A half-time adjustment made by Cleveland State men's basketball coach Gary Waters helped the Vikings get off to a fast start in the second-half and take control of the game.

CSU would withstand several late rallies by Valpo and held on to a 76-65 victory on Thursday night at the Wolstein Center in front of a crowd of 4, 472, the third largest this season.

The Vikings would hold on to defeat the Crusaders, 76-65, Thursday night at the Wolstein Center in front of a crowd of 4, 472, the third largest this season.

The win gives first-place CSU (21-3, 10-2 Horizon League) some breathing room as second-place Valpo (16-7, 8-3 Horizon League) drops 1 1⁄2-games behind the Vikings.

CSU received a combined 51 points from Jeremy Montgomery and Norris Cole.

Valpo was led by Howard Little's 17 and Ryan Broekhoff's 15.

The first half started off just like the previous game at Valpo. CSU jumped out to a quick lead, led by as many as 11, and Valpo finished the half strong using a 12-2 run to cut the lead down to 31-30 at the half.

That's when Waters made his adjustment.

"Valpo had turned the game into an offensive game," said Waters. "They scored on nine of their first 10 possessions to start the second half at Valpo (earlier in the season). They average 42 points in the second half and we knew we had to get out of that.

"So at half-time we told Norris (Cole) to push the action and get up in transition. And we did and ended up getting shots and lay-ups we were capable of making."

CSU would score on six of their first seven possessions in the second half to take a 43-32 lead on Tim Kamczyc's jumper.

With Cole controlling the tempo, CSU's offense was rolling as the Vikings shot 46.2 percent in the second half.

Cole would finish with 25 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists. It was his 12th 20-point game of the season and fourth double-double.

"That's my job as a leader of the team and as a point guard, to control the tempo and make the game at a pace where we have the advantage," said Cole. "They were playing a funky zone and we did not want them to set it up. In order to get them out of it we had to out run them and beat them to their spots."

The Crusaders would cut the lead down to 49-47 on a lay-up by Cory Johnson. CSU would respond with seven straight points.

Valpo would make one last run cutting the lead down to 63-60 on a lay-up by Little with 3:14 left, but CSU would again score seven straight points.

"The difference in the game was their speed just took it over," said Valpo's coach Homer Drew. "We couldn't get them into a half-court game. When Cole got it he was faster with the ball then anyone on our team, except Erik Buggs and he fouled out trying to stop him on the fast breaks."

Once again, CSU's defense played a key role in the game. The Vikings held Valpo's offense to 37.7 percent shooting, which is 10 points below their season average. They also held Valpo's top two scorers, Brandon Wood (16 points per game) and Cory Johnson (15.8), both to six points each.

"We wanted to take away Johnson, Wood and Broekhoff," said Waters. "Broekhoff still found ways to get open. We wanted to play them straight up and make certain people shoot."

Montgomery finished with a career-high 26. The Chicago native made several big shots in the second half. He finished 7-for-10 from the field, including 4-for-6 from 3-point range.

"I was taking open looks and playing off my point guard to feed me," said Montgomery. "Tonight I gave my team a good lift."

Next up for CSU is a nationally-televised match-up with their arch-rivals Butler on Saturday at noon. The game will be televised on ESPN2. The Bulldogs (14-9, 6-5) are coming off a 62-60 lost at Youngstown State on Thursday.