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Cougars

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Washington State eager to host 'big name' Pittsburgh

The Cougars will close their home season Monday in the opener of the best-of-three College Basketball Invitational series against Pittsburgh, only the second Big East team to visit Pullman.

By Christian Caple

The Spokesman-Review

PULLMAN — The opportunity to continue their season was motivation enough for the Washington State Cougars to accept a bid to the College Basketball Invitational.

And after winning three games — the most recent one without leading scorer Brock Motum for much of the game — WSU is being rewarded for its resiliency.

That is, if you consider a best-of-three series against a Big East team a reward. But from a prestige standpoint, the Cougars (18-16) are proud to host Pittsburgh at 7 p.m. Monday in the opening game of the CBI's championship series.

Why shouldn't they be? After all, Pitt is about to become just the second current member of the Big East to play a game in Pullman, and the first since that conference was formed in 1979.

DePaul is the only current Big East team that has played a game here, losing 83-69 to WSU on Dec. 11, 1974.

"Pullman's not a fun place to play" for a visiting team, senior forward Abe Lodwick said. "It's not an easy place to get to, either, so I understand why a lot of programs don't come. It'll be fun having a team with a big name on their chest coming in. We definitely want to represent ourselves and our school as best we can against them."

"Playing Pitt here, it's a big-name school coming in and giving us some publicity over on the East Coast for recruits and stuff," said freshman guard DaVonte Lacy. "I think it's a real good opportunity for us and hopefully we take advantage of it."

The latter may be difficult without Motum, who leads the team in scoring at 18 points per game. Coach Ken Bone said the junior forward has a "very slim chance" to play after spraining his right ankle early in WSU's 72-55 semifinal win over Oregon State last week.

Motum, who hadn't practiced all week when he met with reporters Saturday, was still in a walking boot and on crutches. He said if he can't play Monday, the goal will be to get healthy in time for Game 2 on Wednesday in Pittsburgh.

The Panthers (20-16) were ranked 10th in the AP's preseason poll, but they lost their first seven Big East games with starting point guard Tray Woodall sidelined by an abdominal injury.

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