

Golden Bulls Repeat as CIIA Champions

Hollis' 19 points, Scott's three pointer fuel victory

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Johnson C. Smith came into the 2009 CIIA Tournament championship game against Virginia Union looking to repeat as tournament champions. Virginia Union was looking to win their fourth championship in six years. The challenge for Virginia Union would be could they win with new coach Willard Coker at the helm, after replacing longtime coach Dave Robbins who retired shortly after the end of last season.

It would be the Golden Bulls who would repeat as CIIA tournament champions by defeating Virginia Union 70-63 at the Time Warner Cable Arena. It was the third CIIA championship for the Johnson C. Smith program.

“This is just huge,” said JCSU head coach Steve Joyner, Sr. “As far as back-to-back, personally for our team, it’s very exciting especially for people like (sophomore guard) Ronald Thornhill, who’s won two and is back there saying he doesn’t know how to lose. It’s a big step for our program.”

Jerry Hollis scored 11 of his 19 points in the first half to earn tournament MVP honors and help the Golden Bulls earn the conference’s automatic bid to the NCAA Division II tournament.

Ryan Scott scored 13 points, Tavaris Little added 12 points and Michael Cooper finished with nine points for the Golden Bulls.

Gregg Thondique paced Virginia Union with 23 points and 13 rebounds. Braxton Byerson contributed 16 points. Virginia Union, which was ranked second in the latest Atlantic Regional rankings, more than likely will be invited to the Division II tournament.

Scott delivered perhaps the biggest basket of the game with the shot clock winding down and JCSU clinging to a 62-58 lead. Scott drained a 3-pointer from the top of the key with 1:25 remaining to give the Golden Bulls the 65-58 lead. Scott scored all of his points in the second half after sitting most of the first half because of foul trouble.

“I knew I’d get my time,” said Scott. “The way Jerry was working down-low, I just told him, ‘Let me know – I’m ready.’”

On Virginia Union's next two possessions, Hollis and Little blocked shots to help secure JCSU's second-straight tournament.

Both teams started the game off with a fury as there were five lead changes and three ties. With the score tied at 11 early in the first half, Johnson C. Smith (23-7) went on a 12-2 run capped off by a Hollis jumper with 9:53 remaining in the first half giving the Golden Bulls a 23-13 lead. Virginia Union would get as close as five points as Branden Smith's jumper with 2:15 remaining in the half, pulled the Panthers to within 28-23. The Golden Bulls took a 34-27 halftime lead.

But Virginia Union (21-6) refused to go away easily. Trailing by 11 points with less than 11 minutes remaining, Virginia Union sliced JCSU's advantage to four points on three occasions in the final 4:30. The last was at 62-58 following a Braxton Byerson 3-pointer from the corner with 2:39 remaining. The Golden Bulls were able to get a couple of offensive rebounds on its next possession which led to the big three-pointer by Scott.

Both teams will know their fate as the NCAA Division II Men's Basketball Selection Committee will announce the 64 teams for its championship tournament on Sunday March 8.