

Panthers Top Washington State, 71-65, to Win CBI Title

PITTSBURGH (AP) – Tray Woodall scored 17 points and Pittsburgh beat Washington State 71-65 on Friday night to win the College Basketball Invitational title.

Lamar Patterson had 14 points, eight rebounds and five assists while being named the tournament's Most Valuable Player.

Talib Zanna continued his strong postseason by finishing with 12 points and five rebounds for the Panthers (22-17), who salvaged a disappointing season by winning the final two games of the best-of-three series.

Reggie Moore led Washington State (19-18) with 18 points but the Cougars had trouble stopping Pitt even though the Panthers played without star senior guard Ashton Gibbs, who missed the final two games of his college career with an ankle injury.

Pitt shot 50 percent from the floor and turned it over just three times. The Panthers broke it open with a 12-2 run midway through the second half and the Cougars would get no closer than six the rest of the way.

The Cougars had injury problems of their own. They played the entire series without forward Brock Motum, the Pac-12's leading scorer. Motum injured his ankle in a semifinal victory over Oregon State.

Without the 6-foot-10 Motum to worry about, Zanna and Patterson went to work. Zanna, a sophomore forward from Nigeria, struggled during the regular season but found his footing in the CBI, scoring in double digits in five of Pitt's six games in the tournament.

Zanna was never better than during the game-turning run. The teams were tied at 44 when Pitt's JJ Moore was fouled during a 3-point attempt. He hit the first two free throws but missed the third. Zanna tipped the ball away from two Washington State players to extend the possession and then finished it with a dunk off a feed from Woodall. He later hit a nifty hook shot to push the lead to 52-45 before Woodall found him for another dunk to make it 56-46 with 9:20 to play.

Washington State's Mike Ladd ended the run with a layup but Woodall drained an 18-footer as the shot clock expired on Pitt's next possession and the Panthers were on their way to winning their first postseason championship outside of a conference tournament.

It wasn't the season Pitt envisioned in November. The defending Big East champions were picked to finish fourth in the Big East behind Gibbs, touted as the conference's preseason player of the year.

Yet the Panthers never got going. Woodall missed 11 games with a groin injury, forcing Gibbs to play the point. The experiment failed and the Panthers plummeted to their worst season in over a decade.

Coach Jamie Dixon hoped for a bid to the NIT but accepted one to the CBI feeling it would help his young roster improve. The Panthers rolled into the finals and showed some maturity despite having just one senior forward Nasir Robinson in the rotation.

Patterson averaged 11.6 points, 6.1 rebounds and 4.6 assists during the series to prevent the Cougars who lost in the NIT semifinals a year ago from claiming the CBI championship.