



CBI final a unique opportunity for Panthers

By Ray Fittipaldo / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pitt and Washington State will play for the third time in five days tonight at the Petersen Events Center in the final game of the best-of-three College Basketball Invitational championship series. Add in the 2008 contest between the two schools in the Legends Classic, and the Panthers will play the Cougars as many times as they played Syracuse in a four-year period.

That's just one of the odd circumstances presented by Pitt's first foray into the CBI.

- It's the first time in more than 80 years and only the second time in school history the Panthers play the same opponent in three consecutive games. In 1931, they played three games against Kansas in Kansas City from Dec. 21-23. They lost the first two before winning the third game, and the highest score in the three contests was 26 points by the Jayhawks.
- The game tonight will be No. 39 for the Panthers, the most in a single season in school history.

Scouting report

- **Matchup:** Washington State (19-17) vs. Pitt (21-17), 7 p.m. today, Petersen Events Center.
- **TV, Radio, Internet:** HDNet, KDKA-FM (93.7), www.pittsburghpanthers.com.
- **Pitt:** Evened the best-of-three College Basketball Invitational championship series Wednesday with a 57-53 victory. ... Played without leading scorer Ashton Gibbs for the first time this season. His status for tonight likely will be a game-time decision. ... Sophomore C Talib Zanna scored 14 points Wednesday on 4-for-4 shooting. ... In five CBI games, Zanna is 23 for 32 from the field and has scored 59 points. ... Sophomore F Lamar Patterson has scored in double figures in four of the five CBI games.
- **Washington State:** Erased a 10-point deficit in the final 10 minutes to tie the score late in regulation before losing Game 2. ... Likely to be without leading scorer Brock Motum for the third consecutive game. Motum injured an ankle in Washington State's semifinal victory at Oregon State. ... Junior G Reggie Moore scored a game-high 18 points Wednesday. ... Shot 4 for 13 from 3-point range after going 9 for 15 from the arc in Game 1.
- **Hidden stat:** Pitt's bench has outscored Washington State's bench, 46-29, in the first two games of the series.

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- It also will mark the latest the Panthers have played in a calendar year.
 - And finally, the CBI gives the Panthers an opportunity to do something they've never done before -- win a postseason tournament other than the Big East.

It's not the tournament the Panthers dreamed of winning at the beginning the season when they debuted at No. 10 in the national polls, but they want to make the most of the opportunity after evening the series Wednesday with a 57-53 victory.

"It's a good opportunity for us," senior forward Nasir Robinson said. "We wanted to play in this. We easily could have backed out of this tournament. We wanted to play, all the players and coaches. We want to finish it out and try to get this win Friday."

Pitt has played a few Big East opponents three times in the same season. Most recently, the Panthers played West Virginia twice during the regular season and then in the 2009 Big East tournament. But those games came in the span of 46 days.

"It's real strange," Robinson said. "It's different, playing back-to-back like that."

In an effort to be different from the other one-and-done postseason tournaments, the CBI made its championship a best-of-three affair when it came into existence five years ago.

"It's an opportunity for our guys to compete and get some experience and to challenge themselves in a little different way," Pitt coach Jamie Dixon said. "It will be interesting to see how everyone responds playing a team for the third time in a row."

By now, each team has a firm grasp of how the other likes to play. They have identified the top scoring threats. They know their favorite sets and plays and what situations that are used.

It's probably the reason Pitt held Washington State to 20 points in the first half Wednesday, the fewest number of points allowed by the Panthers in a half this season.

And it's probably the same reason the Panthers managed to make just two field goals in the final 10 minutes. The finale tonight could be similarly low scoring.

"It's different, but I think it's fun," Washington State coach Ken Bone said. "It's unique. You have to change some things, but you don't want to change too much. It's kind of fun for a coach and I would imagine the players."

First Published 2012-03-30 04:17:14