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FEATURED NEWS / **JANUARY 6TH, 2016**

TAIPANS TAKE DOWN FIRST-PLACED WILDCATS

The CQUniversity Cairns Taipans produced their best defensive effort of the season to take down the first-placed Perth Wildcats 71-61 at the Cairns Convention Centre on Wednesday.

The Snakes forced 18 Wildcats turnovers and allowed the visitors just 34 per cent from the field (22-from-65), making the most of regular fast break opportunities at the other end.

Torrey Craig (15 points) and Bruce (10 points) continued their supreme run of form, combining with veteran Mark Worthington (13) as the Snakes made a concerted effort to push the ball in transition.

The visitors got 14 second-half points from Jermaine Beal (18 total), while Matt Knight toiled for 10 points and six rebounds.

At 8-11 the Taipans have much to do to secure a playoffs berth, head coach Aaron Fearne pointing to his side's stingy defence as a key to achieving that goal.

"Defensively over the last four or five games I've really been impressed with the defensive execution and the toughness that they've shown," Fearne said post-game.

"We were able to work on a few things over that Christmas break and it's definitely been a positive for us and has helped us defend a little bit differently and cause disruption.

"We've got to win playing defence and that's what we'll do."

Defence dominated first-quarter proceedings as Perth went to work in the paint – getting their first 12 points from Nathan Jawai and Knight inside.

Highlights were prevalent despite both sides shooting at percentages in the 30s, with the Snakes streaming out in transition off Perth misses and live-ball turnovers.

Jawai got the highlight reel started, running rim to rim in a hurry and being rewarded with an easy dunk.

Meanwhile, Craig feasted with an open floor in the first term and Worthington joined the party for three breakaway lay-ups in the second quarter.

The hosts found a bulk of their first-half scores pushing the pace for easy buckets, as their field goal percentage climbed from 35 per cent at quarter time to 39 at the half.

Perth finished the half plus-seven on the glass but had a second term to forget, turning it over six times and scoring just 12 points including a scoreless stretch of almost six minutes.

Cairns continued pushing the ball to open the second half. Every possession presented itself as a transition opportunity and Craig had the crowd on its feet with athletic finishes in an 11-2 run.

Craig was even running pick-and-roll as the home side extended to 15 when veteran Alex Loughton drilled his second triple.

Despite six third-quarter turnovers, Perth pulled the margin back to 10 by three-quarter time on a late Beal three, before another seven-straight points had the home crowd biting its fingernails about a slim 48-45 lead.

But timely scores from Craig and Bruce down the stretch, combined with clamping defence kept the margin large enough to force a fouling situation, as Cairns made them when it mattered.

"We had 10 turnovers in the first half and 16 in the first three quarters and you can't play in this league when you're coughing the ball up that many times," Cats coach Trevor Gleeson said.

"We went soft offensively, looking for easy bail-outs instead of playing through it."

Cairns will meet Townsville in the season's third Reptile Rumble, while Perth (13-8), will look to bounce back from three-straight losses at home against Sydney next Friday.

BOX SCORE

CQUniversity Cairns Taipans 71 (Craig 15, Worthington 13, Loughton 13)

Perth Wildcats 61 (Beal 18, Prather 13, Knight 10)

@ Cairns Convention Centre, 06/01/16.

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