



2011 State Farm Missouri Valley Conference Women's Basketball Championship Tournament

Semifinals - Game 8

No. 3 Missouri State 84, No. 7 Indiana State 79

*Saturday, March 12, 2011 * Family Arena, St. Charles, Mo.*

ST. CHARLES, Mo. — The Missouri State Lady Bears built an early 20-point advantage over Indiana State, then survived the Sycamores' second-half comeback bid for an 84-79 victory Saturday in their semifinal match-up at the State Farm Missouri Valley Conference Tournament at The Family Arena. With the win, the Lady Bears advance to Sunday's title game, where they will take on regular-season champ UNI at 2:05 p.m., for the right to represent the Valley in the NCAA Tournament.

After cruising to a 20-point lead in the first nine minutes of the contest, the Lady Bears held off the Sycamores to move into their first Valley championship game in five years, despite a second-half shooting demonstration by ISU that saw it hit on 10-of-16 (.625) three-point attempts to turn what appeared to be a runaway victory in the making for MSU into a five-point game in the end.

But the Lady Bears had just enough wiggle room to secure their 23rd victory of the season, thanks in large part to a balanced offensive attack that featured five double-figure scorers for the first time this season. Casey Garrison led MSU with 22 points, while Christiana Shorter added 13, including nine critical points in the final 11:39 to help wrap up the victory. Freshman Karly Buer came through for MSU with her best offensive performance since November, totaling 12 points on 6-of-8 field goal attempts.

Additionally, MSU also got 14 points from Jaleshia Roberson and 10 points from Lacey Boshe off the bench, as the Lady Bear enjoyed a much-needed lift from its reserves for the second straight night.

Missouri State was in control throughout the first half, scoring 27 of the first 34 points to cruise into the break with a 43-28 advantage. Led by Roberson's nine points, the MSU bench out-scored ISU's reserves by a 19-0 margin in the opening half, and the Lady Bear defense forced 11 turnovers and limited the Sycamores to 3-of-14 (.214) shooting from beyond the arc.

Both offenses struggled in the early moments of the contest, as neither team put any points on the board until the 16:53 mark, when Shorter corralled a loose ball in the paint and converted from point blank. That bucket would get the ball rolling for the Lady Bears, who would catch fire to connect on nine of their next field goal attempts over the ensuing four-and-a-half minutes to ultimately build a 20-point lead.

Just as it did in Friday's quarterfinal win over Drake, the Lady Bear bench played a critical role in the MSU attack. Roberson drained a three with 14:43 to play, then buried two more long triples over the ensuing two minutes to stake the Lady Bears to a 21-5 advantage.

Roberson got some help from Boshe, who tallied six points in the first nine minutes of play and eight points altogether in the period. Her two free throws at the 11:33 mark hiked the gap to 27-7 for MSU's largest lead of the half.

Behind three-pointers from Kelsie Cooley and Brittany Schoen, the Sycamores were able to pull to within 13 in the final minute of the half, before Garrison knocked down a pair of free throws with one second left on the clock to close out the first-half scoring.

Garrison would lead all scorers with 10 points in the first half, six of which came after she sustained a cut above her left eye that required six stitches to close. In all, eight players cracked the scoring column for MSU, which shot .432 (16-of-37) from the floor and was a perfect 8-of-8 at the foul line as a team.

Missouri State (23-9) got baskets from Buer and Garrison, as well as a three from Jasmine Malone in the first three minutes of the second half to push its lead to 50-30. The Sycamores (16-16) bounced back behind the play of Whitley, who accounted for eight of ISU's first 12 points of the half. She teamed up with Cooley to hit back-to-back treys, then scored four straight points to pull her club to within 13 once again.

The two clubs would go back-and-forth until the Lady Bears would use a 6-1 run to extend their lead back to 18 with 8:57 to play. ISU would not go away, though, as three different Sycamores connected from long range a total of four times over the ensuing five minutes to slice the MSU lead down to eight points.

But Shorter registered back-to-back field goals and Roberson knocked down a pair of free throw tries to stretch the margin back into double digits. Schoen and Annie Munn would combine to hit a trio of threes in the final 1:06 to keep the heat on the Lady Bears, who went 7-of-10 from the foul line over the final 2:18 to salt away the win.

Sunday's game between the Lady Bears and Panthers (26-5) will be broadcast live on the MVC Television Network and carried locally in southwest Missouri on Fox Sports Midwest.

Courtesy: MSU Athletics Communications