

Broncos Claim CBI Championship

Team wins second tournament title in three years

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If you asked any college basketball expert a month ago which team from the West Coast Conference they thought would be the last one still standing in April, it is unlikely anyone would have said Santa Clara.

But with their 80-77 victory over George Mason University on Friday, the Broncos clinched the College Basketball Invitational championship, their second postseason championship in the last three seasons.

While rivals Gonzaga University and Saint Mary's College played — and were eliminated — in March Madness, Santa Clara reached the pinnacle of its tournament. This, of course, was bittersweet for Keating.

“If I had to trade it, I’d trade to play in the NCAA tournament and I’d want these guys to experience that,” said Keating, “but (the College Basketball Invitational championship) is a nice thing — I guess — to have.”

The teams split the first two games in the series, but Santa Clara was too much for the Patriots despite playing on the road in the deciding contest. Kevin Foster closed out his Santa Clara career in style, pouring in 24 points, including five three-pointers.

“I am so glad I could end my five years with a win,” Foster told the San Jose Mercury News. “We worked hard and wanted it all year long.”



Chris Glennon

Kevin Foster is surrounded by George Mason University defenders late in the second half of Santa Clara's Game 1 win over the Patriots in the College Basketball Invitational championship series. The Broncos went on to win the series in three games.

The Texas native set a CBI record by scoring 158 points over the course of the tournament. Also playing his last game as a Bronco was Marc Trasolini, who scored 20 points and grabbed six rebounds in the deciding contest.

"I think we just elevate our play in the postseason," said Trasolini. "Whenever you have the opportunity to play for a championship, you really want it and I think we've been able to do a great job staying focused and really putting everything we've had into these postseason games."

Just one season after a forgettable campaign in which Head Coach Kerry Keating's team didn't win a single conference game, he was able to lead his team back to postseason success. He credited his two senior leaders for overcoming adversity.

"It's really commendable for those two guys to overcome some obstacles in different ways to get back to All-Conference form and end up being two of the top five leading scorers (in Santa Clara history)," said Keating.

Despite the team's disappointing early exit from the WCC tournament in early March, the Broncos were extended an offer to compete in the CBI tournament and they took advantage of the postseason opportunity.

"Losing to (Loyola Marymount University) got us kind of pissed off," said senior Niyi Harrison, "so coming into the CBI tournament we felt like we had a little something to prove, like we didn't show our best in the WCC tournament. People just came back focused, ready to play and we put it all together. The stars aligned."

Similar to their run to a CollegeInsider.com Tournament championship two years ago, the Broncos played the majority of their postseason games on the road.

"We're playing to compete," said Keating, "but I think it's really helped us that we've kind of made it a dual purpose and taken advantage of everywhere we've been to try to find things we can see that we maybe have never seen before. I think that's really helped them take advantage of wanting to keep playing."

The Broncos didn't find out that they would be participating in the CBI tournament until just days before their first-round matchup with the University of Vermont at the Leavey Center.

It was a chance to extend the season, but for some players, it was a chance to extend their Santa Clara careers.

"We sort of just went on the road and we had fun," said Trasolini. "We stayed together, we played together, we sort of went into everybody's house and just took them down, and that's fun. We were like that all year. I think that helped us a lot in this tournament."

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