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# COURTSIDE VIEW

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## What to watch for: California in CBE Classic

By [Steve Walentik](#)

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KANSAS CITY -- The Missouri basketball team put together its most complete and convincing performance of the young season Monday night in an 87-58 dismantling of Notre Dame in the semifinals of the CBE Classic at the Sprint Center. The 21st-ranked Tigers shot 58.2 percent from the field, limited the Fighting Irish to 37 percent accuracy, outscored them 44-22 in the paint and controlled the glass, finishing with a 38-24.

Now the question is can they do it again?

MU is in store for an even tougher test Tuesday night when it takes on No. 20 California, coming off its own rout of Georgia, in the CBE Classic title game. The game is scheduled to tip shortly after 9 p.m.

To have a performance like that tonight obviously is going to give these guys some confidence," first-year Coach Frank Haith said. "We've got another game tomorrow, and you look across the country this time of year, there's a lot of champions that are going to be named.

"When you want to have a championship program, winning a championship like tomorrow -- we're competing for the CBE championship -- is important and get our mentality of winning championships. There's no question tomorrow we're going to play another great team from a BCS Conference and we'll be excited about the opportunity."

Missouri should get a boost from what figures to be an overwhelmingly pro-Missouri crowd at the Sprint Center. Here are a few things I'll be watching for from my seat inside the Sprint Center:

- **Can the Tigers be as disruptive defensively?** Missouri forced 10 first-half turnovers against Notre Dame on Monday night, poking the ball away from Irish ball-handlers and getting their hands into passing lanes. They were as prolific at taking the ball away in the second half but did a better job contesting shots, and Notre Dame only went 7 for 28 from the floor over the final 20 minutes. Senior forward Tim Abromaitis, who had 18 first-half points for the Irish, only managed for after the break and only shot 2 for 8 from the field.

It could be more difficult to fluster the Golden Bears. For starters, the Tigers' quickness advantage doesn't figure to be nearly as pronounced against Coach Mike Montgomery's team, which boasts a pair of potent wing players in sophomore Allen Crabbe, last year's Pac-10 freshman of the year, and senior Jorge Gutierrez and a veteran point guard in junior Brandon Smith, who carries a 14-to-5 assist-to-turnover ratio into Tuesday game. The Bears also have more proven weapons, including senior forward Harper Kamp, who had a game-high 16 points and went 6 for 6 from the field against the Bulldogs in Monday night's semifinal.

Cal is shooting 50.9 percent through their first four games and hit 25 of 50 shot against Georgia. It has also made 23 of 53 3-point attempts (43.4 percent).

• **Will Missouri have to move away from the basket?** MU had averaged nearly 10 made 3-pointers in its first three games but only hoisted 11 from beyond the arc -- making five -- against Notre Dame. The Tigers instead came out intent on getting the ball to the basket, whether it was working it into power forward Ricardo Ratliffe in the early going or driving the ball with purpose the rest of the game. That's how they managed to score 44 points in the paint despite playing at a size disadvantage against the Irish.

That dynamic will exist again on Tuesday night against the Bears, who have a 6-6 wing player in Crabbe and pair the 6-8 Kamp with 6-10 Richard Solomon to protect the frontline. They're more athletic than Notre Dame's big men. Solomon isn't much of a threat to score, but he had seven rebounds, three of them at the offensive end, and blocked two shots against Georgia. Cal also brings 6-8 freshman David Kravish, a Lee's Summit North graduate, off the bench, and he had six points, eight and two rebounds in 23 minutes Monday night.

Cal is outrebounding its opponents by an average of 11 per game, so the Tigers will have to work hard to hold their own on the glass.

• **Do the Tigers avoid foul trouble?** It was a problem in Monday night's semifinal victory. Both Ratliffe and Marcus Denmon picked up their second fouls with more than 11 minutes remaining in the first half. Matt Pressey eventually was hit with his third.

Haith sat Ratliffe for the majority of the final 10 minutes, giving Steve Moore and Kadeem Green turns at manning the middle of Missouri's defense. He didn't bench Denmon, though, instead substituting him in when he could on offensive possessions and pulling when he could on defense. He didn't leave him on the floor more than a minute or two at a time to help him avoid a fatigue foul.

"I thought we found a way. We were creative to be able to finish it off when you have guys get in foul trouble like Matt Pressey got three in the first half and Marcus got two, Ricardo got two," Haith said. "We just found a way to get our lineups in there the way we could where we could not lose one of those guys, particularly in the first half, and I thought our guys played well without fouling.

"We changed defenses a little bit. We went to the zone a little bit to bide some time, and the other thing with that, you've got to run offense. You can't go down and shoot quick shots because now you're back on defense. I thought we did a great job when we had those foul trouble situations."

Missouri would rather not have to repeat that performance against Cal. The Tigers need their best players on the floor as often as possible to give them their best chance at chance at their first victory over a ranked opponent since they knocked off then-No. 24 Kansas State in a Martin King Day matinee last season.

• **What does Denmon do for an encore?** The [senior guard was nearly flawless](#) on Monday night. He made his first seven shots and finished 9 for 11 from the field to finish with a game-high 26 points. He used his quickness to get to blow by Notre Dame defenders and his strength to finish at the rim. He also only knocked down two of his three 3-point attempts. There's no question Denmon enjoys playing in his hometown. He has now averaged 24.3 points in his past four games at the Sprint Center.

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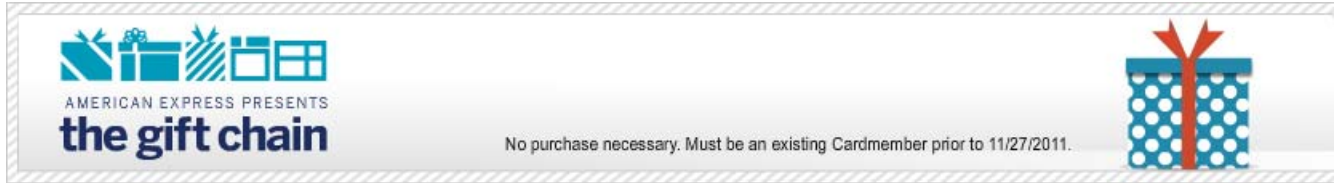
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