

Billikens Reach CBI Championship Round

ST. LOUIS – Kwamain Mitchell and Willie Reed combined for 41 points Wednesday night to lead Saint Louis to a 69-59 victory over Princeton at Chaifetz Arena, propelling the Billikens to the championship round of the College Basketball Invitational.

Saint Louis (23-11) will meet Virginia Commonwealth (25-9) of the Colonial Athletic Association in next week's best-of-three finals. The Rams were 88-75 winners over Boston University Wednesday night. Game one between SLU and VCU will take place Monday, March 29, in Richmond, Va., at 6 p.m. (CT). Game two at Chaifetz Arena will tip at 7 p.m. (CT) Wednesday, March 31, while game three, if necessary, is slated for a 7 p.m. (CT) start at Chaifetz Arena Friday, April 2.

Mitchell tallied game highs of 21 points and five assists, while Reed registered his ninth double-double of the season with 20 points and a game-high 10 rebounds. Cody Ellis and Brian Conklin added nine points apiece for the Billikens, who shot 54.5 percent (24of44) from the floor, their second-best effort of the season.

Princeton (22-9) was led by Kareem Maddox (16 points) and Douglas Davis (14 points). The Tigers shot 44.4 percent (20-of-45) on the evening but were just 1of8 from beyond the arc in the second half following a 4of8 effort in the opening period.

Mitchell gave the Billikens a 5-2 lead with a long 2-pointer followed by a trey from the left wing, but Princeton scored on five of its first seven possessions to grab a 12-7 advantage. Saint Louis reclaimed the lead at 16-14 with a 9-2 spurt consisting of Conklin's 3-point play, Reed's dunk, Conklin's layup and Reed's steal and dunk.

Davis' 3-pointer from the right corner put the Tigers back on top, and the lead changed hands six more times before Maddox's driving layup made it 25-22 Princeton. However, Reed and Mitchell tallied six points apiece in a 164 Billiken run over the final 6:55 that allowed SLU to carry a 38-29 cushion to the locker room. Reed scored all three of his baskets after grabbing offensive rebounds, while Mitchell nailed a 3pointer early in the run and finished it with a traditional 3-point play following a running bank shot.

Saint Louis shot 57.7 percent (15-of-26) in the first half, while Princeton checked in at 47.8 percent (11-of-23). However, the Tigers went just 5-of-15 after beginning the game 6-of-8. The Bills picked up where they left off following the break, scoring on their first three possessions. Reed had a dunk, Ellis netted a trey from the right corner and Kyle Cassity beat the shot clock with a 3-pointer from the top of the key that gave SLU a 46-29 advantage.

Princeton answered with a flurry of its own, though, and narrowed the gap to eight points. Ian Hummer made a layup and two free throws, Maddox converted a 3-point play after sinking a tough short jumper and Dan Mavraides hit a pullup banker, and suddenly it was 46-38 Saint Louis.

Saint Louis stretched the margin to 12, 52-38, following Reed's up-and-under, a driving lefthanded floater by Christian Salecich and a Conklin layup. Princeton crafted an 113 run that narrowed the margin to six points, 55-49, only to see the Billikens regain command with yet another Reed dunk, Mitchell's fast-break layup and a Salecich free throw that restored a double-digit cushion, 60-49.

Princeton pulled to within eight points twice down the stretch, but SLU kept the Tigers at bay by making enough free throws to preserve the victory.