

Championship Bound!

Siena scored the first nine points and never looked back in a 61-49 victory over Illinois State in the semifinals of the CBI Wednesday night in Albany. The Saints advance to next week's best-of-three Championship Series against the winner of tonight's Old Dominion/Fresno State game. Siena will be on the road Monday night in game one, then host game two on Wednesday, April 2 and a potential game three (date and location TBA).

Illinois native Brett Bisping, who grew up fewer than 30 miles from the Illinois State campus, led all players with 20 points and rounded out his second straight double-double with 13 rebounds. If there's an MVP award for the CBI Tournament, he's making a strong case for it.

"Brett is becoming a great player," Siena coach Jimmy Patsos said. "Obviously he took it personally he wasn't recruited by Illinois State."

Bisping and the young Saints (18-16) will now play for a national postseason championship for the first time in their Division I history (won 1950 National Catholic Invitational).

Siena's made it this far because of its defense. The Saints have given up an average of just 52 points in their three CBI games, and improved to 9-0 this season when holding its opponents to 59 points or fewer.

Illinois State (18-16) made just 2-21 three-pointers, and was never able to make a serious dent after Siena's fast start. The Saints led from start-to-finish, and after Bisping's early tip-in made it 14-9, the lead was at least five the rest of the way.

The Redbirds trailed 42-35 with 7:51 to play, but Bisping hit a jumper and Rob Poole followed with a three to create more space.

Poole finished with 14 points. Ryan Oliver (11) and Evan Hymes (10) came off the bench to contribute double figures as well. The Saints are 8-2 when four or players reach double figures this season. Marquis Wright played nearly 40 minutes and stuffed the statsheet with five assists, three steals and a career-best four blocks.

Reggie Lynch had 15 points and seven rebounds for Illinois State which was the last Missouri Valley Conference team left playing.

Siena will be one of the last 10 teams playing Division I basketball when the Championship Series returns to the Capital Region next Wednesday.

The Saints improved to 16-11 in national postseason play, and will play their first ever game in the month of April next week. In fact, Siena will have played its earliest (November 8) and latest (April 2) game ever by the time the Championship Series has concluded in what already is the longest season in program history.

Siena fans have enjoyed the ride.