NIT Championship Game: Clemson Tigers vs. WVU Mountaineers

Contributed by Tommy Watson
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The MasterCard NIT Championship game will be played tonight at Madison Square Garden in New York City between the University of West Virginia Mountaineers (26-10) and Clemson Tigers (25-10), two teams found to be on the outside looking in at the more prestigious NCAA Tournament. Most offshore sportsbooks installed the Tigers a slight favorite (-1 ½, 136 total) by most offshore sportsbooks. Tip-off for the ESPN televised game will be at 7 p.m. ET. The folks at Clemson are excited about their 25 win season, its most since the days Horace Grant ruled the court for the Tigers in the 1986-87 season. With a win tonight, Oliver Purnell’s Tigers can establish a new school record for the number of wins in a season with 26. Of course how can Clemson explain winning the first 17 games of the season and not making the NCAA Tournament? The Tigers fared well against the Arkansas States, Monmouths and Woffards but suffered in its ACC schedule finishing eighth with a 7-9 league record. Clemson has been notorious for loading up on cupcakes in its non-conference schedule and inflating its won-column early only to melt against quality competition in league play.

Since choking in league play, Clemson did not put together any kind of a winning streak until NIT play began with East Tennessee State. The Tigers fell short of the double-digit (-16) point-spread but took a 64-57 SU win. The Tigers had an easier time of it against a so-so Ole Miss team winning 89-68 SU and easily covering the -5 ½ point chalk as a home favorite. The Tigers edged Syracuse in the NIT quarterfinals 74-70 SU covering the -3 ½ point line ATS. The Tigers played the first three tournament rounds at home in Littlejohn Coliseum on the Clemson campus. Clemson was matched with Air Force in the NIT semifinals on Monday (March 27) winning 68-67. The total has gone OVER in five of Clemson’s last seven games. Clemson has made at least 40 percent from three-point range in each of its last three games, the first time Clemson has done that all year. In fact, Clemson has made at least 40 percent in five of the last six. Clemson has a 9-2 record when it shoots at least 40 percent from three-point range this year. In the four NIT games, Clemson is 31-80 from three-point range, .388. Clemson opponents are 19-71 for a .268 figure. Clemson has scored its first points in each NIT game with a made three-point goal, including three times by Cliff Hammonds. K.C. Rivers has led the Tigers in scoring with a 13.9 points per game average. The Mountaineers early season results almost resembled that of Clemson, winning 13 of their first 14 games with the only blemish in the early going to Arkansas on a neutral court in Orlando, Fla. But West Virginia found rough sailing against the upper echelon of its BIG EAST schedule however broke .500 with a 9-7 league record. In NIT play, the Mountaineers defeated Delaware State 74-50 in the first round, UMass 90-77 in the second round and North Carolina State 71-66 in the quarterfinals. The first three round games were played at WVU Coliseum in Morgantown W.V. In the semi-finals the Mountaineers defeated the Mississippi State Bulldogs63-62 to advance to tonight’s championship game. WVU covered the spread in 3-of-4 NIT games while the total split 2-2. Point-Spreads.com pick: West Virginia + 1 ½