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Virgin Islands Push Canada to Brink but Loses on Buzzer-Beater in Opening Game of Third Window AmeriCup Qualifiers

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Walter Hodge (6) weaves through traffic to attempt a lay-up in the Virgin Islands two point loss against Canada By. FIBA BASKETBALL

The Virgin Islands Men's Basketball team nearly overcame a nine-point fourth quarter deficit but fell, 95-93, after Kyle Landry hit a buzzer beater for 21st ranked Canada to secure the victory in the first game of the third window of the 2022 AmeriCup qualifiers in San Juan, Puerto Rico on Wednesday.

The Virgin Islands were down 84-75 with just over six and a half minutes to go in the game, but they didn't quit and fought back to put Canada on upset alert.

The Virgin Islands tied the score at 88-88 with 2:20 to go in the game. No baskets were scored by either team until there was 1:25 left in the game and Walter Hodge hit a long two pointer to give the Virgin Islands a slim lead. Canada answered on the next possessions with two free throws from Aaron Best. The foul on Best occurred on a loose ball after the Virgin Islands forced a miss from Canada.

Hodge scored again for the Virgin Islands on the next possession as he hit a three-pointer with just 50.8 seconds left in the game. That basket was answered by a three-pointer by Phil Scrubb for Canada.

Hodge was called for a charge which resulted in a turnover with 21.6 seconds left, and Canada used the whole clock before Landry scored with no time remaining on a lay-up to take home the victory.

The game was heavily contested throughout as the Virgin Islands never trailed by double-digits. Hodge and Best led both their teams with 28 points a piece. Ivan Aska had 22 points and 8 rebounds for the Virgin Islands and Laron Smith had 15 points, 8 rebounds and 3 blocks.

One of the biggest statistical differences between the teams was free-throw shooting as the Virgin Islands went 60 percent from the free throw line, and only hit 26 of their 43 attempts. Canada, meanwhile, hit 96 percent of their free throws hitting 28/29 of their shots.

In an interview with the Consortium, USVI Head Coach Donald Bough said he told his team after the game, "Let it go, it's gone." Coach Bough said he focused on the positive, telling his team they played great and should not dwell on the heartbreaking loss.

Mr. Bough said that at the AmeriCup Qualifiers level, you can't make mental lapses. He said he wasn't referring to the last play but the three-pointer by Scrubb where he thought his team suffered one of those costly mental lapses. "We got to understand if you know your man is a shooter, you got to stay home with him and we had that lapse, and they made us pay."

Mr. Bough added, "I am so proud of the guys and it shows the nucleus that we have. I hope that the people that saw them are proud of them too. This [is an] under-manned team and we came out here and went against one of the powerhouses and took them to the wire."

The Virgin Islands will be back in action at 2:00 p.m. A.S.T Friday against the Dominican Republic, before a rematch with Canada at 2:30 A.S.T on Saturday. Both games will be televised on ESPN +.

Full Game Recap

Canada scored the first five points of the game and built a 12-6 lead three minutes after the start of the game, however the Virgin Islands refused to let the game get away from them early. The VI scored the next four points and played stingy defense. After a Hodge layup with 4:30 left in the first quarter, the lead was just two, 12-10, in favor of Canada. The Virgin Islands continued to chip away and cut the deficit down to one, 21-20, before Canada stretched their lead up to eight by scoring the last seven points of the first quarter.

Hodge came into the second quarter hot and scored the first four points of the period, forcing a Canada time-out. The timeout didn't slow the Virgin Islands momentum as the team forced a Canadian turnover on the next possession, which resulted in a transition slam dunk by Aska that made the score 28-26 with 8:39 left in the first half.

Canada maintained their lead over Virgin Islands and it fluctuated between 2 and 6 for the majority of the quarter. A Romani Hansen three-pointer for the Virgin Islands with 29 seconds left in the half, tied the game for the first time since 0-0. The Canadians hit a free throw before the end of the quarter and took a 47-46 advantage into halftime.

The Virgin Islands were down 44-38 with about two minutes and half minutes left in the half before closing the second quarter on an 8-3 run.

Canada scored the first basket of the second half to get their lead to three, but a lay-up and free-throw by Aska tied the game, and a Smith lay-up on the next possession after a Virgin Islands defensive stop gave the team its first lead of 51-49, after just over three minutes of second-half action.

The Virgin Islands fell behind by three before they called a time-out with 5:37 left in the third quarter. After they broke the huddle from that time out, the team scored the game's next six points to gain a 60-57 lead with about four and half minutes left in the quarter.

Canada outscored the Virgin Islands 17-9 the rest of the quarter and held a 74-69 advantage going into the final period of play. The Canadians got their lead as large as 8 with 30 seconds left in the third quarter. It was a Hodge three pointer with under five seconds left in the quarter that kept the V.I. within five points going into the final period.

The Virgin Islands began the fourth quarter strong and cut the lead down to 1, 76-75 with 8:39 of play left.

Canada went on a run and ballooned their lead to nine with 6:26 left in the game.

After a pair of Hansen free-throws, the Virgin Islands were only down four, 86-82 with 3:45 left in the game. Hodge hit three free throws on the next possession and the Virgin Islands trailed by just one point.

After Canada scored two points, Hansen converted a lay-up and drew a foul. When he hit the ensuing free-throw, the score was tied 88-88 with 2:20 left.

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