

7/22/2012: PTL Notebook – Upset headlines semifinal play

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NORTH LIBERTY, Iowa – Sometimes, a second chance is all that's needed.

Entering Sunday's slate of Prime Time League semifinal games, Culver's/Iowa City Ready Mix went into its showdown with Vinton Merchants/Mike Gatens Real Estate without a single victory to its name this summer. But with there only being four teams participating in the PTL this summer, being 0-5 didn't end up mattering much.

With a combination of streaky shooting in the first half and coming up clutch from the free-throw line in the final minutes, Culver's/Ready Mix picked up its first victory of the summer, defeating Merchants/Gatens 100-93 to advance to Tuesday's PTL championship game against Jill Armstrong of Skogman Realty, who won 99-93 over L.L. Pelling Company/McCurry's in the other semifinal.

Paving the way for Culver's/Ready Mix in this one were the Iowa duo of senior forward Eric May and sophomore forward Aaron White. May finished with a game-high 24 points on 10-of-18 shooting from the floor and also pulled down seven rebounds. Despite shooting a meager 5-of-15, White also shot 10-of-12 from the charity stripe to finish with 22 points along with eight rebounds.

"All you need is two really to be the champion, so that's what we wanted to do," White said about getting that first victory.

In addition to the efforts of May and White, Culver's/Ready Mix also received 14 points and five rebounds from incoming freshman guard Anthony Clemmons and 11 points from incoming freshman forward Kyle Meyer. With the game tied at 28-28, Culver's/Ready Mix looked like it might blow the game open, scoring seven unanswered points and leading at halftime 59-52.

"Everybody was moving the ball well, we were knocking down shots, we were crashing the boards," May said. "We were just clicking... finally. It seemed like that was the first time we had a few possessions like that in a row."

Merchants/Gatens would get back in the game and even take the lead in the second half thanks in large part to the play of incoming freshman center Adam Woodbury, who had 20 points on 10-of-14 shooting.

But in the closing minutes, free throws would prove to be critical. With Merchants/Gatens trailing 90-88, Woodbury had a chance to tie the game with a pair of free throws, only to miss both attempts. Remaining ahead 94-91 in the final minute, Culver's/Ready Mix went 6-of-6 from the line to reach the century mark in points.

"They didn't fall," Woodbury said. "I've been putting in a lot of work at the gym on them. They didn't fall, but last week, I went 2-for-3. It's going to come. I'm going to feel more confident with it and everything's going to fall together."

In defeat, Merchants/Gatens received a double-double of 18 points and 13 rebounds from incoming transfer Jarrod Uthoff, who also had six assists. It also received a near double-double from junior forward Zach McCabe, who compiled 17 points and nine rebounds. Sophomore guard Josh Oglesby finished with 14 points.

As for the second semifinal, Armstrong/Skogman won in large part due to the performances of junior forward Melsahn Basabe and former Iowa center Jarryd Cole, both of whom tallied 34

points each. Basabe also pulled down 19 rebounds, while Cole had 12 boards.

In what was mostly a back-and-forth second half, both players had key stretches. With the game tied at 74-74, Basabe proceeded to score the game's next six points and Armstrong/Skogman looked like it had a win in the bag.

"I've just been trying to play smarter, control efficient basketball as opposed to what I was doing before, really going for points," Basabe said. "I'm just sticking to my bread and butter because that's what I forgot last year. I'm a great rebounder and I let my offense create off that."

Not to be outdone, Pelling/McCurry's fought back to tie the game at 91-91 with two minutes remaining. Sparking the late rally was sophomore forward Gabe Olaseni, who had perhaps his best showing this summer with 31 points on 14-of-22 shooting and six rebounds.

The scoring output was clear evidence of what Olaseni described as the most significant facet to his game that has led to his improvements – confidence.

"I think I proved to myself I can score when I put my mind to it and also play a little bit of defense as well," Olaseni said.

Cole made a go-ahead bucket with 1:24 left and would later make two more big plays – pulling down a rebound at the defensive end off a missed Pelling/McCurry's free throw, and then sinking two free throws himself to secure the victory. Afterwards, he said being consistent every time on the court has been the greatest emphasis for him this summer as he prepares to play professionally in France, leaving Aug. 6.

"When the ball's in my hands, I got to be able to do something," Cole said. "I worked on that and I was able to do it tonight. Teammates found me and I was able to contribute."

The PTL championship game is scheduled to tip off at 9 p.m. Central from the Jones Gym inside the North Liberty Community Center and it will be televised locally by Mediacom Connections.

Culver's/Ready Mix (BLACK) VS. Merchants/Gatens (GOLD) (FIRST HALF VIDEO):

Culver's/Ready Mix (BLACK) VS. Merchants/Gatens (GOLD) (SECOND HALF VIDEO):

Armstrong/Skogman (BLUE) VS. Pelling/McCurry's (WHITE) (FIRST HALF VIDEO):

Armstrong/Skogman (BLUE) VS. Pelling/McCurry's (WHITE) (SECOND HALF VIDEO):