

Albany Beats Hartford Behind David Nichols' 40 Points

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Albany Times Union

March 2, 2017

Wednesday night, David Nichols did it for CJ.

The sophomore guard for the University at Albany basketball team scored a program-record-tying 40 points and vaulted the Great Danes to a pulverizing 100-71 win over Hartford in a quarterfinal game of the America East Conference Tournament at SEFCU Arena.

CJ is the nickname for Nichols' 24-year-old sister Cecilia Coleman, who died on Saturday after a long struggle with leukemia. The 6-foot Nichols briefly left the team and flew home to Chicago to be with his family during the trying time.

When he returned on Tuesday, there was no doubt he wanted to do something special for his sister.

And do something special he did.

Nichols' 40 points tied the all-time record for points, set by Gary Holway, who got his 40 against Utica on Feb. 2, 1957. The previous high for points in the UAlbany Division I era was 39 points, scored by Jamar Wilson at New Hampshire on Feb. 16, 2003.

"I think you could say that," Nichols said when asked if he was playing for his sister. "She was on my mind a lot. Playing for this team, which has been a big help in supporting me, I wanted to go out there and give it my all ... for this team and my family."

With the win, the Danes, the third seed in the tournament, improve to 20-12 (the third time in four years UAlbany has gotten to 20 wins) and advance to the semifinals. UAlbany will play second-seeded Stony Brook at 7:30 Monday night on Long Island. The Seawolves beat No. 7 Binghamton 70-60 on Wednesday.

The other semifinal will feature No. 1 Vermont, an 86-41 winner over No. 8 Maine, playing host to No. 4 New Hampshire, which edged No. 5 UMBC 74-65.

The story from the start of the UAlbany game was Nichols, and his family.

The 1,693 in attendance gave him a hearty welcome when he was introduced. And all of the Danes wore the initials "CC" on the backs of their warmups in honor of Cecilia Coleman, a gesture that touched Donald Nichols, David's father, who was watching back in Chicago.

"The tribute to Cecilia before (Wednesday's) game was nothing short of amazing," Donald Nichols said in a Twitter message. "The passion and determination exhibited by the team embodied the fighting spirit CJ showed throughout her life. The outpouring of support from the entire UAlbany family has provided needed comfort during this time."

David Nichols took it from there. He made four of his career-high eight 3-pointers before the game was five minutes old and the Danes had an already commanding 16-4 lead. Hartford, which had upset UAlbany in last year's playoffs as a seven seed, would make no such noise this time around.

"We know how talented a player David is," said sophomore Joe Cremo, who had his fourth double-double of the season with 14 points and 10 assists. "He deserved what he got (Wednesday). For him to go out and do that, especially for his sister, it means a lot to him. I thank him for putting up 40."

UAlbany scored a season-high 51 points in the first half (not counting the 53 the Danes had against Division III Oneonta) and led by 26. Nichols, who had 22 points at halftime, started the second half with another 3 and the rout continued. UAlbany led by as many as 37. The only drama left was whether or not he would get to 40 and he did that with 4:23 left and then was taken out of the game.

"David is a great kid and player," UAlbany coach Will Brown said. "He did a real good job of keeping his emotions in check. This might be as good a performance as I have seen (in my 16 years on the UAlbany bench). I thought he was outstanding."

"(Nichols) was playing with a great sense of purpose," said Hartford coach John Gallagher. "He just kept making shots."

Nichols made 14 of 22 shots and was 8-for-12 from 3-point range. As a team, the Danes made 13 of 25 shots from 3-point range, the most makes and attempts they have had from long range this season.

This was the first time the Danes have scored 100 points since they beat Maine 108-64 last season.