

Champions!

Siena Saints: 2014 College Basketball Invitational Champions.

"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight with you, then you win."

Jimmy Patsos ripped a sign with this Gandhi quote off Siena's lockerroom wall and brought it to the postgame press conference before making sure his team posed with it next to the CBI trophy.

The Saints completed a remarkable turnaround season with an improbable championship Saturday in Loudonville. Plenty of people laughed at Siena's chances when the energetic Patsos took over a year and two days ago after inheriting a team that lost a program-record 24 games last year.

Nobody's laughing now.

CBI Tournament MVP Brett Bisping finished off one of the most improved seasons in all of college basketball with 20 points and nine rebounds in the title game, and after his three-pointer rattled home on Siena's first possession the Saints never looked back in a wire-to-wire victory that was the perfect coronation to this surprising season.

Siena's 20th win exemplified what this team was all about. The Saints gave over-the-top effort from start-to-finish and rattled the Bulldogs with a ferocious press before sinking into an unexpected 3-2 zone. They crashed the boards for 46 rebounds, including 14 on the offensive end.

After Bisping's second three-pointer hit home with 9:19 left in the first half, the Saints had doubled-up Fresno State 22-11, and they led by at least nine the rest of the way.

Bisping's 20 points were only outdone by junior Rob Poole who scored 23 and sealed the game from the free throw line late. Poole scored 556 points - the 10th most in a season in program history.

Fresno State senior Tyler Johnson had 20 points and 10 rebounds Saturday - his 12th 20-plus point performance this season. It wasn't nearly enough.

The Bulldogs shot 76% (16-21) from the field in the first half of their 89-75 win over the Saints Wednesday, but made just 18% (4-22) in the first 20 minutes in the title game.

Meanwhile, Siena's offense was firing on all cylinders. The Saints broke 80 points for the first time in a regulation game since December 6. Freshman point guard Marquis Wright joined Poole and Bisping in double figures with 12 points, and his four assists left him just one shy of 200 for the season - tying for the fourth most in program history.

Nearly every Siena player had a role in the Championship, and a Fresno State timeout with three seconds to play allowed for senior walk-on Steven Cruz to finish his career on the court. Cruz was hoisted onto the shoulders of his charging classmates moments later, and was given the honor of being the last player to cut down the net.

The longest season in Siena basketball history ended this way. Siena Saints: 2014 College Basketball Invitational Champions.

