

Behind The Beavers Beat

White House visit unlikely, but OSU lives it up as CBI champion after upset of UTEP in Game 3

Posted by Paul Buker, The Oregonian April 03, 2009 21:31PM

SATURDAY MORNING UPDATE

... ESPN radio's John Stashour talked to that OTHER team that won its first post-season title. Coach Ed Dechellis' perennial also-ran Penn State squad took down Baylor 69-63 Thursday night at Madison Square Garden in the NIT finals. ... Stashour said that if Oregon State got invited to the White House in the wake of its CBI championship, the Nittany Lions should be going, too. ... Dechellis said he wasn't going to get into politics, and that Robinson probably had a better 'in' to get into the WH.

EL PASO



Rickey Claitt's final game for Oregon State? You couldn't have written a more dramatic script ... a career high 28 points in Game 3 of the CBI championship series.

- Rickey Claitt, the only senior starter on the Oregon State team, had the game of his career Friday night as Oregon State won the College Basketball Invitational championship with a 81-73 win over Texas El-Paso at the jam-packed Don Haskins Center.

Claitt, who played in pain with back spasms, made four three-point shots in the second half and scored a career-high 28 points in the decisive third game of the CBI championship series as the Beavers, cool and calm in the face of UTEP's physical defensive pressure, silenced a crowd of 12,000.

The longest season in school history ended with OSU at 18-18.

It was the most wins for OSU since the 1989-90 team went 22-7.

UTEP of Conference USA finished at 23-14.

It was the first post-season championship of any kind for an OSU men's team.

OSU had won the first game of the series 75-69 Monday night at Gill Coliseum, but UTEP tied the series 1-1 with Wednesday night's 80-73 win at the Haskins Center.

In Game 3, the Beavers shot 56 percent from the floor and sank 12 of 19 three-point shots.

OSU point-center Roeland Schaftenaar, booed mercilessly in Games 2 and 3 by the UTEP crowd, was named Most Valuable Player of the 16-team CBI tournament.

After leading 34-26 at halftime on the strength of a 17-4 run, OSU kept its composure and led by 14 points, 68-54, with 3:42 left before UTEP made its final run.

But the Beavers made enough free throws to hang on.

OSU coach Craig Robinson got a cold-water dousing from his players afterwards in the victorious Beavers' locker room.

"My first championship shower, and nothing felt better," said Robinson.

"I can't tell you how proud I am of these guys.

"You know, it's a year ago Tuesday that I took the job. ... you look at where these guys have come from and what they've been through. This is a great story for anybody. ... I'm at a loss for words."

While Robinson spoke on a radio post-game show, his players were cutting down the nets.

Robinson lobbied for an invitation to the CBI, despite OSU's 13-17 record and four-game losing streak after a one-and-out at the Pacific 10 Conference tournament.

He hoped for one more game - to help build confidence for next season - and he got six more.

And won five of them.

"There's no question, it has helped the program, and I think it will help us with recruiting," said Robinson.

"This meant a lot to our guys. We know it wasn't the NCAA or the NIT, but it was still a tournament where you had to win a lot of games. ... considering where (his players) came from, and where they ended up, this season has been so unexpected."

When Robinson took the OSU job last April, the program had hit bottom at 6-25 overall and 0-18 in the Pac-10.

Friends in the profession told him it was career suicide, that he wouldn't be able to convince quality players to come to Corvallis.

But in less than a year's time, Robinson and his staff have produced a recruiting class that Rivals.com ranks No. 22 nationally.

Four-star guards Jared Cunningham and Roberto Nelson, center Joe Burton, and Australians Angus Brandt and Rhys Murphy will give the Beavers a new look in 2009-2010.

Because of this infusion of talent, Robinson said his holdover players face a crucial off-season. "And part of it is, after what we've done, we're going to have (higher) expectations, which is a whole different thing," he said.

Robinson said his veterans shouldn't fear being pushed aside for the new recruits. "I've told these guys, they have a head start on whoever is coming in," said Robinson. "Even if we were bringing in NBA players, they would have a head start because they're older and more mature, and they've been through it."

Robinson - who signed a six-year contract last April - laughs about the speculation he isn't long for Corvallis.

Because of his first-year success, because he is considered a rising young coaching star, and perhaps because of the notoriety he's gotten from being President Barack Obama's brother in law, Robinson's name comes up in coaching searches.

"My name's rumored in everything," he said, "and it's just ridiculous. "It's not fair to these guys, it's not fair to (athletic director) Bob De Carolis and it's not fair to me. But it's the way the business works."

Robinson can't say with 100 percent certainty he will be at OSU for the length of his contract but he talks like someone who will be around for a few years.

"I'm like most guys," he said. "It's got to be a perfect fit (for him to move again) and why can't it be a perfect fit here? It's up to these guys (at OSU)."

Notes: Schaftenaar, who played all 40 minutes, talked about his role as villain in El Paso. ... "I wasn't sure what it was at first, until I saw highlights of (Game 2) everywhere where my hand was in one of their players' faces," he said. "I got booed for about two hours straight today, but we had fun." ... to prepare their point-center for Game 3, his teammates booed him whenever he touched the ball during OSU's shootaround. ... Schaftenaar said of Claitt, who hit 8 of 9 shots, "he played an amazing game, and we needed it bad, too. I'm so happy for him. It was his last game for us and it was great for him to go out like this." ... said a happy Claitt, clutching the CBI championship trophy, "I told the coaches that if we got into a post-season tournament I was going to do everything I could to win it for them." ... after a long travel day Saturday that starts with a bus ride to Albuquerque, N.M., the OSU traveling party is due back in Oregon at 7 p.m. (SW flight 1110 at PDX, btw)

- PB

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