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Austin White | awhite26@radford.edu

After surprisingly winning the Northeast Conference, LIU Brooklyn was coming off a five-game winning streak when they faced Radford in a play-in game for a spot in the East Region.

The winner would play Villanova University, the number one seed in the region. Even though the Blackbirds were on a win streak, the Highlanders were on a seven-game winning streak coming fresh off a game-winning buzzer beater by Carlik Jones to win the conference tournament over Liberty University.

Radford's defense made a difference early in the game holding LIU Brooklyn to nine points up 18-9 with 9:37 left in the first half. Ed Polite Jr. made his presence known by getting six quick points and two assists. He also grabbed three rebounds in that timespan while playing impressive defense on forward Zach Coleman for most of the night.

LIU Brooklyn kept it close with forward Raiquan Clark hitting a key three-pointer to keep the game close making it 20-16 with 7:24 left in the first, forcing coach Mike Jones to call a timeout.

The rest of the half the Highlanders were trying to pull away from LIU Brooklyn, and they just couldn't shake them off. Sophomore Travis Fields Jr. started to make plays by finding senior Randy Phillips in the paint for a nice dunk. Fields also swished a three from the corner. The Highlanders found themselves up 30-28 at the end of the first half.

The Highlander guards carried the team for the entire game, especially the second half. Senior Christian Bradford started the second by making two layups to extend the lead. Phillips also came up big in the second, grabbing rebounds, blocking shots, and scoring on the inside to keep the LIU Brooklyn defense honest.

Clearly, Coach Jones wanted defense to be the key in winning the game, with the Highlanders not allowing LIU Brooklyn to score a field goal after sophomore guard Julian Batts' three-pointer with 6:50 left made the score 57-55 Radford. The rest of their points

came from free throws.

Radford's stellar defense ended up helping their offense finish the game on a 10-2 run.

One of Radford's primary offensive weapons in the first half started to go cold. Polite Jr. did not make a field goal for the rest of the game. Because his offense was missing, the Highlanders needed someone to fill the void.

That, someone, was Fields Jr. He carried on what he was doing in the first half of the second, assisting open teammates and hitting a sweet jumper. With 3:29 left in the game, he dribbled the ball to the right side of the three-point line with a defender on his hip.

He then crossed the ball over from his right hand to his left sending the defender flying to the right and finished the play by hitting a swishing three and nodding his head in satisfaction.

Polite Jr. ended up making up for his bad shooting night by hitting clutch free throws down the stretch of the game. The deciding ones came with 43 seconds left extending the lead to 71-61. He finished with 13 points and 12 rebounds notching his 27th career double-double.

All students and Radford citizens should be proud of this team after their incredible year, easily one of their best.

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