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The Radford Highlanders Men's basketball team made its first appearance in the NCAA Tournament since 2009 this last week.

The Highlanders topped off their impressive season in which they finished second in the conference after being projected to finish seventh by winning the Big South Tournament and winning their first-ever NCAA tournament game against Long Island University Brooklyn.

The last time Radford had made it to the tournament was in the 2008-09 season where eventual champions North Carolina defeated them in the first round. It would take the Highlanders 9 years and undergoing an arduous rebuild for them to reach their next tournament appearance.

The Highlanders would finally get their first taste of success in March after defeating LIU Brooklyn 61-71 in their matchup in the First Four.

The Highlanders would then put up a valiant effort against #1 seed Villanova in a 61-87 loss to the Big East Tournament Champions. The Highlanders played hard every second, earning admiration from Former NBA star and commentator Reggie Miller who gushed on commentary about the Radford fans and the players making themselves and the school proud.



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It seems safe to say that this team absolutely did just that with a gutsy performance against one of the best teams in the tournament. The Highlanders shared a moment with their traveling support and even stayed to applaud and acknowledge the same fans who had been cheering their hearts out for their team.

Both this season's team and the 2008-09 team share some similarities when it comes to their leading scorers. 2008-09's squad was led in scoring and rebounding by Belarusian junior big man Artsiom Parakhouski while this year's squad was led in scoring and rebounding by another junior, this time being Ed Polite Jr. Polite Jr. was first-team All-Big South while Parakhouski was a multiple time Big South player of the year.

Current coach Mike Jones was the man chosen to help rebuild the program after a rough couple of seasons. The previous coaching regime was under fire from the NCAA and coming off the back of a particularly poor season, and the reins were handed to Coach Jones who changed the system and made the Highlanders into a tough and hard-working team with an emphasis on defense, rebounding and second-chance points.

Jones, in his 7th season who's in charge of the Highlanders finally saw his work and his team's work come to fruition with a second place finish in the conference after most had the Highlanders

pegged to finish 7th at the start of the season.

The Highlanders would fight through the Big South Tournament and defeat Liberty University in the final after a dramatic buzzer beater from Big South Freshman of the Year Carlik Jones. Coach Jones was recognized for his hard work over the course of the season by being named as Big South Coach of the Year.

The Highlanders will be looking forward to next season with a host of returning players and will be hungry to compete and make it back to the dance come next March.

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