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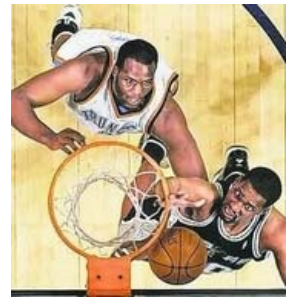
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CBI: UTEP will force tempo against Nevada

BY CHRIS MURRAY • CMURRAY@RGJ.COM • MARCH 17, 2009

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San Antonio's Kurt Thomas reaches for a rebound in front of Oklahoma City's Malik Rose.

(Provided to the Reno Gazette-Journal)

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UTEP's Arnett Moultrieshooting over UAB's Howard Crawford Wednesday in El Paso, Texas.

(Provided to the Reno Gazette-Journal)

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Provided to the Reno Gazette-Journal

Houston center Marcus Cousin tries to block a shot by UTEP guard Randy Culpepper at the Conference USA tournament on Thursday. Houston won in overtime, 89-85.

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WOLF PACK BASKETBALL

Who: UTEP (19-12, 10-6 Conference USA) vs. Nevada (21-12,

The Nevada basketball team better have its running shoes on tonight.

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The Wolf Pack will host Texas-El Paso in an opening-round game of the College Basketball Invitational at 8 p.m. tonight, and the Miners are ready to run.

"We like the game to be up-tempo," UTEP coach Tony Barbee. "We like to force things defensively, use our pressure defense, and get the ball up and down the court."

Barbee, a former assistant at Memphis under John Calipari, uses many of the same philosophies employed by the Tigers.

So it comes as no surprise that when Nevada coach Mark Fox was asked what team UTEP reminded him of, he dipped into the memory bank.

"They're a lot like Memphis was a couple of years ago in the tournament," said Fox, whose team played the Tigers in the 2007 NCAA Tournament. "Obviously Tony came from there, so they play a similar way and are built in a similar fashion."

While UTEP doesn't have the same pool of athletes that 2006-07 Memphis team had, it has one of the best scorers in the country in 6-foot-5 guard Stefon Jackson.

Jackson, the all-time leading scorer in Conference USA history, is averaging 24.2 points per game and is coming off three straight 30-plus point efforts.

"He's one of the best scorers I have been around," said Barbee, who recruited multiple first-round draft picks to play for Memphis. "He's a dynamic scorer and puts up points in a hurry and from a variety of angles. He really has mastered the lost art of the mid-range pull-up jumper. He hits a lot of those shots -- and they are difficult shots. That is his unique talent."

Jackson, fifth in the nation in scoring, leads the country in free-throw makes (8.8) and attempts (10.5) per game.

"(He's) certainly a terrific lead player and great lead scorer," Fox said. "He's as talented as you get in the backcourt."

Yet, UTEP (19-12) isn't a one-man show as Randy Culpepper comes off the bench to average 17.4 points per game.

"They have length and athleticism all around and size up front, so they're a very good basketball team," Fox said.

11-5 WAC)

When: 8 p.m. today

Where: Lawlor Events Center (11,536)

Radio/TV: 630 AM/HDNet

Tickets: Range from \$15-\$25 and \$5 for UNR students. They go on sale to the general public beginning at 10 a.m. today.

Betting line: Nevada favored by 2, according to Las Vegas Sports Consultants

On the web: Live chat at RGJ.com/sports starting just before tip-off

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