

Beavers Race Past Western Illinois In Opening Round Of CBI

CORVALLIS, Ore. Oregon State raced out to a 16-2 lead and was never seriously challenged as it rolled past the depleted Western Illinois Leathernecks, 80-59, in the first round of the College Basketball Invitational presented by Zebra Pen. The win gave the Beavers their 20th victory of the season, the most since All-America guard Gary Payton was prowling Gill Coliseum in his senior year of 1990.

"I told my team in the locker room that most of them weren't born the last time this program won 20 games," fourth-year head coach Craig Robinson said. "It has been a group effort to get to this milestone; Beaver Nation should be congratulated as well as my staff, the players and especially the student section for great support all year, including tonight."

Jared Cunningham led the Beavers' offensive attack with 22 points to go along with eight rebounds, five assists and three steals. He hit 9-of-14 from the field. His 605 points for the season is the second-most in OSU history for a junior and he now ranks 16th in school history for career points with 1,231.

"You are seeing an evolution of his game," Robinson said of Cunningham. "When he starts attacking like he did tonight, opponents don't know how to defend him. He can beat you on the drive and tonight he hit some nice pull-up jumpers. He's showing a lot of different aspects to his game."

The Beavers led by as many as 16 points on three occasions in the opening half before settling for a 44-34 advantage at the break. Western Illinois crawled to within nine points early in the second half before the Beavers put a 15-6 run together to clinch the victory. WIU shot 54 percent from the field in the first half, but OSU's defense put the clamps on in the second half allowing just 32 percent. OSU shot a season-high 65.2 percent for the game, including 68.2 percent following halftime.

Ahmad Starks quietly scored 16 points and knocked down two three-pointers to set the Oregon State sophomore record with 78 on the season. Devon Collier added 12 points and Angus Brandt scored all 10 of his points in the first half, while Eric Moreland chipped in four points, six rebounds and five blocked shots and Joe Burton had eight points and eight boards.

Don McAvoy scored a career-high 19 points for WIU, which was playing with just eight players after suspending two prior to the game and having a third quit the team.

The Beavers (20-14) host TCU (18-14) Monday at 7 p.m. The Horned Frogs, who earlier this season beat NCAA Tournament teams UNLV and New Mexico, defeated Milwaukee Tuesday night in Fort Worth, 83-73, to advance to the CBI quarterfinals.

"TCU will be much more athletic and have a lot of size," Robinson said of the team's next opponent. "It will be nice for us to get a breather after all the games we have played recently, but we will be back at it hard Friday in practice in preparation."