

Evansville Aces will need to quiet Hofstra's ace in College Basketball Invitational opener

By Randy Beard

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From what he's seen on film of Hofstra University's leading scorer, Charles Jenkins, since late Sunday night, Marty Simmons knows his University of Evansville basketball team better be much sharper defensively than the last time the Aces competed in a postseason contest.

Jenkins enters tonight's 7:05 College Basketball Invitational game against Evansville at the PAC at the University of Southern Indiana as the nation's fourth-leading scorer, averaging 23.2 points.

Plenty of tickets, which cost \$15 apiece, remain. They can be bought at the UE ticket office or at 488-ACES today until 5 p.m. Tickets will then be available at the PAC starting at 6.

As for Jenkins, "he shoots a high percentage overall, a high percentage from (3-point range) and his assist-to-turnover percentage is very good, so he makes everyone around him better," said Simmons of the 6-foot-3 senior guard. "And he gets to the free-throw line, so he's a complete player."

How good is Jenkins? Hofstra already has retired his jersey.

Brigham Young's Jimmer Fredette, who leads the nation in scoring (27.9) and ESPN highlights, has 2,501 career points. Jenkins has 2,499 — and takes seven fewer shots per game.

Indeed, Jenkins is the only player among the nation's top 10 scorers who is making better than 50 percent of his shot attempts, connecting on 52.8 percent from the floor and 41.4 percent from behind the arc (compared to 45.5 and 40.4 for Fredette).

The Aces can't afford to let Jenkins get hot tonight if they plan to advance to the second round of the CBI.

The last time the Aces were in a postseason game, they lost 92-76 at Roberts Stadium to a Belmont University team that knocked in 17 3-pointers in a 2009 CollegeInsider.com contest.

As a team, the Hofstra Pride (21-11) average only a half dozen 3-pointers per game. But the Aces might not want to tempt fate or Jenkins and 6-5 junior Mike Moore. With

65 and 61 3-pointers, respectively, the two Hofstra guards have each made more treys this season than UE's Colt Ryan (59)

The Pride average 70.7 points per game with Jenkins and Moore (14.9) accounting for 53.4 percent of the offense.

"It's going to be a big challenge for us, no doubt about it," said Simmons of slowing down Hofstra's offense.

The Pride aren't slouches in the paint, either. Greg Washington, a 6-10 senior forward, averages 7.4 points, 5.3 rebounds and 2.2 blocked shots. David Imes, a 6-7 sophomore forward, averages 7.7 points, 6.8 rebounds and a blocked shot per game.

"(Washington) is athletic, runs the floor extremely well and can shoot the 15-17 foot shot," said Simmons. "Imes is a strong athletic guy who is very good at getting to the boards."

The fifth starter, 6-foot senior guard Brad Kelleher — an Australian — also averages 7.4 points and 3.3 assists.

"They are just a good team, someone we have a lot of respect for," Simmons said of the Pride, who tied Old Dominion for second place in the Colonial Athletic Association.

Offensively, the Aces counter with Ryan (15.7 points per game), Kenneth Harris (8.2) and Denver Holmes (7.7), with Ned Cox (6.9) coming off the bench. And inside UE has a pair of 6-10 centers in Pieter van Tongeren (6.1) and Clint Hopf (6.1), who might be able to tag-team Washington into foul trouble.

Hofstra and Evansville have played one common opponent — North Carolina. The Pride lost to the Tar Heels by 44 (107-63). UE lost to UNC by 27 (76-49).

But with a short preparation time — the Aces didn't learn of the matchup until after 10:30 p.m. Sunday — Simmons is inclined to believe that his players just need to limit the turnovers in order to have a chance to advance to play the winner of the Austin Peay at Boise State game.

"We are what we are — screen, cutting, delivering the basketball," said Simmons. "When we have had any success, we've done a good job taking care of the ball and that's going to be a big key for us again.

"Defensively, we just have to have the same fundamentals we've had in how we want to play half-court defense."

If the Aces advance, they possibly could play another game at Roberts Stadium since the quarterfinals are scheduled for March 21. Roberts was booked this week by a Disney On Ice show.