

Patriots Tops Charleston in CBI Opener, 78-77

CHARLESTON, S.C. - Sophomore Erik Copes tipped in the game-winning basket with less than a second to play, and the George Mason men's basketball team upended College of Charleston, 78-77, Tuesday night in the opening round of the Collegiate Basketball Invitational presented by Buick.

The Patriots (19-14) move onto the quarterfinal round, where they will host the winner of Wednesday's Texas/Houston game. That game will be played Monday night at the Patriot Center, with game time and television coverage to be determined.

Copes scored a career-high 14 points on 7-of-8 shooting, one of five Patriots in double digits. Junior Sherrod Wright added 20 points while juniors Jonathan Arledge and Bryon Allen added 11 apiece and sophomore Corey Edwards had 10. Arledge led the Patriots with five rebounds while Allen tied the game-high with six assists.

Leading the offense for the Cougars (24-11) was Anthony Stitt who scored 21 points including five 3-pointers.

Mason jumped out to a 10-5 lead after Wright's first basket at the 16:17 mark, but the Cougars would tie the score with five in a row. Charleston's first lead came after a Trent Wiedeman jumper made it 15-13 and they would swap baskets, but the Patriots grabbed the advantage with a 7-0 run. Andrew Lawrence tied the game at 24 with three from the free throw line, but another 7-0 Patriots run made it 31-24 with more than six minutes remaining in the half.

Up 33-28, Mason strung together a 9-1 scoring run to take their largest lead of the contest, as Wright laid it in after an Allen steal to leave the scorer 42-29 with four minutes to play. The Cougars pulled within eight points as the half ended, making the score 44-38. Mason shot a blistering 66.7 percent from the field in the first 20 minutes (18-27), including 16 points by Wright.

It took Charleston just over ninety seconds to make it a one-possession game, as Stitt's second three pointer of the period at the 18:26 mark pulled the Cougars to within 46-44. The Patriots held onto the lead for nearly seven more minutes, before Stitt hit from beyond the arc to put Charleston ahead, 57-55.

Mason would not lead again until the Copes putback, but the Patriots tied the score four more times. Charleston led by six points, 77-71, with 1:48 to play, but Arledge hit a basket to make it a four-point game, and on the next possession Stitt turned it over and Allen capitalized with a 3-pointer to make it 77-76.

Charleston had the ball with under 30 seconds on the clock, but Stitt's jumper was off the mark and Wright grabbed the rebound. He drove the lane and put the ball up, and as it rolled around the rim, Copes tipped it back through the net with 0.6 seconds remaining. The Cougars had a shot at the buzzer but it was off the mark.

Basketball season ticket holders will have an opportunity to purchase their season ticket seat locations for the 2nd round game. If you are a season ticket holder, you will receive an e-mail with further details by 12:00 noon on Wednesday.

Tickets for the general public will be available at the Patriot Center Box Office and through Ticketmaster (www.Ticketmaster.com or 800-745-3000). Ticket prices and on sale information will be posted on GoMason.com by 12:00 noon on Wednesday.

