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UTEP Miners look to extend CBI run, get experience

By Bill Knight / El Paso Times  
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EL PASO -- Disappointment dripped down on UTEP basketball after the overtime loss to Houston in the opening round of the Conference USA tournament in Memphis.

That meant no NCAA tournament and probably no NIT. It meant College Basketball Invitational. Again.

UTEP coach Tony Barbee said, "That wasn't our goal." But he emphasized that the CBI is an opportunity and has said since "we might as well go win it."

The fact is, basketball players love to play basketball games -- be it in November or March or July. And so the Miners, after a dramatic 79-77 win over Nevada in Reno, are playing another basketball game -- Monday night, 8 p.m., UTEP vs. Northeastern in the Don Haskins Center.

It is an opportunity -- an opportunity for the players to play another game, for sensational senior Stefon Jackson to play one more home game, for all the young players to get another game of experience, for Miner fans to see another college basketball game before next November.

And there is plenty to see.

It will be offense vs. defense. UTEP, 20-12, is averaging 78.4 points a game during the past five games. Northeastern, 19-12, gives up just 59.9 points a game.

There are so many record-setting moments with this UTEP team -- no matter the venue ... NCAA, NIT or CBI.

Jackson, of course, has destroyed both the UTEP and Conference USA scoring records. He now has 2,325 points, averaging 24.3 points a game -- fifth best in the nation. He leads the nation in free throws made and free throws

attempted. He had his school record-tying string of three straight 30-plus point games snapped in Reno, scoring 26 in the win over Nevada. Jackson has scored 20 or more points 10 straight times, just short of legendary Miner Jim Barnes, who did it 13 consecutive times in 1963-64. Jackson has a school-record 64 games with 20 or more points.

Sophomore Randy Culpepper, the athletically gifted 6-footer, averages 17.3 points a game off the bench. Culpepper needs just 21 more points to hit 1,000 for his career. Only Barnes, Antoine Gillespie and Omar Thomas accomplished that feat in their first two years.

Together, Jackson and Culpepper average 41.6 points a game. That also is a school record, breaking the mark of

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Nolan Richardson and Al Tolan's 41 points per game in 1960-61.

And only six times in the long and distinguished history of UTEP basketball have there been two 1,000-point scorers on the same team: Nate Archibald and Mike Switzer in 1969-70; Roshern Amie and Anthony Burns in 1980-81; Dave Feitl and Juden Smith in 1985-86; Prince Stewart and David Van Dyke in 1991-92; Gillespie and Ralph Davis in 1993-94; and John Tofi and Jason Williams in 2005-06.

There are other things to watch, too.

Sophomore Julian Stone has 199 assists, second best single season total in school history. Fili

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Rivera had 229 in 2004-2005. Stone has the solid statistical line, averaging 5.6 points, 5.4 rebounds and 6.2 assists a game. He has become more aggressive offensively lately, averaging 9.2 points a game over the past five games, shooting 42.4 percent from the floor and 37.5 percent from beyond the 3-point arc.

Freshman Arnett Moultrie is fifth in the nation among freshmen in rebounding, averaging 8.1 points and 8 rebounds a game. The 6-foot-11 Moultrie, who moves as if he were 6-6, also leads Conference USA in offensive rebounding with 3.2 per game.

Perhaps Stone summed this game up best.

"It's about next year," he said. "It's about getting better for next year. And it is about sending Stefon out with a bang. He's a great player."

It is not the NCAA tournament and not even the NIT. But it is more basketball, an opportunity -- for everyone.

Bill Knight may be reached at [bknight@elpasotimes.com](mailto:bknight@elpasotimes.com); 546-6171.

**Game time**

- What: Northeastern vs. UTEP, 8 p.m. Monday at the Don Haskins Center.
- Tickets: UTEP students free with valid ID; \$10 general admission, available Monday only at the Don Haskins Center.
- Information: 747-5234.

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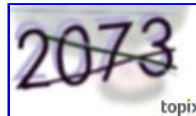
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