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Oregon men's basketball: Dukes have overcome hazards to reach CBI quarterfinals**Duquesne has survived long road trips and long-ago tragedy to reach the second round of the CBI**

BY RON BELLAMY*The Register-Guard*Published: **Friday, Mar 18, 2011 04:25AM**

For the Duquesne men's basketball team, it's a long road to Oregon to play the Ducks on Monday night in the second round of the College Basketball Invitational in Matthew Knight Arena.

A long road, literally. The Dukes, after defeating the University of Montana in Missoula on Wednesday night, got permission from the NCAA to bus to Eugene rather than fly back to Pittsburgh and then turn around and fly west again.

And so the Dukes were on the road Thursday to Richland, Wash., and planning to arrive in Eugene sometime today. And their plans for a couple of days in the Willamette Valley?

"Nothing other than practice," coach Ron Everhart said Thursday afternoon, by cell phone from the bus somewhere southwest of Spokane. "I don't know what our guys have planned, but that's the one thing I have on tap."

It isn't the first time the Dukes have taken the long way somewhere. Last week, after losing to Saint Joseph's — by three points, in overtime — in the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament, they bused from Atlantic City back to Pittsburgh. What was projected to be a six-hour trip turned into nine when the bus got two flat tires.

Then there was the road trip to play St. Louis in February, when their flight was delayed because their airplane was grounded in Hartford, Conn., with mechanical problems. The Dukes instead got a flight originating in Charlotte, N.C., and left Pittsburgh five hours late.

But perhaps all that is a metaphor for how far the Dukes (19-12) have come, and how tough the journey has been, since September 2006, six months after Everhart was hired, when five Duquesne players were shot by two gunmen after a campus dance.

Three players were hospitalized, one critically; all survived. The Dukes had to add walk-ons to play that season, and won 10 games "when we probably shouldn't have won any,"

Everhart said. "But we had a really unified group, and they played hard and they played together."

What could have doomed Everhart's tenure became a starting point.

"If I were a kid looking for a school, or parents looking for a school for my kids, I would want them to go play with a bunch of guys who acted the way our guys acted the night that happened," he said. "We had some real heroes. We had some very courageous kids who laid down in the line of fire that night and looked out for their teammates and probably saved their lives in some regard."

How far has the program come since then? Consider:

When the Dukes defeated Montana on Wednesday night in the first round of the CBI, in their third straight postseason appearance under Everhart, it represented the Dukes' first postseason tournament win since a victory over North Carolina-Charlotte in the first round of the 1994 NIT, and their first postseason tournament win on the road since 1969.

At 8-6 on the road, the Dukes have eight road wins for just the second time since 1971; the last Duquesne team to win nine road games was the 1951-52 squad.

The Dukes, who play fast and with pressure, lead the nation with 9.9 steals per game. They're second in the nation, behind Kansas, with 17.8 assists per game, and they rank 15th in assists-to-turnovers at 1.34 per game. Duquesne has four starters averaging in double figures, led by 6-foot-5 senior Bill Clark at 16.2 points per game, 6-7 Damian Saunders at 12.7, and 6-5 junior B.J. Monteiro at 11.7. The backcourt consists of two true freshmen whose fathers were their high school coaches — Atlantic 10 rookie of the year T.J. McConnell and Mike Talley.

After winning 11 straight games from late December to early February, the Dukes lost seven of nine before the Montana victory, losing two games by a single point, another by two points and the last in overtime.

"It's been a tough year for us because we lost some games we know we should have won," Everhart said. "The bad part is that it probably cost us a chance to play in one of the other tournaments, but the good part is that we still got a chance to play in the postseason, and our kids have a chip on their shoulder right now.

"We kind of let some opportunities get away and we're trying to make amends for that."

In the 87-76 victory at Montana, Duquesne got a career-high 17 points from guard Sean Johnson, broke the game open with a 22-2 run and forced 19 turnovers. The 87 points were the most given up by the Grizzlies this season.

Arguably, the key to the Duquesne season has been the development of Clark, the senior forward. When the Dukes made their one-and-done appearance in the CBI last year, Clark was left home on suspension for what amounted to attitude issues.

That changed this season, as the graduate student became an all-league player.

“Bill’s one of those guys who’s been emotional at times and worn it on his sleeve a lot,” Everhart said. “He’s really matured a lot this year and grown into that leader that every team wants.”

Everhart has seen only clips of the Ducks. He’s known coach Dana Altman for a long time but not coached against him.

“I don’t really need to see a whole lot to know what Dana Altman teams do,” he said. “They get after you, they defend, they wear you out, they get on the glass and they really execute on offense.

“We’ve got a tremendous challenge ahead of us.”

After the long trip, and a weekend in Eugene waiting to play, will the Dukes be road-weary, or ready?

“I don’t know that we know any better than to just want to have a chance to play again,” Everhart said. “Knowing our guys as well as I do, coming through a season like we have, I think we would relish any opportunity to play, but especially a Pac-10 school, with Nike town — our guys understand all that.

“I think we’re going to be very eager to have an opportunity to play Oregon.”

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