We've got a lot of love for the CSU Vikings here on TCF today, and staff contributor Cris Sykes was another one of the guys at The Wolstein last night for the Vikings goosebumpy win over nationally ranked Butler. In a piece he told me "he just had to write", Sykes takes a look back at last nights win, what it means, and where he feels coach Gary Waters is leading this basketball team.

Wow. Who would have thought it? The hottest ticket in town could very soon be your Cleveland State University Vikings. After the biggest win in the history of the 17-year old Wolstein Center, a 56-52 thriller over #12 Butler, the Vikings stand alone at the top of the Horizon League Standings .

The Vikings, playing in front of a raucous home crowd essentially led wire to wire in defeating Butler, only giving up the lead for a couple of second half possessions, but taking it right back, to never relinquish it again. Some of The Cleveland Fan staff got together to attend this game, and I can honestly say it was one of the most entertaining sporting events I have ever attended. In his post game interview, Coach Waters took time out to recognize the outstanding support of the close to 6,000 fans in attendance, "The support was fabulous by the fans. Not only did they come out in numbers, but they didn't sit on their hands. They brought energy into the arena and it probably would have been a different outcome if they were not here tonight. We want to bring more people back every game. We have to move this thing forward"

The Vikings play the game with the same intensity Coach Waters coaches. They are relentless on the defensive end of the floor, which led to the total frustration of Butler's dynamic guard duo of A.J. Graves and Mike Green. Hounded

everywhere on the floor they went, the duo was held 12 points under their scoring average, only converting on 6 of their 22 shot attempts.

As great as the game was, Coach Waters is never satisfied. As for the game play itself, Waters says, "It wasn't even close to a perfect game for us. We missed too many assignments and we turned the ball over too much". The one thing that impressed the fans as well as Waters was the way the Viking competed. Waters states, "I thought our kids went out and competed as hard as they compete. I told them that they had to out-compete this team. Butler is physically and mentally tough."

The Vikings knew they had to get out fast. A slow start would allow Butler to set the tone and style for the game, and probably remove the crowd from making any kind of difference. After the game the coach summed this up by saying, ""The biggest thing I wanted them to do is compete in the first five minutes. If we were in a slow movement, they would have had some confidence in our place. I wanted our guys to make a presence, especially on the defensive end." Third year forward J'Nathan Bullock hits on the fact that Coach Waters drove home the need for a fast start home all week in practice, "Coach has been drilling us all week that we have to get off to a good start. The last couple games, we have been getting in a hole and coach told us we needed to raise our intensity level and I think we responded well."

The turning point in the season for the Vikings appears to have come after losing to Gary Waters former team, the Kent State Golden Flashes. The Vikings were unable to match Kent's intensity in that game, which was a major factor in the 15-point loss. Coach Waters pointed to that game in his post game interview, telling everyone "Another game we learned from was the Kent State game. We didn't go after them, but from then on, our guys have been going after people." Since that game, the Vikings have really turned up the defensive pressure, limiting opponents to 57 points per game, opposed to allowing 67 points per game in their first 12 contests.

The Vikings, up two games in the loss column in the conference, are in the process of building something quite special. With Coach Waters rotating players at a breakneck pace, always keeping fresh defenders on the floor, the Vikings will be sure to keep themselves in games. With the growing confidence of a core group of guys on the offensive end of the floor, there is no telling how far this team can go. They are very reminiscent of the Kent State squads that Coach Waters turned into the marquee team in the MAC conference before leaving for Rutgers.

The Vikings are down to their final five home games (Viking Schedule). The first of those will be Saturday night at 7:30 against Valparaiso, who sits one half game behind Butler for second place in the Horizon League. I highly recommend taking an opportunity to go down and see this team in action. You are going to witness a blue-collar team, which works their tails off for 40 minutes. This is as much of a "Cleveland" type team as there can be.

The Valpo game on Saturday is a huge stepping-stone. It is one thing to come out and upset a highly ranked opponent on your home floor. It is another to stay grounded and know the season does not end with that win. Their ability to remain looking forward and not rest on this win will determine how far the Vikings can go. According to Waters, the team has the three "H's" in mind at all times. He tells us, "We have three H's, we have to be honorable, humble and hungry. After this game, we have to remain humble and be hungry for the next game."

Showing he's placed his stamp on the players, Viking point guard Cedric Jackson echoes his Coach Waters' sentiment, "We are not to distracted by this win. We know when tomorrow comes, we have to get ready for another game. When practice comes tomorrow, we know its over. We need a total team effort on defense tonight because without help, none of this would have been possible."

Congrats to Coach Waters and the entire Viking team. A special mention goes out to Associate Head Coach Jayson Gee, who told the Viking Club during a

pre-game get together that last night was going to be the night Cleveland State got back on the map. He said it not only like he meant it, but like there was an entire locker room that believed it. Then, they went out and played like they believed it!