

Behind The Beavers Beat

CBI finals series, baby .. Haynes says OSU gets to be the Lakers, and UTEP can be ...

Posted by Paul Buker, The Oregonian March 29, 2009 11:30AM

Welcome to your CBI championship series headquarters.

Questions or comments, please call Tailgate columnist Ryan White at home.

UTEP at Oregon State

What: Game 1, CBI championship series

When: Monday at 7

Where: Gill Coliseum

Records: UTEP (22-12), OSU (16-17)

On the air: TV on HDNet, radio on KPAM 860

The lowdown: And the last Pacific 10 Conference team playing in the post season is ... Oregon State?

"Who would have believed we would be playing in April?" said OSU's Josh Tarver. ... OSU beat Houston, Vermont, and Stanford to reach the CBI's best-of-three championship series. UTEP of Conference USA beat Nevada, Northeastern, and Richmond. After tonight's game, the series switches to the Don Haskins Center on the UTEP campus for Game 2 on Wednesday, and Game 3 (if necessary) on Friday. ... **we noted**

in previous blog that this is the first OSU-UTEP basketball game since UTEP's Tim Hardaway and OSU's Gary Payton went at it in El Paso in 1986-87, with the Beavers winning 83-72. ... UTEP folks point out that Payton was headed for UTEP (to join HS teammate Greg Foster) but Miners' coach Don Haskins ran out of scholarships. ... my, how that would have changed history in Corvallis, eh?

CORVALLIS



UTEP's Randy Culpepper shoots 3's like Oregon's Tajuan Porter and jumps like OSU's Calvin Haynes.

- In their wildest dreams, the Oregon State players who were the laughingstock of college basketball last season could not fathom playing for a tournament championship a year later, or being the last Pacific 10 Conference team left standing in the post-season. Excuse them if they pinch themselves this morning, knowing that when March turns to April, they won't be at the Dixon Rec Center playing pickup games, they will be playing in Game 2 of a championship series.

"Amazing," said first-year coach Craig Robinson, whose team opens the College Basketball Invitational's best-of-three Finals tonight at Gill Coliseum against Texas El-Paso (22-12) of Conference USA.

Game 2 of the series, and Game 3 if necessary, will be at UTEP.

"My body is ready to shut down," said Robinson.

"I've never coached, or played, this late in the season before."

After getting bounced from the Pac-10 tournament with a 13-17 record and a four-game losing streak, the Beavers (16-17) lobbied for an invitation into the 16-team CBI and they have made the most of it, mowing down Houston, Vermont, and Stanford

to reach the Finals series, each time coming from behind.

The Vermont and Stanford games went down to the last possession in overtime.

The Beavers, who doggedly work their 1-3-1 and 2-3 zones and patient ball-screen offense, managed to come up with the big shot, or big defensive play, each time to beat teams they probably didn't match up with on paper.

"Being behind doesn't faze them," said Robinson. "I mean, the calmness they show, whether they're seven down, or 15 down. ... they know that if they run their stuff, they can chip into the lead and come back."

Robinson pushed hard for the CBI, despite its low-profile and dubious significance, knowing that potentially it could give the program a jump-start for next year, when his top 25 recruiting class arrives and in Robinson's words, "we'll have some depth. We can push the ball, we can press, we can do all the things we couldn't do this year."

Knocking off three straight 20-win teams to make the CBI Finals has Oregon State players thinking anything is possible next season, when touted recruits such as 6-foot-7, 260-pound center Joe Burton and four-star guards Roberto Nelson and Jared Cunningham come aboard.

"None of us liked the way it ended (at the Pac-10 tournament)," said OSU's Josh Tarver. "This has helped us re-gain our confidence and proven to people that we can win games. ... we think we're going to be good enough to finish in the top half of the conference next year. We think we can make the NCAA tournament."

Players on both teams applaud the concept of being in a three-game series instead of a one game winner-take-all championship game.

"Everybody wants to pretend like they're in the NBA," explained Robinson.

Calvin Haynes, the Beavers' leading scorer, wishes it was best-of-seven.

"Hey, man, it's everybody's dream," said Haynes, who has made one big shot after another in the tournament.

Haynes said if this were the NBA, the Beavers would be the Lakers (his hometown team) and UTEP could be Boston, or Cleveland.

And if that is true, the Lakers are the underdogs.

This young UTEP team may be a year away from being a Conference USA title contender and making the NCAA tournament but it has to be considered the CBI Finals favorite with the series finishing in El Paso.

The Miners are big, and quick, and they boast the nation's No. 5 scorer in 6-5 senior guard Stefon Jackson, who averages 24.6 points a game and goes by the nickname D.J., short for "Draining jumpers."

UTEP also has a 6-foot guard, Randy Culpepper, whose vertical leap may remind OSU fans of Haynes' rim-level acrobatics.

Culpepper averages 17.5 points per game.

"We've got to figure out a way to stop those guys," said Robinson of the explosive UTEP guards.

Haynes said the Beavers feel like if they "run their stuff" and play good defense and take care of the backboards, this will be yet another close, down-to-the-wire game. And if that happens, a crowd of 5,000-plus at Gill might swing it OSU's way.

"Our fans," said Robinson, "have been fantastic. ... they have really gotten into this thing."

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Comments

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