

Princeton Outlasts IUPUI 74-68 in Double OT

INDIANAPOLIS – For context, it can't compare to the game held about a mile away from here and 14 years ago, but it was hard to beat for excitement.

The "Catfight in the Jungle" as IUPUI was billing it went to the Tigers over the Jaguars as the Princeton men's basketball team advanced, 74-68 in double overtime, to a College Basketball Invitational semifinal game Wednesday night at 8 p.m. Central Time on HDNet TV at Saint Louis University.

The Billikens also went double overtime Monday night, defeating Wisconsin-Green Bay 68-62.

Sydney Johnson's teams seem to have a knack for the dramatic in the Circle City when the postseason comes calling. More than a decade after the then-junior helped lead his team to a 43-41 upset of defending champion UCLA in the 1996 NCAA Tournament in a football stadium, he coached Princeton through 50 grueling minutes against the Summit Conference's runner-up in a packed little gym.

The Tigers (22-8) needed some leading tonight, and it came from sources in addition to Johnson. Senior Marcus Schroeder added 10 points while tallying just one assist on a night when IUPUI's (25-11) interior presence forced the Tigers to improvise. Zach Finley had a foul-shortened three minutes, and his fellow senior center Pawel Buczak was 6 for 10 from the field for 12 points.

"I think we were fortunate to get it into overtime," said Johnson. "We were clearly fortunate to beat a very good team."

Princeton complemented the senior guidance with outstanding efforts from players who aim for this postseason not to be their last. Junior Dan Mavraides played 49 minutes and scored 18 points, rebounding from being held scoreless in the CBI opener against Duquesne last week. Freshman Ian Hummer was 8 for 12 from the field, scoring 16 points while grabbing a team-high six rebounds.

But it was far from a complete effort, and the Tigers are fortunate to have a chance to try and bounce back in two days rather than having to wait until November for another game. Princeton was outrebounded 48-33 by IUPUI and left 11 of its 21 free throw attempts at the line.

Despite the statistical shortcomings, those who have followed the Tigers closely this season know that comebacks have been a common occurrence this season.

"They've played from behind and been fine," Johnson said. "We don't panic. I think we trust in each other. I think that has a lot to do with the chemistry in the locker room."

The Tigers made up for it with an 18-9 turnover advantage and 48.3 percent shooting from the field, a statistic that survived the 6-for-20 night from beyond the arc.

Some intangibles were there as well, with Princeton having had its chances to fold and head back to campus. IUPUI's lead was 11 with less than seven minutes to play in the first half, but the Tigers roared back by closing the half on a 14-3 run to tie it.

"I think going on that run put a little something back in us," Mavraides said. "I think I was probably more tired when we were down 10."

Again, Princeton was down by 10 with less than nine minutes to play in the game before going on a 13-1 run to take a 59-57 lead with four minutes left.

Princeton never led in regulation by more than three points, and the two-point lead was short-lived. IUPUI led 63-61 and had the chance to put Princeton away with two free throws at the 29-second mark of regulation, but the Jaguars' John Ashworth missed them both.

The final minute all but belonged to Hummer, who grabbed the rebound of Ashworth's second miss, had the game-tying layup, and scrapped with IUPUI's Leroy Nobles for a loose ball near half court that went to Princeton on the possession arrow. After a first overtime that saw the final 1:15 go scoreless, Princeton helped force IUPUI to miss all four of its shots in double OT and turn the ball over three times. Marvaides, Hummer and Schroeder accounted for Princeton's eight points in the second extra frame, with Mavraides hitting three of four free throws in the final minute to seal it.