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English leads No. 21 Mizzou to CBE Classic title

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By The Associated Press DAVE SKRETTA (AP Sports Writer)



Photo credit: AP | Missouri guard Marcus Denmon dunks during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game against California on Tuesday, Nov. 22, 2011, in Kansas City, Mo. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

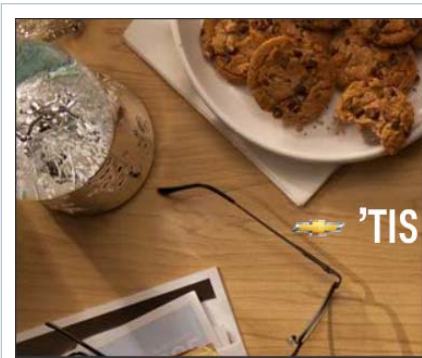
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KANSAS CITY, Mo. - (AP) -- Kim English can't remember a time during his four seasons that Missouri has played with so much teamwork, so much energy on offense and defense. His mind wandered all the way back to a Big 12 title his freshman season for something that came close.

The way the Tigers have played this week, there's reason to believe they'll win more championships before this season is over.

English had 19 points to lead six Tigers in double figures, and No. 21 Missouri dominated No. 20 California 92-53 to win the CBE Classic on Tuesday night.



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"This is the best I've felt in my four years, because it's the most selfless team I've played on," English said. "We're all 10 guys, plus three transfers -- we're buying into the process every day."

The process sure seems to be working.

Missouri built a 45-26 lead by halftime and the outcome was never in doubt over the final 20 minutes, with coach Frank Haith pulling his starters with a few minutes left in the game.

Marcus Denmon added 18 points and was the tournament's Most Valuable Player. Matt Pressey had 13 points and Michael Dixon finished with 11 for the Tigers (5-0), who won the event just a couple hours' drive from their campus in [Columbia](#) for the second time in four appearances.

"The kids are buying in and that's great to see. We understand we have to stay hungry. It's a marathon -- this is coach-speak now -- it's not a sprint," Haith said. "As long as our guys understand the focus, there are things we have to work on, we've got a chance. No doubt about it."

Jorge Gutierrez scored 11 points to lead Cal (4-1), but fouled out with 11:12 remaining. Richard Solomon also fouled out with more than 7 minutes left and finished with nine points.

"They're aggressive," Gutierrez said. "They play with a lot of intensity, and we felt it."

The Tigers used relentless man-to-man, half-court pressure to force the guard-oriented Golden Bears into a plethora of early turnovers, and the result was a lot of easy points.

After a free throw by Allen Crabbe got Cal within 19-14 with just under 10 minutes left in the first half, the Tigers went on a 12-2 spurt in which five players scored. Phil Pressey's bucket with 7:29 left prompted Cal coach [Mike Montgomery](#) to call timeout, but Dixon added a 3-pointer moments later off a feed from Denmon to keep the run going.

Denmon's two free throws made it 31-16 with 5:55 remaining in the half.

The Golden Bears committed three straight turnovers at one point during the stretch, and wound up with 14 of them in the first half, which Missouri turned into 15 points.

The Tigers, who took a 45-26 lead on two foul shots by Phil Pressey with under a minute left in the half, wound up shooting 3 of 12 from beyond the arc and got outrebounded 22-11 over the first 20 minutes, yet still managed to build what turned out to be an insurmountable lead.

"It starts with us playing as a team," Denmon said, "everybody passing up the good shot for a better shot, and that's what we did as a unit. It allowed us to have California playing on their heels, and that's something I felt if we did as a team, we would be hard to guard."

The Golden Bears had grown accustomed to being on the other side of the scoreboard.

They routed [Georgia](#) 70-46 in the semifinals Monday night, their fourth consecutive victory by at least 17 points. The win gave them their best start since Montgomery took over four years ago, and was made even more impressive when the Bulldogs knocked off Notre Dame in the third-place game.

Of course, the Tigers also had their way with the Fighting Irish.

Missouri showed over two games in [Kansas City](#) that it has made a flawless transition from the fast-paced, "40 minutes of hell" style of former coach [Mike Anderson](#) to a style employed by Haith that values scrappy defense, transition baskets and lights-out shooting.

All of which was on display Tuesday night.

"We're working. We're a work in progress," Denmon said. "We continue to do the things we need to do to get better as a team. ... Everything else will take care of itself."

Things were going so well for the Tigers that when Moore was left open at the top of the key late in the first half, he popped the 3 and hit nothing but net. It was the 6-foot-9 senior center's third career 3-pointer, and it brought a heavily pro-Missouri crowd to its feet in a roar.

The din never died down in the second half.

The Golden Bears never managed to get into a rhythm, settling for a series of off-balance jumpers, awkward shots at the rim and contested 3-pointers -- when they got a shot off at all.

Just as often, it seemed, California was coughing up the ball. The 14 turnovers it had in the first half were two shy of its season high, set against Austin Peay last week, and one fewer than it had in the semifinals against Georgia the previous night.



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Neil Best (@sportswatch) writes that Mark Sanchez persevered long enough to make his final two throws count.



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He had been bruised by his coach, booed by his fans and bamboozled by the Bills. But when it mattered most,

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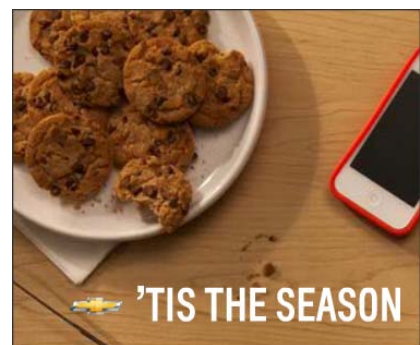
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"We really didn't have much going," Montgomery said. "It's as simple as that."

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