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LITTLE GIANTS PUNCH TICKET TO NCAA D3 TOURNAMENT

WOOSTER — Twelve lead changes. Eight ties down the stretch. Outcome riding on a last-second shot.

That's part of how No. 1 seed Wooster and No. 2 seed Wabash battled it out for the NCAC tournament championship and automatic bid to the NCAA Division III national tournament on Saturday. When the final buzzer sounded, the Little Giants emerged victorious 81-80. But it took every last ounce of effort to win it.

"We got out of here (Wooster) just short a week ago," said Wabash Head Coach Kyle Brumett after the triumph. "They (the team) really wanted to get this game back."

In many respects, the NCAC championship tilt was a flipped image of last Saturday's regular season conference showdown, where Wooster won 75-74 with a last-second three-point shot. Wooster led by as much as 13 points in that contest. The Little Giants came clawing back to take a two-point lead with two seconds remaining, only to lose on the final shot.

This time it was Wabash starting quickly out of the gate. Red-hot offensively, the visitors hit on 6 of 7 field goals, including 5-5 from beyond the three-point arc, to take an early 12-point lead at the 16:11 mark in the first half. Freshman center Gavin Schippert led the way, scoring 17



points early. The Little Giants extended their advantage to 17 (34-17) on an Edreece Redmond 3-pointer with 8:24 in the first.

But Wooster fought back, time and time again. The Scots closed the gap to 6 points at halftime, down 48-42.

Coming out of intermission, at first the battle was like the game's opening in reverse. Turner Kurt, Elijah Meredith and Jamir Billings all hit baskets and the game was tied 50-all at the 17:56 mark. Wabash responded with a 15-3 spurt, with key baskets coming from Ahmoni Jones, Champ McCorkle, and Edreece Redmond.

"Edreece played great," Brumett said. "He was incredible de-

fensively." The coach credited Redmond's aggressive defense in contributing to 13 Wooster turnovers in the contest.

Wabash had a 65-53 lead with 13:28 remaining. Again, Wooster battled from behind to catch the Little Giants. Kurt, Meredith, Billings and Nick Everett all contributed to a 13-0 Fighting Scots streak that propelled the home team to its first-ever lead, 66-65, with 10:02 to go. Then the contest turned into a back-and-forth tussle which saw neither team ahead by more than 3 points approaching the final stretch.

Like two heavy-weight boxers still slugging it out approaching Round 15,

Wabash and Wooster took turns hitting shots, making free throws, and stopping their opponent with good defense. Baskets from Josh Whack, Styles McCorkle, and pairs of successful free throws from Jones and Vinny Buccilla. Gave Wabash a 76-75 advantage with 6:21 remaining.

From there defense took over. Both teams missed consecutive shots, and defensive rebounds ruled the floor. No one scored for more than three minutes, until Billings landed a 3-pointer to give Wooster a 78-76 edge with 1:46 remaining.

Redmond grabbed an offensive rebound on a Sam Comer miss, converted it into two

points on a lay-up as Wooster fouled him, and made it a three-point play by nailing the free throw. Trailing 79-78, Meredith hit two charity tosses to give the home team an 80-79 lead with 21 seconds remaining.

That was more than enough time for the Little Giants. Jones connected on a turnaround jumper in the paint to put Wabash on top 81-80 with just 10 clicks remaining on the clock.

But Wabash had been at this point against Wooster before, just a week earlier. Lockdown defense from Edmonds led to a Billings miss, the ball sailing out of bounds, with less than a second remaining. The Little Giants successfully in-bounded

from their own end to seal the triumph.

"This team has a much WAF (Wabash Always Fights) in them as I've ever seen," Brumett said after the game. "We got 23 points off of turnovers, but we still knew we had to get that last stop."

Wabash ended the game shooting 51% from the field, 48% from three-point territory, and 86% from the free throw line. Wooster had 14 3-pointers — 10 of them from a red-hot Billings — but only 18 points in the paint compared to 24 for the Little Giants, despite the Fighting Scots' height advantage.

The victory puts Wabash basketball into the NCAA Division III playoffs for the second consecutive season. The last time that happened was in 1996-97 and 1997-98, in the era of Chad Tabor and when Wabash was in the Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference.

While thrilled with the automatic qualifying bid to the playoffs, Brumett believes Wooster deserved to be in the DIII dance as well "Two teams from the NCAC should be in every year," he said. "This conference is a basketball power conference. You see it in our records. DePauw finished sixth in the conference, but had 18 wins on the season."



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Jones heroics lifts Little Giants past Battling Bishops in thriller

"We've got better karma than most teams."

If "karma" is code for "Ahmoni Jones," then Wabash coach Kyle Brumett is totally on the nose, because Jones was on the pointy end of the spear that led the Little Giants to a 76-75 come-from-behind-late-in-the-game win over Ohio Wesleyan on Saturday at Chadwick Court.

The junior from Indianapolis Pike hit not one, not two, but three 3-point shots in the last two minutes to bring his team from down seven to winning by one, and keeping the Little Giants in control of their own destiny in the conference. They are now 17-4 overall and 10-2 in the NCAC. They are tied with league-leading Wooster in the loss column and their last game of the season is at Wooster.

Jones last triple, with 5.8 seconds on the clock, barely rippled the cords.

Jones was halfway back to play defense already. "I knew it was in," he said, sporting the confident look of the team leader he has become.

That third three was the game-winner, but it was the one before that had all 546 fans and both sets of coaches shaking their heads just a little.

Trailing 74-70, Jones got free of his coverage just a little, elevated, twisted and banked in a shot that would be impossible to duplicate



in a game of HORSE.

The first of the triple threesome came with 2:04 remaining in the game, and was the first points of the final comeback.

Jack Clement, the leading scorer in the conference, hit the last of his 11 field goals to give OWU a 71-64 lead with 2:26 on the clock.

It was the last field goal of the game for the Battling Bishops, who came into the game tied with Wabash for second place in the league but leave a game behind with a 9-3 mark, and drop to 14-7 overall.

Jones first trey cut the deficit to four. Clements hit two free throws to make it a six-point game.

Then up stepped Sam

Comer.

The junior from Danville hit one free throw with 1:23 left and then got open for a layup with :29 to go. It was 73-70.

OWU made one of two free throws, Jones hit the second triple with :15 left, to get within one.

The visitors, who had missed only two free throws in 21 attempts, missed the first and made the second.

Jones made it a one-point game at 74-73 with his twisting trey.

Back to the line with 14.1 to go, the Bishops missed another, made the second and Wabash called timeout.

"Comer's bucket earlier really set us up," Brumett said of the final sequence. "We

could get the ball back to him, which we knew they didn't want, and that meant we had Vinny (Buccilla) on the left and Ahmoni on the right. Those are pretty good options. We know that eventually, one of those guys will make a play."

As it was, Comer got the assist on the final Jones hoop, as he finished with 28 points. Buccilla carried the Little Giants through much of the second half, scoring 18 of his 20 after intermission.

The win, coming in front of most of the 1982 National Championship team and members of other Wabash playoff teams, including Jack Davidson and some of last year's Final Four squad,

gives the team a push going into the last two weeks of the regular season and whatever lies beyond that.

"The guys on this team are very different from the guys last year," Brumett noted. "This year's guys are much more diligent about the details. They have been in so many close games, but it wasn't until those last seconds that they had that confident, winning look. They were locked in and bought that last play. These guys work so hard, they are so coachable. It is all about getting them to believe in themselves. We had five juniors in to finish the game, five guys that were part of winning the league and getting to the Final

Four last year. I hope today puts them in the place where they want that pressure shot. These juniors can't shy away from their responsibilities as leaders of the team, and they have not. They might succeed or might fail, but we win or lose with them, and are happy with their efforts."

Jones, for his part, wants that shot, and knows it is his duty.

"I know I have to lead by example," he said. "Doing all the things I saw last year's seniors and captains do is now my job, and being able to do that for my team is what drives me. We've worked our tails off since the start of the season, and we have gotten really close as a team. Now we just have to continue winning. Never be complacent, have fun and never get down."

The Battling Bishops were led in scoring by Clement with 35. The final score was identical to the first meeting of the season, won by OWU at home. They took advantage of a poor shooting night by the Little Giants, especially from the line and from three-point range.

Jones and company reversed that number in picking up the win Saturday and staying in the hunt for the conference title.

CONGRATS TO WABASH ON YOUR SUCCESS!



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Little Giants fall in opening round of NCAA D3 Tournament

For the second straight season Wabash College Men's basketball found themselves playing in the NCAA Division III Men's Basketball Tournament. After a thrilling 81-80 win over the College of Wooster in the NCAC Title game Wabash traveled to Case Western Reserve University to take on University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Warhawks in the round of 64. Unfortunately for the Little Giants the cards were not in their favor as they saw their season come to an end with the Warhawks coming away with a 90-83 win.

In the first half Wabash were the ones with the advantage holding a 28-20 lead before the Warhawks battled to cut the Wabash lead to 33-30 after the first 20 minutes. Then the second half began and the Warhawk offense exploded for 60 points as Wabash's defense couldn't hold serve.

"I think out of the gate they weren't quite ready for us," Wabash coach Kyle Brumett said. "We came ready to play but in the second half when they got on their runs I felt like our guys felt like they just had to score with them, and



that's asking for trouble. Both teams fouled a ton and they were able to extend the lead that way. Every time we made a little run we couldn't keep them off the foul line."

The Warhawks ended the game shooting 28-40 (70%) from the foul line. Wabash got to the line and shot it just as well making 27-34 (79.4%) attempts. Miles Barnstable led all scorers

in the game scoring all 26 of his points in the second half. Trevon Chislom added 16 for the Warhawks and Jameer Barker scored 15.

Sam Comer led the way for the Little Giants with 19 points while Ahmoni Jones scored 18, Josh Whack 13, and Edreece Redmond rounded out the double-figure scoring with 11. Freshman Gavin Schippert added nine.

Coming into a season where the Little Giants lost the D3 Player of the Year in Jack Davidson along with Tyler Watson and Kellen Schreiber some expected a step back for this group. Instead Wabash continued their winning tradition by winning 21 games including the North Coast Athletic Title for the second straight season. While there is time to celebrate all this group

accomplished, Brumett knows the work is never done as every single member of this year's team will return next season as the Little Giants don't have a single senior on their roster.

"I'm really proud of this group for all of the work they put in to get here and the results we got this season," Brumett said. "Even while still being proud of them, our expectations

are going to continue to be high next year. There's a lot out there for us to achieve still. We had a chance to host the conference tournament at our place in the final weeks of the season and didn't get it done. I think the next step for Wabash College basketball is to try and host an NCAA Tournament game. With all of that being said, we have to embrace what it will take to get there. Because if we don't then we'll take a step backwards. With everything we lost this year the best part about this season was I never felt like we were taking a step back, just always moving forward. These guys are a real fun group to be a part of."

With every single player returning next season, there's not many reasons to believe why the Little Giants won't be favored to win the NCAC for a third straight season. If everything goes as it could, the Little Giants might just check off one of those goals for Brumett of hosting an NCAA Tournament game at Chadwick Court.

CONGRATS WABASH ON ANOTHER OUTSTANDING SEASON!
LOOKING FORWARD TO WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS!
- JOURNAL REVIEW SPORTS STAFF

Jones and Buccilla earn All-NCAC honors

Wabash College junior Ahmoni Jones and sophomore Vinny Buccilla earned 2023 All-North Coast Athletic Conference Men's Basketball First Team honors for their performances throughout the 2022-2023 basketball season. Both received all-conference recognition for the first time in their careers.

Jones ranked third in the conference with a 16.1 points-per-game scoring average. He tied for sixth in the NCAC in rebounds with an average of 6.2 boards per game. He scored a career-high 33 points against Marietta College in the first month of the season, then equaled it with a 33-point effort against Denison University on December 10. Jones scored over 20 points in nine games for Wabash this season and recorded two double-doubles as part of five for his career. Jones averaged 1.9 three-point baskets per game to tie for eighth in the conference. Jones shot 88 percent from the free throw line, the second-best percentage among conference players this season. He helped Wabash win the NCAC Men's Basketball Tournament

championship and earn a berth in the NCAA Division III Tournament with a 16-point, seven-rebound effort against Wooster in the championship game. Jones averaged 15 points and 9.3 rebounds in three conference tournament games and was named the Al Van Wie Award recipient as the conference tournament's most valuable player.

Buccilla averaged 14.3 points, 3.7 rebounds, and two assists per game as a starting guard for Wabash. He led the conference in three-point field goal percentage, connecting on 42.0 percent of his long-range attempts. Buccilla averaged 2.25 three-point field goals per game, second-best among NCAC players. His 63 made three-point field goals ranked second in the NCAC. Buccilla made 149-of-282 shot attempts for a 52.8 shooting percentage, fifth-best in the conference. He scored a career-best 26 points against Wooster on February 18 and recorded a double-double versus Wittenberg with 13 points and a career-high 12 rebounds on January 18.



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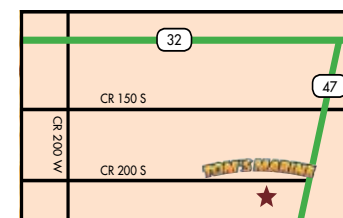
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Little Giants 2022-23 Schedule (21-8, 11-5 NCAC)

Nov. 8 vs Mt. St. Joseph 81-78 W
Nov. 11 vs Washington University (St. Louis) 70-67 W
Nov. 15 @ Hanover 79-69 W
Nov. 18 Great Lakes Invitational vs Marietta 89-81 OT L
Nov. 19 Great Lakes Invitational vs Maryville 84-74 W
Nov. 22 @ Anderson 87-85 W
Nov. 30 vs Earlham 65-57 Loss
Dec. 3 vs Oberlin 80-78 W
Dec. 6 @ Bellarmine (exhibition) 86-45 L
Dec. 10 vs Denison 74-66 W
Dec. 17 @ Ohio Wesleyan 76-75 L
Dec. 20 @ Rose Hulman 80-68 W
Dec. 30 vs Edgewood 90-63 W
Jan. 4 @ Kenyon 71-67 W
Jan. 7 vs Wooster 83-68 W
Jan. 11 vs Hiram 83-67 W
Jan. 14 @ DePauw 86-80 L
Jan. 18 vs Wittenberg 72-62 W
Jan. 21 @ Oberlin 86-82 OT W
Jan. 28 vs Kenyon 74-69 W
Feb. 1 vs DePauw 89-79 W
Feb. 4 vs Ohio Wesleyan 76-75 W
Feb. 8 @ Denison 68-61 L
Feb. 11 vs Hiram 80-70 W
Feb. 15 @ Wittenberg 58-56 OT L
Feb. 18 @ Wooster 75-74 L
Feb. 21 vs Hiram (NCAC Quater-Finals) 91-71 W
Feb. 24 vs DePauw (NCAC Semi-Finals) 75-67 W
Feb. 25 vs Wooster (NCAC Championship) 81-80 W
Mar. 3 vs Wisconsin Whitewater (NCAA D3 Touranment) 90-83 L







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