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**Home court advantage**

**UTEP gets win, forces Game 3 vs. OSU**

**CBI Tournament: UTEP 70, Oregon State 63**

By Bill Knight / El Paso Times  
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UTEP basketball players celebrate win against Oregon State in Game 2 of CBI championship series. (Vanessa Monsisvais / El Paso Times)

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EL PASO -- The crowd was alive ... some sort of living, breathing entity with ear shattering, rock concert, airplane runway noise. It began to grow as it formed at 3 p.m. to await the chance to get in the building. It flowed down from the concourse, filling up the seats like lava flowing out of a volcano. It rocked and rolled and roared.

And, because of that crowd and certainly because of some solid second half basketball, UTEP's basketball season remains alive.


UTEP came from behind, spurred on by the super decibel gathering of 12,000 orange faithful that jammed the Don Haskins Center, and edged Oregon State 70-63 Wednesday night in game two of the best-of-three championship series of the College Basketball Invitational.

Game 3, the championship deciding Game 3, will be at 8

p.m. Friday in that same Haskins Center.

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"That crowd was worth 10 points -- if not more," UTEP coach Tony Barbee said.

"I was just complimenting that crowd on my radio show," Oregon State coach Craig Robinson said. "They were rowdy but respectful. That's a commendation to your fans."

These two teams have battled greatly for 80 minutes now. Oregon State outlasted UTEP 75-69 in Corvallis. Now UTEP counters with the seven point win in El Paso. And now ...

"Friday night -- nothing left after that," Barbee said. "Both teams will bring it all on Friday night."

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For a moment, a long moment, it looked as if this crowd, this first Haskins Center sellout since March 1, 2006, would not be enough. Oregon State was poised, patient and getting good looks, knocking down shots as if they were playing in an empty gym. The Beavers, who shot 60.5 percent Monday night in Gill Coliseum, were shooting 60 percent early in the Haskins Center. They were shooting a torrid 50 percent at the half, leading 35-30.

But the crowd, this loud, living thing, kept urging the Miners on. And the Miners kept responding.

Stefon Jackson, UTEP's all-time leading scorer and the man who has piggybacked this team so many times, was having yet another tough night



UTEP's Randy Culpepper races downcourt after a steal from Oregon State's Roeland Schaftenaar during the second half of the second game of the College Basketball Invitational best-of-three championship series, Wednesday at the Don Haskins Center. (Victor Cazada / El Paso Times)

shooting. At one point, he was 4-of-15 from the field. Coaches tell good shooters to move in a bit when the shot is not dropping. Jackson moved in -- all the way in. He attacked the bucket like few in college basketball can do -- slashing and scrapping and fighting.

Still, this was anybody's basketball game.

The score was tied 40-40 with 12:58 to play. It was still deadlocked there as the clock slipped under 12 minutes.

Daniel Deane made

two free throws, then made a layup and the Miners were looking uphill, 44-40 with 11 minutes to play.

And then came Jackson.

The 6-foot-5 senior, who is also Conference USA's all-time leading scorer, got to the rim, dunked and made the free throw and the Miners made a run.

UTEP led 55-49 with 3:38 when Jackson converted again. But Oregon State was having none of this going gently into the good night stuff. The Beavers battled right back. Seth Tarver made two freebies and it was UTEP, 56-55, with just under five minutes left. The Miners rushed forward but Calvin Haynes drained a 3-pointer and it was 64-61 as the clock eased under the one minute mark. Randy Culpepper, fighting calf cramps every last second, made enough free throws for UTEP and its living, breathing crowd to survive another day.

"Again, that crowd was awesome," Barbee said. "I was in the locker room doing the board 45 minutes before the game and I asked my assistants what was that noise. The crowd was out there for pre-game, urging this guy or that guy to dunk. It was

just a great atmosphere."

Barbee got his Miners to extend their trapping defense to half court, to three-quarter court and that sped the tempo, got the Miners in transition a bit more and got that big crowd even more exciting.

"We're playing a very good basketball team," Robinson said. "They had their run, just like we had our run. In the end, I think they got a few more rebounds and they got to more 50-50

balls. This isn't going to come down to X's and O's. This is who wants it most. These are two tired, banged-up basketball teams and it is going to come down to who wants it most."

Jackson finished with 28 points, finishing 9-of-20 from the field. He also had 10 rebounds. Culpepper had 17 points. Arnett Moultrie had 12 points, 11 rebounds. Julyan Stone had eight assists, six rebounds. Oregon State was led by Roeland Schaftenaar with 17 points, eight rebounds, four assists. Haynes added 10 more points.

"That was a great atmosphere," Culpepper said. "It felt good as soon as they opened the doors and we saw everybody coming down."

Jackson said, "Whether they realize it or not, our fans play a big part in the game. They motivate us."

A pair of tired basketball teams, each and every one of them excited about playing one more game, will play Friday night -- for fun, for a CBI championship and for a living, breathing creature called a basketball crowd.

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