

Columbia Surprises Penn Five by 74-72

By THOMAS ROGERS

Columbia's hopes for an Ivy League championship ended several weeks ago, but the Lions are still very much in contention for a berth in the National Invitation Tournament.

The Lions increased their chances for a postseason tournament invitation last night with a 74-72 victory over Pennsylvania before a screaming capacity crowd of 3,408 at Levien Gymnasium.

Pennsylvania, which had clinched its second straight Ivy League title last Friday night with a victory over Cornell, suffered its first league loss after 11 straight victories. The Quakers, who will play in the National Collegiate tournament as a result of their Ivy League crown, lost for only the fifth time in 24 games.

Columbia, second in the league with an 8-4 won-lost record, improved its overall mark to 15 triumphs in 24 games. The victory over Penn, plus triumphs next weekend in games at Harvard and Dartmouth, could do a lot to impress the National Invitation Tournament committee.

Playing in the final home game for Columbia were four starting seniors — Alton Byrd, Ricky Free, Juan Mitchell and Shane Cotner. All reacted splendidly to the hectic farewell of the crowd and the pressure of needing a victory to have a hope for postseason competition.

Byrd, the 5-foot-8-inch guard, led Columbia with 19 points and added nine assists to his Columbia record in that department. He now has 504 in his three-year career. The officials stopped the game when he reached the 500 plateau after 2½ minutes of the second half.

Free, the center from Brooklyn, had 18 points and pulled down 12 rebounds against the taller frontcourtmen from Pennsylvania. Mitchell tossed in 14 points and Cotner contributed 8.

After leading by 7 points at halftime, 43-36, the Lions allowed the Quakers to take a 50-49 lead with 14:56 left to play.

But then the Lions' defensive play — especially their sniping of loose balls — improved so much that Pennsylvania did not score a point for the next 5 minutes 22 seconds and went 8:07 without a field goal.

The Lions used the Penn dry spell to run off 14 straight points, including 3-point plays by Free and Byrd, and held a 63-50 lead with fewer than 10 minutes to play.

But the Quakers recovered to run off 8 straight points — 6 while Byrd was off the court, nursing a leg cramp — to pull back into contention.

A layup by Tony Price, who led all scorers with 20 points with 1:52 to play and then 20-foot jump shot by Ken Hall with 64 seconds left pulled Penn to within 2 points, 74-72.

St. John's 70, Providence 65

Rudy Wright, playing in his final game in Alumni Hall, came off the bench to score 17 points as St. John's defeated Providence College, 70-65, before 4,584 fans last night.

Iona 79, Fordham 70

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NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y., Feb. 24 — Dave Brown, playing in his last home game, scored 16 points and grabbed nine rebounds to lead Iona to a 79-70 victory over Fordham tonight.