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OSU men's basketball: Beavers head east to take on Texas

By KEVIN HAMPTON, Corvallis Gazette-Times | Posted: Saturday, November 19, 2011 12:00 am

Craig Robinson has been waiting for the time that he could take a team to a tough early-season tournament.

The schedule was set when Robinson arrived at Oregon State. But he then hesitated with following teams because the Beavers weren't quite ready.

Now it's time.

The Beavers have been taking part in the TicketCity Legends Classic with regional round games against West Alabama and Hofstra, but it is the championship rounds of the tournament that piqued Robinson's interest and landed his OK to the invitation.

The Beavers are in East Rutherford, N.J., to take on Texas in the Izod Center today and then either North Carolina State or Vanderbilt on Monday.

"We wanted to have games against some good competition, hence Texas, North Carolina State and Vanderbilt," Robinson said.

Next year the Beavers are planning on participating in the 2K Sports Classic which has games in Madison Square Garden in New York City.

"As your team gets better you can play in better tournaments because you won't get clobbered and this is just what you do when you're building up your program," Robinson said. "That was my plan."

The Beavers like the idea.

They want the chance to get out in front of a wider audience.

"That's the plan," OSU guard Ahmad Starks said. "Go over and play in the East, get Oregon State's name out there, get some wins on the table, some high-quality wins, especially for the RPI. We are trying to make the tournament. So just that exposure playing against the good teams will definitely help us out, if not make us better as a whole."

The Beavers definitely relish the shot at some big-name schools from outside the Pacific-12 Conference.

"It's big. It's the games you live for," Starks said. "This is a great opportunity for us to play against some good teams. Texas has been in the tournament the past 12 years or something like that, Vanderbilt's in the top 25, N.C. State is a good ACC team.

"So it's a great opportunity to play against these big-time teams and we're just looking forward to the challenge."

The challenge begins today against Texas.

The Longhorns are 2-0 with wins over Boston University (82-46) and Rhode Island (100-90).

The Longhorns are young and not particularly big, with three freshmen in a starting lineup that goes 6-foot-7, 6-7, 6-3, 6-1 and 6-1.

Texas has one player over 6-7 on their roster and goes with a three-guard lineup.

Needless to say, Texas relies on running and long-range shooting to pile up the points.

The Longhorns have hit 20 of 47 3-pointers in two games.

The three guards can score. Junior J'Covan Brown averages 31.5 points and freshmen Julien Lewis and Myck Kabongo score 14.5 and 12 a game, respectively.

"I'm excited," forward/center Joe Burton said. "I think the team is excited, too, because people are taking us seriously this year, opposed to other years.

"We're playing better teams and getting us ready for the tournament or winning league first, that's our first goal, and then if we do that, go to the tournament."