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## Bluejays, Ducks see CBI as launching pad

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REBECCA S. GRATZ/THE WORLD-HERALD

Antoine Young said the Bluejays “need to come out in attack mode right away and be aggressive all game” on Friday night.

EUGENE, Ore. — Creighton and Oregon playing for a championship Friday night might be for some the ultimate April Fool’s Day basketball joke.

The teams have combined for 33 losses this season. Neither could win their way into the only tournament that really counts, and they weren’t judged good enough to play in the second-level National Invitation Tournament.

But one will celebrate winning a College Basketball Invitational title after the 9:05 p.m. (CDT) game at Matthew Knight Arena. At this point in the development of the programs under new head coaches, that would rank as an accomplishment.

“I think this has helped us,” said Oregon coach Dana Altman, referring to the three-week extension to the season. “It’s not the NCAA tournament and it’s not the NIT, and we have a long way to go to elevate our program.

“But it’s been an opportunity to play, and winning breeds winning. Hopefully, this will help us down the road.”

Creighton coach Greg McDermott has expressed the same thoughts repeatedly as the Bluejays have wound their way through the CBI.

“This makes for a very long season for the guys,” he said after Thursday’s practice. “We’ve been practicing for five months now. It’s been a grind, but I think the benefits for our team outweigh any of the negatives. This has been a good thing for our team.”

Has Creighton gained more by getting a chance to play six games in the CBI as opposed to perhaps being one-and-done had it qualified for the NCAA tournament?

“No,” McDermott answered emphatically. “A trip to the NCAAs does so much for your program in so many different ways. To taste that and experience that, the way it motivates you as you move forward, is immeasurable.

“You can try to explain it to people what it’s like, but from my experience of doing it three times, there is no way to explain it. It’s the ultimate in our sport, and that will always be our goal.”

Creighton’s goal Friday night will be to regain the confidence it played with in winning its first four games in the tournament. It took a hit in Wednesday’s 71-58 loss to the Ducks that evened the best-of-three series at a game apiece.

Oregon played much more aggressively than it did in Monday’s 84-76 loss in Omaha. The Ducks also switched to a man-to-man defense, a combination that resulted in 13 steals while forcing 20 Creighton turnovers that led to 35 points.

The Bluejays had averaged 88.2 points and shot 53.6 percent from the field in the first four wins. They were held to 41.9 percent shooting in Wednesday’s loss while committing almost half as many turnovers as they had in their first four games (42).

Oregon finished with decisive advantages in points in the paint (44-16), points off turnovers (35-9) and fast-break points (14-2).

“We have to get back on transition defense,” Creighton forward Doug McDermott said. “They beat us on layups. We also have to take care of the ball. They had 30-some points off our turnovers, and that just can’t happen.

“And I have to stay out of foul trouble.”

McDermott, the Bluejays’ scoring and rebounding leader, picked up two fouls in the first three minutes and 54 seconds. He sat out the remainder of the first half and played only a total of 15 minutes, finishing with six points. That matched his second-lowest scoring output of the season.

McDermott had 21 points in Monday’s win, while Gregory Echenique had 15 and Kenny Lawson and Jahenns Manigat 11 apiece. Echenique and Manigat led Creighton in Wednesday’s game with 10 points each.

As poorly as they played offensively, the Bluejays know that they need to pick it up on the other end of the court in order to have a chance to bring home a trophy.

“We have to get stops,” guard Antoine Young said. “We have to be aggressive. We need to come out in attack mode right away and be aggressive all game.”

Neither McDermott nor Young expects the Bluejays to shy away from the challenge.

“That was one of those games that you have, and we just have to move on from it,” Young said. “I don’t think it hurt our confidence or anything. We just have to go out and play to win.”

Altman figures that his Ducks will see a different Creighton team than they did Wednesday night.

“We were upset with the way we played on Monday and we came back and played a lot harder,” Altman said. “I know those guys at Creighton, and they’re going to be disappointed in the way they played. They’ll come back much more aggressive on Friday.

“They’ll get ready to play.”

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