "Coach Waters has the personnel and the players to really turn up the heat and get after people.

How can you simulate that (pressure defense) in practice? They are the so-called Mid-Major version of Purdue. The way they pressure and get up into you. And they do it the whole game and they don't let up."

CSU used a 9-1 run to start the second half to built a 49-29 lead on Jeremy Montgomery's 3-pointer with 18:06 left in the game. The Vikes wouldn't trail by less then 17 the rest of the game.

Harmon finished 7-of-10 from the field, including 4-of-7 from 3-point distance.

"When Trey's shooting the ball it's hard for teams to beat us," said Waters.

UIC (5-10, 0-3 Horizon League) were led in scoring by senior guard Robo Kreps with 21 points. Kreps had to work hard for those points, going 10-of-12 from the free throw line, as Harmon was in-his-face the entire game.

"It's my job to try to make his day a living hell," said Harmon.

Next Friday's game at Butler will be televised on ESPNU at 7 p.m. The Bulldogs (10-4, 2-0) have won six straight after defeating Valparaiso at home, 76-59, on Saturday.

"It's going to be a big game," said Waters. "The Butler Invitational (aka The Horizon League Tournament) we got to stop that."