

Patriots Downs Santa Clara to Extend CBI Finals, 73-66

FAIRFAX, Va. - In front of a raucous capacity crowd at the RAC Gym, the George Mason men's basketball team stormed out to an early lead and never looked back, capturing game two of the College Basketball Invitational presented by Buick over Santa Clara, 73-66, on Wednesday evening. The victory forces a deciding game-three showdown on Friday night at 7 p.m. at the Patriot Center.

Junior Sherrod Wright paced the Patriots (22-15) with his second career double-double, pouring in 20 points and 11 rebounds, both game highs. Joining him in double digits were classmate Bryon Allen with 15 points and freshman Erik Copes, who had 10 points along with inne rebounds. Kevin Foster led the Broncos (25-12) with 16 points.

The Patriots scored eight of the first nine points, holding the Broncos without a field goal until the 16:22 mark, a Raymond Cowels 3-pointer. Santa Clara closed to within a basket just over two minutes later on Evan Roquemore's four-point play, but Mason stretched its lead back to eight after Paris Bennett hit a jumper in the lane and the bonus free throw, making the score 17-9 with 11:31 left in the half.

SCU got no closer than five for the duration of the period, as the Patriots used a 13-3 run to take their largest lead, 35-19, inside of two minutes. After Cowels hit another three with seven seconds to play to cut the gap to 11, Allen drove the length of the court and laid it in as the halftime buzzer sounded to give the Patriots a 39-26 lead.

The Broncos started the second half strong, using a 7-0 run to pull within six at 39-33. The teams essentially traded baskets for the next few minutes, until Foster's trey with 12:04 remaining cut the gap to 47-42. Mason answered with a 9-2 run to go back up 12, and they would lead by as many as 14 before a furious Santa Clara rally in the final minute.

Santa Clara scored three baskets to close within 70-66, and Brandon Clark had a chance to make it a one-possession game after he laid it in and was fouled. His free throw was off the mark, and Wright sank one of two to make it 71-66, with Arledge punctuating the victory with a last-second dunk to set the final margin.

