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CBI Tournament: Oregon, Creighton play for title

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AP Photo/The Register-Guard, Kevin Clark

EUGENE - It was 231 days ago that the Oregon basketball team began practicing for the 2010-11 season.

On Friday night, the longest season in school history will end, with the final game of the CBI Tournament championship series at Matthew Knight Arena.

"I definitely didn't want my season to end with a loss," said Oregon's Jovean Catron, who had 18 points in the Ducks' 71-58 win on Wednesday night.

Oregon (20-18) and Creighton (23-15) have split the first two games of the best-of-three, each winning on its home court, and the Ducks have considerable momentum heading into Friday night's finale.

Ducks coach Dana Altman said his team "kind of turned the tables" on Creighton after they didn't play with passion in their 84-76 loss in Omaha in Game 1.

The games couldn't have been more dissimilar, unless you count a happy crowd.

Oregon and E.J. Singler must go through big Gregory Echenique one more time.

The Bluejays had scored at least 82 points in each of their four previous CBI games were held 24 points below that in Eugene.

Doug McDermott, the team's leading scorer who had 21 points in the opener, got in foul trouble and had six quiet points in Game 2.

The Ducks held Creighton to 21 first-half points in Game 2. In the opener, the Bluejays had 21 points by the first TV timeout.

"We had to change something up," Altman said.

The Ducks switched to more man-to-man pressure and attacked the basket whenever possible. It worked. Creighton turned the ball over a season-high 20 times.

"Coach was trying to get us to get after the ball," said guard Johnathan Loyd, who clearly has benefited from the extra games and practices.

And the CBI has given Oregon a 20-win season and clinched a winning record in Altman's first year here.

"I'm really proud of the guys, they didn't give into it," Altman said of how far the team has come in such a well, long time. "There in December, we were hoping to get to double digits. Our fans stayed with us, even though we were not a very good basketball team."

By mid-January, the Ducks had sunk to 7-9 and 0-4 in the Pac-10. Since then, even with a four-game skid to end the regular season, Oregon has gone 13-9.

"Winning breeds winning," Altman said of the CBI-boosted win total. "So hopefully it'll help us down the road."

Road is a four-letter word to Creighton, which has lost eight games in a row on the road, winless since Jan. 9.

Foul is another four-letter word, especially when Doug McDermott picked up some early ones on Wednesday night. The coach's son played a season-low 15 minutes in that loss. In the series, Creighton has outscored the Ducks by four points with McDermott on the floor. When he's on the bench, Oregon has outscored the Jays by nine.

As the CBI goes, it doesn't get any better than this: A Game 3 in a series with a story line - Altman's return to Omaha - to capture attention. Oregon had to pay another \$75,000 for the right to host Game 3, but the investment is paying off. The Ducks are making money, gaining experience and can now say they're playing

in April.

-- **John Hunt**

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