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### For Butler, a Different Tournament but a Familiar Opponent

By [MATT RHINESMITH](#)

*In 2010 and 2011, the Butler Bulldogs were college basketball's favorite Cinderella story. But this season has sometimes been a struggle and the Bulldogs are now playing in the College Basketball Invitational tournament.*

*Matt Rhinesmith, a sports reporter for [The Butler Collegian](#), will file occasional posts for The Quad about the team's season.*

Alex Brandon/Associated Press  
Shelvin Mack of Butler, right, fouling Gilbert Brown of Pittsburgh at the N.C.A.A. tournament last year.

The Butler men's basketball team continues to be successful in the month of March — just not to the degree fans have experienced in recent seasons.

After a 65-46 loss to Valparaiso in the semifinal round of the Horizon League tournament on March 3, the Bulldogs found themselves in uncharted waters.

Before that loss, Coach Brad Stevens and the Bulldogs had gone 1,081 days since their last loss in March. The team registered 13 consecutive victories during that run. The loss to Valparaiso all but assured that this year's team would not be part of the N.C.A.A. tournament. Instead, the Bulldogs are playing in the College Basketball Invitational tournament.

This year's field in the C.B.I. included teams such as Wyoming and Washington State, along with a familiar opponent for the Bulldogs, Milwaukee. Perhaps the most notable team in this year's tournament is Pittsburgh, once considered a contender in the Big East this season.

After a 75-58 win over Delaware in their first-round game on March 14, Butler headed to the campus of the University of Pennsylvania to face the Quakers at the Palestra on March 19.

Led by a duo of sophomores, Chrishawn Hopkins and Khyle Marshall, the Bulldogs knocked off Penn, 63-53, in a sweltering gym. Hopkins led all scorers with 15 points, and Marshall added a double-double with 14 points and 13 rebounds.

The victory set up a highly anticipated rematch with Pittsburgh on Wednesday at Hinkle Fieldhouse. The Bulldogs and Panthers gave fans one of the best N.C.A.A. tournament games in recent memory last season, with Butler winning, 71-70. Former Butler guard

Shelvin Mack committed a foul on Pittsburgh guard Gilbert Brown with 1.4 seconds remaining in the game. Butler was leading by 70-69 at the time.

Former Butler forward Matt Howard was fouled trying to corral the rebound on Brown's second miss and went to the line at the other end. He sank one free throw to win the game for the Bulldogs. While the game against Pittsburgh likely will not bring the same sort of drama this time around, a game against an opponent like the Panthers is good for a young Butler team.

The Bulldogs freshmen missed out on an opportunity to gain N.C.A.A. tournament experience, but postseason play is still beneficial.

In 2010, for example, Virginia Commonwealth won the C.B.I. It followed that up with a dream season that ended with a loss to the Bulldogs in the 2011 Final Four. While not every team will experience such results, there is no doubt that more time on the court can only help a team that has made great strides this season. During the past 13 games, when Butler has played its best, the Bulldogs have shot nearly 70 percent from the free throw line.

For a team that shot 61 percent before that, that improvement is vital and one of the reasons Butler has been winning. Take senior guard Ronald Nored, for example. He has shot 70 percent from the line this season, far better than the 57 percent average he recorded his first three seasons.

Without a bid to the N.C.A.A tournament, the Bulldogs have had to get used to the idea that there are different kinds of success to be had in March. The games being played by the Bulldogs now will certainly benefit them in the long run, and could prepare them for a return to the N.C.A.A. tournament next season.