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Five burning questions heading into No. 1 Duke vs. No. 4 Kansas State

Story Highlights

This is going to be fun to watch because both teams really want to get out and run

Duke has the best big man (Mason Plumlee), but K-State boasts superior depth

How will Duke handle a very hostile crowd at the Sprint Center in Kansas City?

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- We haven't reached Thanksgiving yet, but it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.

College basketball will get a wonderful pre-holiday gift Tuesday night, when the CBE Classic will conclude with a championship contest pitting No. 1 Duke against No. 4 Kansas State. The teams reached the title game by vanquishing Marquette and Gonzaga, respectively, in Monday night's semifinals. This titanic clash will teach us a lot more about these teams regardless, but more than anything it will provide us with some March-worthy entertainment. Here are the five biggest questions that will determine the outcome:

1. Who will blink first in the tempo war?

This game is going to be fun to watch because both teams really want to get out and run. But here's the rub: Both teams also want to force the other to execute in the half court. So while transition defense will be pivotal, at some point one of these teams is going to have to make a concession and apply the brakes. When you see one coach putting his palms down to tell his guys to slow down, you'll know the other team has the upper hand.

2. Is Kansas State really that good of a three-point shooting team?

The Wildcats came out sizzling Tuesday night against Gonzaga, making nine of their first 11 three-point attempts. They finished shooting 12-for-26, or 46.2 percent. That is way above the 36.4 percent clip they had coming into the game. Did the Wildcats have an "on" night? Or is this the new normal? If it's the latter, the Blue Devils had better get out on those shooters.

3. Is one greater than five?

This isn't math class, it's a basketball game. So while Kansas State can run five power forwards and centers through the post, none will be the best big man in the game.

That "one" will be Duke's 6-foot-10 sophomore Mason Plumlee, who had his best game as a collegian Tuesday night against Marquette, finishing with 25 points, 12 rebounds, five blocks and three assists. Plumlee has the potential to be a one-man wrecking crew, but he will face a lot more defensive pressure on Tuesday night than he did against Marquette. "Their half-court defensive pressure is just stifling," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said of Kansas State. "Even a normal entry pass is not a given."

Because Marquette is a smaller team that plays a four-guard lineup, Duke did not get many minutes from its other big men, junior Miles Plumlee and sophomore Ryan Kelly. Those two will need to be bigger factors against Kansas State.

Incidentally, this question could also have been, Is eight greater than 11? Kansas State played 11 guys for five or more minutes against Gonzaga, but Duke only went eight deep against Marquette. The Blue Devils' core of Mason Plumlee, Kyle Singler, Nolan Smith and Kyrie

Irving each played 32 or more minutes. After the game, Mike Krzyzewski brushed aside the suggestion that they might have some tired legs for Tuesday night -- "These guys play all summer; they're fine" -- but K-State guard Jacob Pullen made clear that his team's depth should be an advantage in trying to win on back-to-back nights.

"We think we're the deepest team in the country," Pullen said. "That's what we hang our hat on. We want to get you into your bench, because we know we're comfortable with ours."

4. Who will have the advantage at the foul line?

Both teams tend to take a lot of free throws. The difference is, Duke makes them. Though Krzyzewski expressed surprise that his team missed the front end of a one-and-one three times -- "I'm not sure that's ever going to happen again" -- Duke came into the game with its top five players all shooting better than 80 percent from the foul line. The Blue Devils shoot 75.6 percent as a team. Kansas State, on the other hand, shoots a rancid 50.6 percent. It doesn't take a genius to understand that is a potentially fatal flaw.

Kansas State also commits more fouls than just about any team in the nation. It was whistled for 23 on Monday night, which allowed Gonzaga to shoot 29 free throws (it made 23). The Wildcats will have to show a lot more discipline against Duke. They'll also have to hope the referees allow a lot of contact.

5. How will Duke handle the crowd?

Krzyzewski doesn't schedule many true nonconference road games against top-ranked teams anymore, and while this game is not taking place in Manhattan, believe me it will feel like a road game. The Sprint Center is going to be packed with thousands of purple-festooned fans, and they are going to put a level of game pressure on Duke that it has not felt yet. With all the hype surrounding the nation's No. 1-ranked team, it's easy to forget that the Blue Devils graduated three seniors off the starting quintet that won the NCAA title. Their point guard is a freshman, their sophomore center was a role player last year, and they become less experienced when they have to go to their bench.

Prediction

These teams are evenly matched across the board, so I expect the game will come down to threes and frees. Duke is a better three-point-shooting team and a much better foul-shooting team than Kansas State. I also believe Kansas State is a little too turnover-prone. The Wildcats committed 22 against Gonzaga, and Duke is much more proficient at turning those miscues into buckets. K-State's toughness and the crowd's intensity will keep it close, but in the end, it's about making baskets. And Duke will make just a couple more.

Duke 85, Kansas State 81

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