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IUK picks up historic first win, 82-76, over IUN.

athletics

November 2, 2011

Gary, ind. - Indiana University Kokomo men's basketball team wasn't interested in waiting to pick up their first historic win. Coach Jace Thompson and the Cougars hit the road, traveling to Gary for the first-ever men's basketball game under the new program, and they came home with a well-earned 82-76 win over Indiana University Northwest.

"From the top down, our guys worked hard," Thompson said. "This is where it paid off. It was a team win all the way around."

 IU Kokomo Cougar Basketball team.
IU Kokomo Cougar Basketball team.

Anthony Graves led the way for the Cougars with 31 points, including four three-pointers. Graves and the rest of the Cougars spent plenty of time at the foul line, shooting 39 free throws and converting 28 of them.

Chancellor Michael Harris applauds the team for winning the first game of the season.

"I am extremely proud of the team and congratulate them on their first win," Harris said. "They are fulfilling the dream and vision of the campus by proving to be a first-rate team. This is a great, historic moment for IU Kokomo and its future as a world class regional campus."

Lots of free throws usually mean an opportunity to win, according to Thompson.

"They tended to foul the right guys," he said. "Graves and (Brandon) Larrick were ice up there."

From the start, the Cougars looked and played like a veteran team – certainly not a team playing its first-ever game. Both teams battled hard in the first half, trading baskets on a regular basis. IU Kokomo took the lead for the first time, 9-6, on a three-pointer from Nathaniel Carroll. The RedHawks put together a 13-4 run midway through the first half and lead 23-17. Thompson was content to let his team play through their struggles.

"With a more veteran team, I might have called a timeout," Thompson explained. "But, I felt they needed to play through it." The Cougars steadied themselves and, after trailing 32-24 at one point, exploded for a 12-7 run to end the half. They trailed 37-36 at the break.

The second half saw 11 lead changes until Kokomo was able to take the lead for good with 4:29 left in the game. Aaron Knupp's put back of his own miss gave the Cougars a 70-69 lead. IU Kokomo's Nick George followed with a three-pointer, making it 73-69. However, the RedHawks would not go away and cut the lead to 78-76 with 40 seconds left. Good ball handling along with some made free throws sealed the win for Cougars.

Thompson said the key for his squad was keeping things simple.

"There's a chalkboard in the locker room," Thompson said. "I said that's what the game is. You've been playing it since kindergarten. You just go out there and play. It's no different. Everyone just got a little bigger. They did it. They executed."

IU Northwest was a bigger and admittedly more athletic team. That didn't matter, Thompson said.

"Our guys did a great job of blocking out," he said. "They are much taller and more athletic than us. We had some guys come up huge to get some boards. That's a big deal."

In addition to Graves' 31 points, Larrick scored 10 points to go along with 12 rebounds, giving him a double-double to open the season. Aaron Knupp had 12 points while Jared Lawrence finished with eight points. In all, seven different Cougars scored in the game.

Some firsts

For the record, the first basket scored by an IU Kokomo player in the new era came at the hands of Graves. The point guard drove to the basket and laid the ball off the glass to register the first points for the Cougars. Graves' speed and quickness gave the RedHawks fits the entire game as well.

Moments after Graves scored the first field goal, Larrick made the first free throws. The former Western High School standout made eight of 11 free throws in the game. The first three-pointer was Carroll's long bomb that came on the heels of Larrick's freebies.

The Cougars hit the road again this Friday, November 4, to take on Calumet College of St. Joseph. That game will be followed by a game against St. Francis of Chicago on Saturday. IU Kokomo opens its home schedule on Thursday, November 17, against Bethel College. All Cougar home games will be played at Western High School.

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.



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