

Bradley advances to CBI Semis

PEORIA, III. – Back-to-back 3-pointers by senior guards Jeremy Crouch and Daniel Ruffin with less than nine minutes remaining triggered a 25-4 Bradley run that allowed the Braves (19-15) to overcome a 14-point second half deficit en route to a 79-73 victory versus Ohio (20-13) in front of 6,425 boisterous fans in the quarterfinals of the inaugural College Basketball Invitational Monday night at Carver Arena.

As the last team in the Missouri Valley Conference still playing in the postseason, Bradley will have a short turnaround before the semifinals as the Braves will visit Virginia (17-15) Wednesday in a 7 p.m. (EST) tip at John Paul Jones Arena. The Cavaliers overcame a 37-29 halftime deficit versus Old Dominion and secured their 80-76 quarterfinal win when guard Sean Singletary scored six points in the closing seconds, including a 3-pointer with 23 seconds left to forge a 75-75 tie.

Ohio controlled the first 30 minutes of Monday's game at Carver Arena and the Bobcats took their second 14-point lead of the night, 63-49, when Michael Allen scored on a driving layup with 9:10 remaining. Following a Bradley timeout, however, Crouch drained a 3-pointer from the top of the key and the next time down the court Ruffin followed with a trey of his own to slice the deficit to 63-55 with 7:52 remaining.

After Crouch made a pair of free throws, Justin Orr converted an old fashioned 3-point play with 7:13 left to push the Ohio lead back up to 66-57. Starting with a 15-foot Ruffin jumper from the left wing with 6:25 left, though, Bradley scored the next 13 points. The Braves took their first lead, 68-66, since it was 9-8 when Matt Salley scored inside on a feed from Crouch with 4:18 left and Theron Wilson completed the 13-point run with a one-handed slam off a Salley dish for a 70-66 advantage with 2:55 to go. After Crouch drained his third 3-pointer of the night for a 74-67 lead with 1:07 remaining, the Braves held off Ohio's attempt to rally by making 6--of8 free throw attempts in the final 54 seconds.

Ohio finished with a 35-29 rebounding advantage, but Bradley's work on the offensive glass during one possession late in the game helped secure the win. After Salley's layup with 4:18 left gave the Braves the lead, Allen was called for an offensive foul with 3:57 left. Crouch missed a pair of 3-pointers on Bradley's ensuing possession, but Wilson collected the first offensive rebound and Salley batted out the second, allowing the Braves to run 1:02 off the clock before Wilson's slam.

Ohio got a pair of double-doubles from its starting front court as Leon Williams contributed 20 points and 13 rebounds, while Jerome Tillman added 11 points and 10 boards. Guard Bubba Walther chipped in with 19 points, highlighted by five deep 3 pointers.

The Braves countered with five double-digit performers, led by sophomore guard Andrew Warren's game-high 22 points. Making his first start since breaking a bone in his left hand Feb. 16 versus Creighton, Warren hit 6-of-10 field goal attempts, including 4-of-6 from behind the arc. Crouch added 15 points and five assists to become the fifth player in MVC history to record 500 points (531), 100 rebounds (123), 100 assists (104) and 50 steals (52). Ruffin added 13 points and a game-high six assists, while Wilson and freshman guard Sam Maniscalco both scored 10.

As Bradley prepares for Wednesday's CBI semifinal game at Virginia, the Braves are 114 all-time against the current ACC membership, most recently downing Miami (Fla.), 83-82, Nov. 26, 2003 in the final round of the Las Vegas Invitational. The Hurricanes, however, were still a member of the Big East Conference during the 2003-04 season. The Braves have not played an active ACC member since downing Georgia Tech, 84-82, Dec. 29, 1995 in the first round of the Cable Car Classic in San Jose. Finally, the Braves have played three road games all-time against the current ACC membership Boston College (1947),

Duke (1951) and Miami (1955) but none as active members (Duke was a charter member when the league formed in the spring of 1953).