

Missoulian

Griz to host Duquesne in first round of CBI

By **BOB MESEROLL** Missoulian sports editor | Posted: Monday, March 14, 2011 6:30 am

The Montana men's basketball team has not played its final game of the season.

The Griz accepted a bid on Sunday to play in the 16-team College Basketball Invitational and will host Duquesne in the first round on Wednesday at 7:05 p.m. at Dahlberg Arena. If the Griz win, they would travel for a second-round game to either fellow Big Sky member Weber State or Oregon of the Pac-10. A scheduling conflict with the arena would not allow the Griz to host a second-round game.

The Griz, 21-10, had hoped to receive a bid to the NIT after falling to Northern Colorado in last week's Big Sky Conference championship game, but were not among the 32 teams invited Sunday evening.

"It's special, it's great," Montana's lone senior Brian Qvale said. "Not only do I get to play (at least) one more game as a Grizzly, but I get to play that game at home, which is something special. I think our fans will appreciate it and I think our team will love to be back in Dahlberg Arena."

Duquesne, a member of the Atlantic 10 Conference, finished 18-12 overall and 10-6 in its league. The Pittsburgh school lost to Saint Joseph's 93-90 in overtime in the quarterfinals of the A-10 tournament. The Dukes were 7-6 in road games this season while the Griz were 13-1 at home.

One unique aspect of the CBI is that the final two teams will play a best-of-three series rather than a single championship game.

"I'm elated," Montana coach Wayne Tinkle said. "I think our guys are very deserving of a postseason game. It's not the NCAA tournament or the NIT, which is what I thought our commissioner was going to work for, but these tournaments are really starting to gain some momentum. It's a great reward for our players to not only play in one, but to host says a lot about how our program and our team is perceived. I couldn't be happier for guys like Brian Qvale and all the way down the line who worked so hard to make this a special year."

The Griz were extended an invitation to the CollegeInsider.com tournament, the CIT, last week, but didn't want to commit until the 32-team NIT field was set.

"They had a timeline and we were waiting to see on the NIT," Tinkle said. "(Northern Arizona) got our spot in that."

With every player but Qvale scheduled to return next season, the tournament gives Tinkle an opportunity to get more postseason experience for his young team.

"We have a lot of guys returning," Tinkle said. "To get them another postseason opportunity - especially here at home where we've played really, really well - is great for this team, but it does bode well for the future in a lot of respects. The excitement we created for Grizzly basketball again this year on the heels of our success a year ago, to continue that momentum and for our university to step up and show that men's basketball is a priority speaks volumes."

Montana had to guarantee the CBI something in the neighborhood of \$35,000 to get the home game, which the school hopes to cover with gate receipts.

"We need to get as many people there as possible because that's what enables us to be hosting," Tinkle said, "using those dollars that we raise through attendance to pay the tournament."

The Griz have had a couple of workouts since they returned last Thursday from the Big Sky tournament in Greeley, Colo.

"It's been a little bit all over the place because we were hanging in limbo," Tinkle said. "There was obviously some disappointment that we weren't in the Big Dance and they weren't sure if we were going to get any postseason participation. We worked out (Saturday and Sunday) and said let's show the character we have just in case. Now they're going to be excited."

"It gives our fans another reason to come out and support us in March. I think it's a great opportunity for us."

Sports editor Bob Meseroll can be reached at 523-5265 or at sportsdesk@missoulian.com.