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March 11, 2019

Runnin' Bulldogs Enter the Big Dance on a Five-Game Win Streak



RADFORD, Va. – DJ Laster scored a career-high 32 points and Gardner-Webb controlled the action from start to finish in a 76-65 win over Radford in the Big South Conference Men's Basketball Championship Game Sunday.

The win punches an NCAA Tournament ticket for Gardner-Webb (23-11) for the first time since the program's move to NCAA Division I in 2000. The Runnin' Bulldogs enter the Big Dance on a five-game win streak and have won 11 of their last 13 games overall.

"I'm just really humbled right now and blessed to get a chance to coach this group of guys," said head coach Tim Craft, who is in his sixth season in charge. "I want to give all the honor and glory to Jesus Christ, number one, and just thank God for what he's done in my life, our family's life and these players' lives. I'm really proud of them. It was a hard fought win here on the road and I'm just really proud of them for pulling through."

Laster finished the game a sizzling 14-of-17 from the floor, including a pair of three-pointers, six rebounds and just one turnover in 32 minutes. He fell just two points shy of the tournament record for points in the championship game – and was named MVP following the final horn.

“I just knew I needed to play really hard, go hard and leave my legacy out there on the court,” said Laster. “So I brought that approach from the jump ball. I felt it during starting lineups, that this was my last time to show what I’ve got. So I just went hard from the jump ball to the end.”

Gardner-Webb got 15 points – all in the second half – from David Efanayi, 11 points and seven boards from Jose Perez and eight from Eric Jamison, Jr.

The Runnin’ Bulldogs rode Laster’s hot start to a 20-7 lead, using a 12-0 run to seize control of the game. Radford made its run, trimming the lead to 27-22 by halftime and got within three points on an Ed Polite, Jr., dunk with 19:09 to play in the game.

Gardner-Webb responded with an 11-4 run to stretch its lead to double figures, and Radford (22-11) would not get closer than five points the rest of the way. Each time the defending champions attempted to make a push, the Runnin’ Bulldogs answered.

A three-pointer from Perez with 5:10 left pushed Gardner-Webb back in front 60-52. After another charge by the Highlanders, Efanayi drained a three late in the shot clock to put Gardner-Webb up 65-56 with 2:21 remaining.



Gardner-Webb made five free throws in the final 53 seconds to salt the game away.

The Runnin’ Bulldogs shot 52.1 percent for the game (25-of-48) and dominated play at the charity stripe, taking advantage to make 21-of-28 free throws (75.0 percent). A decisive second half was crisp, as Gardner-Webb shot 70.0 percent (14-of-20) and held a 13-11 rebounding edge over the final 20 minutes.

Radford finished at 41.2 percent for the game (28-of-68), had 31 rebounds and 16 second-chance points to keep the second half from getting out of hand. Donald Hicks III led the Highlanders with 17 points, Polite finished with 15 and Carlik Jones had 14.

Gardner-Webb will now await Selection Sunday to find out where it will be headed for its first NCAA Tournament appearance at the Division I level. The Runnin' Bulldogs have previously made national tournament appearances at the NJCAA, NAIA and NCAA Division II levels – part of a rich basketball tradition at the school.

[Learn more about the GWU Men's Basketball program.](#)