

No. 7 Tennessee Advances on Lofton's Strong Effort

Late 3-pointer helps seal victory for Vols in Legends Classic Semifinals

[box score](#)

NEWARK, N.J. – Chris Lofton scored 19 points to lead No. 7 Tennessee to a 74-72 victory over West Virginia in the second game of the Stubhub! Legends Classic at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J. Friday night.

Lofton's 3-point basket with 3:55 remaining gave the Vols a five-point lead, and free throws by Tyler Smith, Lofton and JaJuan Smith down the stretch helped Tennessee improve to 5-0.

"I could come out and lie and say it was a great effort," West Virginia coach Bob Huggins said. "But we came out like we were scared. We didn't handle the ball, we were not the aggressor early on – they were the aggressor."

West Virginia (2-1) had a couple of opportunities to either tie or win the game late, but Da'Sean Butler missed a pair of jump shots with 55 and 27 seconds remaining. Only down three, the Mountaineers had another chance to tie the game with five seconds left but Alex Ruoff's 3-point try was off the mark.

"We had some pretty good shots at the end – those are shots that Da'Sean makes and they just didn't go down," Huggins said. "We're putting the ball in Da'Sean Butler's hands at the end of the game and he's a sophomore. He didn't even start last year. We're playing Wellington Smith and he hardly played a year ago. We've got to go to the bench to John Flowers who's a true freshman.

"We're just young and we've got to get better," Huggins said.

Trailing 33-28 at halftime, West Virginia used a 13-6 run at the start of the second half to take a 41-29 lead on a Darris Nichols lay up.

Ramar Smith answered with a three-point play under the basket to give the Vols a one-point lead, 42-41, and Tennessee added a 3 from JaJuan Smith to make it 45-41. Tennessee's biggest lead of the game was nine points following a Wayne Chism free throw with 8:29 remaining.

Joe Mazzula responded with a 3-pointer from the wing to cut Tennessee's lead to six, and an 8-0 West Virginia run pulled the Mountaineers to within one, 61-60, with 4:48 remaining.

Chism scored 17 and JaJuan Smith added 15 for Tennessee.

"JaJaun Smith makes a couple of huge 3s and Lofton makes a huge 3," Huggins said. "On Lofton's 3 we're out of line. A pass from half court goes to him for a jump shot. That can't ever happen. The ball can't ever come through us - it has to come around us or under us so we can recover and pressure the shot. We fell asleep and it's hard for me to understand how we could fall asleep on a first-team All-American."

Da'Sean Butler led West Virginia with 16 and Darris Nichols scored 15. Alex Ruoff added 14.

Neither team shot the ball well; Tennessee was 21 of 52 for 40.4 percent while West Virginia was 23 of 60 for 38.3 percent.

"We competed in the second half but we didn't compete the way we needed to compete in the first half," Huggins said. "We've got to grow and get better."

West Virginia held a 42-33 advantage on the glass but committed seven more fouls - 27 to 20. That led to Tennessee cashing in on 25 of 38 from the free throw line. The Vols also forced 19 Mountaineer turnovers.

"Tell me how they score in the first half if we don't throw it to them?" Huggins said. "They had 22 points off of turnovers and 16 points off of offensive rebounds. We go to sleep on the foul line and they rebound it on the foul line.

"We have to find a way to win, all this we gave a great effort and we'll get better ... you keep doing that and you say the same thing in March and I don't want to say the same thing in March," Huggins said.

The Mountaineers will face New Mexico State in the consolation game Saturday afternoon at 4 p.m. New Mexico State lost, 102-87 to No. 16 Texas in the first game tonight.