

#6 Chicago State continues strong play with team effort in win over #3 Centenary

#3 Centenary 54 #6 Chicago State 70; Franklin paces scoring in Cougars victory

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Kansas City- The gritty Chicago State Cougars (12-19, 9-7, 1-0) continue to be a pesky bunch that has just enough talent and heart to win their first-ever postseason Mid-Continent Conference game. The Cougars had the lead for 36:41 in their 70-54 victory over the Centenary Gents (16-12, 10-6, 0-1) in the first round of the Mid-Continent Conference tournament at Kemper Arena in the final game of Sunday (March 7).

"It feels really good to get our first postseason win," stated Chicago State Head Coach Kevin Jones and the Mid-Con Coach of the Year. "I was here last year as interim coach and I vowed this year we wouldn't be leaving after the first game."

The Gents jumped out to the early lead at 4-2 with 18:31 left in the first half before the Cougars exploded on a 13-1 run over the next 6:24 of play to take a 13-5 lead at the 12:07 mark. Craig Franklin led the way for Chicago State scoring nine of his game high 18 points during the spurt. Franklin hit a cool 70-percent from the floor during the game.

Following the game Franklin said that he "was feeling it tonight. I kept going and going and stayed focused and let the game come to me."

Centenary battled back during first half action cutting the gap to three points at 19-16 with 4:39 remaining on the clock. The Cougars took advantage of some sloppy play by the Gents and headed into the break with a 24-19 lead.

The second half action started out with both teams trading baskets until the Cougars were able to muster together a slow but steady offensive attack over the first seven minutes of action. Chicago State built its lead to 13 points (44-31) with thirteen minutes and change left on the game clock.

The Gents were never able to get the score closer than nine points the rest of the way as the Cougars proved to be too good of a team on this night. Chicago State ended the game with their largest lead of the night at 16 points.

Senior Andrew Wisniewski and Centenary struggled from the free-throw line the entire game. Wisniewski a usual 80-percent shooter from the charity stripe only hit 2-of-6 in the game before following out with three minutes of action left. The Gents usually shoot 72-percent from the stripe, but on this night they shot a crummy 44-percent (11-25) from the charity stripe.

About the only bright spot on the night for Wisniewski was the six assists he dished out and three steals he came away with. Wisniewski finished the game with 8 points on 3-of-8 shooting, including 0-for-5 from three-point distance.

On the other side of the ball, Chicago State hit 70.4-percent (19-27) from the stripe. The Cougars outscored the Gents in the paint 25-to-9, while the Gents had an 8-2 edge in fast break points.

Franklin's roommate, Rubeen Perry, scored 12 points and missed a double-double by one rebound as he racked up 9 boards on the night. Perry added four assists and two steals in the game.

Jeleel Akindele was the third and final Chicago State player to reach double-figures with 10 points. Akindele was huge defensively as he racked up four blocks on the night and six rebounds.

Chicago State was the laughingstock of the Mid-Con not long ago before turning around their season after beginning with a rough 1-14 record. Since then they have compiled an impressive 10-5 record over their final 15 games of the season.

"I was here for the beginning of Chicago State when we were like the doormat of the league," explained fifth year senior Perry. "It's unexplainable. It's a great feeling."

Ronald Mickel led the Gents in scoring with 12 points and was joined in double-figures by Michahel Gale and Rickey Evans. Both Gale and Evans scored 10 points in the game.

For Chicago State all attention turns to their match-up against the defending Mid-Con tournament champion IUPUI Jaguars. The two teams split games during regular season play and the Cougars will look to continue their unthinkable season. Chicago State will play IUPUI in the semi-finals of the conference tournament on Monday night (March 8) at Kemper Arena with the tip-off set for 8:30 p.m.

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