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### UTEP Miners top Huskies; Richmond up next

By Bill Knight / El Paso Times  
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EL PASO -- The crowd came early -- alive and energized -- and the Miners responded as if somehow connected to the collective throng.

UTEP, playing as if on a feeding frenzy, roared away to an early lead and, though Northeastern always stayed within striking distance, the Miners never let up or looked back on their way to a 75-66 victory Monday night in the quarterfinals of the College Basketball Invitational in the Don Haskins Center.

UTEP (21-12) now will travel to Virginia to face Richmond at 6 p.m. MDT Wednesday in the tournament semi finals. Monday night, though, was one more celebration of Miner basketball.

It was not the biggest crowd of the year. But the general admission gathering of 7,798 arrived early, cheering every Miner pre-game move, and it was quite possibly the loudest crowd of the year.

UTEP coach Tony Barbee said, "That win is attributed to one thing. Our fans. When I came up before the game, I thought there was a



UTEP's Arnett Moultrie dunked against Northeastern during the teams' second-round CBI game Monday at the Don Haskins Center. Moultrie finished with 14 points. (Photos by Vanessa Monsisvais / El Paso Times)

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concert or that De La Hoya was boxing tonight, looking at the lines. That was an incredible crowd. Maybe we need to go general admission all the time. We had 5,000 people in their seats 30 minutes before the game, cheering our guys in pre-game layup drills. It was hard to let that kind of crowd with that kind of intensity down."

The Miners let no one down ... at least no one wearing orange.

Stefon Jackson was once again Stefon Jackson -- hitting from the perimeter, slashing to the basket. He finished the evening with 26 points, adding another two dozen and two to his all-time school and Conference USA records.

Randy Culpepper was once again active and electric and reached a special milestone on this March Monday. Culpepper scored 21 points and now has exactly 1,000 in his two-year UTEP career.

Fans are only beginning to see the tip of the talented iceberg that is Arnett Moultrie. The agile, athletic 6-foot-11 freshman had 14 points, 10 rebounds, three blocks.

Once again, sophomore Gabriel McCulley came off the bench to add more energy, more athleticism. He finished with 10 points, three assists, a block and three steals. And sophomore Julyan Stone had eight assists, just two turnovers.

It all unraveled quickly for the Huskies. The game was tied 7-7 and, in the blink of an eye, the

Miners were sitting atop a 27-12 lead. Still, the visitors from Boston played hard and never conceded anything. Chaison Allen had 26 points, seven rebounds. Matt Janning had 16 points, three assists. Nkem Ojougboh had 13 points, six rebounds. And Northeastern trimmed that Miner lead to just eight, 35-27, at the intermission.

UTEP had one more big run -- leading 45-37 one moment and then 60-42. And then it was all but over.

"The energy of that crowd was just incredible," Barbee said. "And our guys fed off it. Our guys played great. We wanted to put some pressure on them, speed up the tempo. We did that by extending our half court defense. It was good to see four guys in double figures. Randy and Stefon did what they do. I thought our interior defense was good."

McCulley, who scored all 10 of his points in the final half, said, "Coach always tells us he needs people to step up. We know what D.J. (Jackson) and Randy are going to do. It's important for someone else to step up."

Wayne Portalatin, who has been grinding and working hard and playing better each time out, said, "We're trying to bring a championship back to UTEP."

Unfortunately for the Miners, they cannot take their crowd to Virginia Wednesday night.

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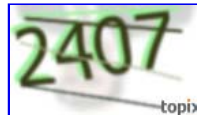
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