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Starks Goes Off For Career-High 33 Points In Win Over Aggies

[box score](#)

CORVALLIS, Ore. - In a game that featured several big players, it was the smallest one on the court who had the biggest game, as [Ahmad Starks](#) exploded for a career-high 33 points to lead Oregon State to a 71-62 win over New Mexico State Sunday night in the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Wounded Warrior Project.

Starks scored in a variety of ways, hitting jumpers from outside and driving to the hole for nifty layups, to finish with 33 points and crush his previous high of 24 he scored against California last season. He also made 9-of-12 free throws, both being career highs, and added five rebounds, five assists and four steals.

The Beavers improve to 2-0 with the win, marking the second consecutive season they've started with a perfect mark after two games. The last time Oregon State won its first two games in back-to-back years was 1999 and 2000.

Next stop: Madison Square Garden in New York City where the Beavers will face Alabama on Thursday in the championship round of the 2K Sports Classic in a game that will be televised nationally on ESPN2.

"I couldn't be happier," Oregon State head coach [Craig Robinson](#) said. "I know I didn't look happy there, but this New Mexico State team is a very good team with perennial 20-win seasons. They know how to win games and they play tough. We needed a game sort of like this to see how we would fare against them. I thought after the first five or six minutes we kind of woke up and started to play well, and I was really proud of the guys for doing that.

"You can't say enough about the game Ahmad had. We needed someone to put the team on their shoulders and carry the offensive burden. We had three of our really good guys - Roberto, Erik and Devon - having off nights. To be able to beat a team like this with guys having this kind of night, I'm so happy with how we hung in there."

New Mexico State, which advanced to the NCAA Tournament last season, brought an imposing team to Gill Coliseum with three players standing 6-foot-10 or taller, including a 7-5 freshman Sim Bhullar. The Aggies used their size to take an early 18-12 lead before the Beavers responded with an 18-4 run to take a 30-22 advantage.

The Beavers took a 41-30 lead to the locker room at halftime and had a 14-point cushion at 68-54 with 4:37 to play before the Aggies made a run to cut it to 68-62 before Starks made three free throws down the stretch to put the game on ice.

Starks made 11-of-21 from the field, 2-of-7 from three-point land and 9-of-12 from the stripe. The 11 field goals are a career high and he had never gone to the line more than five times in a game when he made all five last December against Howard.

Did Starks feel like this was going to be a career night for him? Not even close.

"During warm-ups I was making pretty much every shot," he said. "It reminded me of a game back in high school where I made every shot, but then in the game I shot the ball terribly. I didn't want that to happen again. Some of my jump shots weren't even working, but I just kept attacking and attacking. We were down early and I just wanted to do something to give us the lead and we were able to keep it."

Senior [Angus Brandt](#) had another solid game after opening the season strong in the 102-83 win over Niagara, finishing with eight points, six rebounds, a career-high three steals and equaled his career best with five assists and two blocked shots.

[Joe Burton](#) added 13 points, [Eric Moreland](#) had four points, six rebounds and three blocks, and [Roberto Nelson](#) chipped in nine points and four boards.

Burton had a reverse dunk in the first half that he said after the game might be his best play as a Beaver. But he then turned to humble Joe and downplayed it.

"I don't even remember what happened," he said. "Did I even celebrate? I just ran back like I had been there before. It was nice. I saw an open lane and I saw the 8-footer come over and I just dunked it. I felt like it was kind of slow but it went down and everybody liked it and got hyped off of it."

Oregon State will play at Madison Square Garden for the first time in school history with the game against the Crimson Tide slated for Thursday at 4 p.m. PT (7 p.m. ET). Purdue and Villanova will play after the Beavers and Alabama with the consolation and championship games scheduled for Friday beginning at 2 p.m. PT (5 p.m. ET).