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UTEP Miners have high hopes for College Basketball Invitational series

By Bill Knight / El Paso Times
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EL PASO - UTEP is hoping to end this season with an exclamation point, hoping to set the table for next season, and hoping to send senior

Stefon Jackson out in a special way.

Monday night in Corvallis, Ore., UTEP will try to continue making all these high hopes turn into reality.

UTEP will take on Oregon State at 8 p.m. MDT Monday in the opening game of the best-of-three College Basketball Invitational championship series. Game 2 will be at 8 p.m. Wednesday in the Don Haskins Center. Game 3, if necessary, will be Friday in the Haskins Center.

Oregon State has similar high hopes. Coach Craig Robinson, who might just have the most famous brother-in-law in the world (President Barack Obama), has made huge strides in one season at Oregon State.

The Beavers were floundering a year ago, going 6-25 on the season and 0-18 in the Pac-10. Right now, they are

16-17 overall and they were 7-11 in the Pac-10. Oregon State was 12-7 at home this season and has home court wins over California, Nebraska, Stanford and USC.

Robinson is a Princeton graduate and was a talented player there. He then was an assistant under former Princeton coach Bill Carmody at Northwestern. Robinson was the head coach at Brown University for two years, taking Brown into the CBI last year.

Oregon State has been exciting in the post season, taking three close victories - 49-45 over Houston, 71-70 over Vermont in overtime and 65-62 over Stanford in overtime. All three games were in Corvallis.

UTEP

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is 22-12 on the season, having won five of its past six games. The Miners have CBI wins at Nevada (79-77), at home against Northeastern (75-66) and at Richmond (81-69). Jackson, who will play his final games as a Miner this week, will leave with unmatched statistics. He has 2,385 points - most in the history of UTEP and Conference USA. He is averaging 24.6 points a game, fifth best in the nation. He has 12 20-plus point games in a row, one behind Jim Barnes (1963-64) for the school record. He has a school record 66 20-plus point games.

Jackson also leads the nation in free throws made (292) and free throws attempted (349), good for an 83.7 percentage. Jackson also has broken the single-season scoring record at UTEP, currently with 837 points. Barnes was the previous record holder with 816

in 1963-64.

Sophomore Randy Culpepper is the 31st member of UTEP's 1,000 point club, now with 1,019 in his two-year career. Culpepper averages 17.5 points a game coming off the bench.

Oregon State is led by sophomore guard Calvin Haynes, who averages 13.9 points a game. Roeland

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Schaftenaar, a 6-foot-11 junior, averages 10.0 points a game.

UTEP coach Tony Barbee said his team hoped to make the NIT this year but has said repeatedly, "The only way to prove people wrong is to go into the CBI and win it."

The Miners, who will return every member of this team save Jackson, will try to finish proving their point Monday and Wednesday night ... trying to take good care of all those high hopes.

Bill Knight may be reached at bknight@elpasotimes.com; 546-6171.

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