

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islands Overcomes 17-Point 4th Quarter Deficit to Force OT, But Loses To Dominican Republic in FIBA Qualifier

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Ivan Aska (11), goes up for a lay-up in the loss versus the Dominican Republic on Friday, Feb. 19 2021. By. FIBA BASKETBALL

It was a similar story against the Dominican Republic for the Virgin Islands Friday. The first game in the final window of the FIBA Americup Qualifier saw the USVI [coming back from a big deficit](#) in the final quarter, only to lose to Canada in the end. This time it was the Dominican Republic ousting the Virgin Island 103-99 in overtime in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

USVI Head Coach Donald Bough said in a phone interview with Consortium, "It's deja vu," comparing Friday's loss to [Wednesday's against Canada](#). "We had so many options to win and we let them off the hook."

With just over nine minutes left, the Virgin Islands was down 81-64 against DR before the team started clawing its way back into the game. In fact, the team did not get back within single digits until under five minutes of play, after Xavier Richards made a lay-up, bringing the score to 87-78.

To make a comeback, the team started to play at a faster pace to get lay-ups and better shots, in an effort to deny the Dominican Republic's set defense, explained Coach Bough.

A jump shot from Ivan Aska with just over three minutes left got the game within one possession. After two free-throws by the Dominican Republic, the score was 91-86 with just under a minute and half left in the ball game. A Laron Smith steal led to a Walter Hodge lay-up and the USVI was back within three points with 59 seconds left in the game.

Smith was awarded two free throws with 33 seconds left. He made one, missed the second, and the difference between the sides was just two points. With 13 seconds left, the Dominican Republic widened their gap to three points by hitting one of two free throws. Hodge then drew a foul, made his first free throw, intentionally missed the next free-throw and got his own rebound and made a lay-up to tie the game 94-94 with four seconds left.

"Water did an excellent move, which everyone knew was the only thing to do but it was how he did it," said Bough. Hodge missed the free throw on the underside of the rim as opposed to the top, which led to the ball bouncing right into his hands and in a position to score again.

In the extra period, Hodge hit a three-pointer for the first points of overtime. The Dominican Republic answered back with two free throws and the Virgin Islands lead was just one point. Deon Edwin hit two free-throws on the next possession and the lead was back to three. Those free throws with 3:33 left in overtime were the last points the Virgin Islands managed for the game. The Dominican Republic scored the last seven points to secure the win, and hence their spot at the 2022 FIBA Americup.

The Virgin Islands finished with only five available players on the court. Kyle Clarke and Jalal Johnson were unable to participate due to Covid-19 protocols; Trivante Bloodman got hurt in the first quarter after making a lay-up and didn't return; while Richards, Hodge and Smith fouled out of the game.

The Virgin Islands had four players in double figures, with Hodge leading the way with 27 points, Ivan Aska dropping in 25 points, Smith scoring 18 points and Edwin finishing with 16 points. Hodge had 12 assists while Aska had 11 rebounds.

"We played our hearts out," said Coach Bough. "I really don't thrive on moral victories but if there is one, that's one for sure."

The Virgin Islands will have one more chance to get a victory this weekend in a game against Canada, which takes place today at 2:30 P.M A.S.T on ESPN +. "We're going to give it our best shot and hope the people at home give us that support," said the head coach

A win would give the Virgin Islands a chance of making the tournament, depending on the results of Cuba's final three games. This will not be determined this week as Cuba did not travel to Puerto Rico for the third window of games. Additionally, because Cuba missed the third window, the team's status in the tournament is uncertain, as the team could be penalized, like Canada was for missing the second window. Canada was deducted one point in the standings. If Cuba gets penalized similarly and loses an opportunity to play its three games, the Virgin Islands could make it to the AmeriCup, according to the current standings.

Though the possibility is there, Coach Bough would rather get in the traditional way: "To squash all that, we just need to get out and win [against Canada]," he said.