

Idaho hosts Sac. State today

Vandals to play home opener

By Sandra Kelly, Daily News staff writer

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Tonight the Idaho men's basketball team comes home for its official home-opener.

Idaho beat St. Martin's 87-61 in an exhibition game on Nov. 6 in Memorial Gym, but that game didn't count on the schedule, so tonight's matchup with Sacramento State marks the first time Idaho will be playing in front of its fans in

an official capacity.

The Vandals are doing good things on the court. They opened their season by beating Utah, in Salt Lake City, 87-61.

Idaho had a bit of a letdown two days later when it lost to Texas Southern, but on Saturday it handled North Dakota State 81-69.

"I thought we played very well Saturday (against NDSU)," Idaho coach Don Verlin said. "I thought defensively, they executed well. They held them to 31 percent (from the floor) and 22 percent on 3s. And our offensive effort was what I expected. A lot of people don't realize it, but they (NDSU) are a good program."

Tonight the Vandals take on the Sac. State Hornets, a team from the Big Sky Conference.

The Hornets are 3-2, upsetting Oregon State on the road last weekend.

"You must be pretty good on the road to go to a Pac-10 school and get a win," Verlin said. "Anybody, even in the Pac-10, would think that."

They also have wins against Bethany and Houston Baptist while losing to Rice and South Alabama, and Sac. State's three wins are more than it had all last season.

The Hornets are led by junior guard Sultan Toles-Bey and freshman John Dickson, who plays both the guard and post. Both average just over 11 points a game. Dickson also leads the team in blocked shots with nine.

Senior post Michael Selling leads the rebounding with 6.4 a night.

At first glance, the Vandals should handle the Hornets. Idaho is 14-1 against Sac. State in a series dating back to 1968.

However, the Hornets' 65-63 win against Oregon State proves they need to be taken seriously.

"They are a good, solid outfit," Verlin said. "They have three guards who can really shoot it. They play good defense. I like the makeup of their team."

The Vandals are in position to have a great run this year, but they've got to step up their defense.

Idaho's scoring 80 points a game, but giving up 76, but its also played two teams - Utah and North Dakota State - who played in last year's NCAA tournament.

Guards Steffan Johnson and Mac Hopson lead the Vandals on offense with both averaging 15 points a game while forward Luiz Toledo is averaging nine points and five rebounds a night.

The Vandals love the transition game, and when they run the floor they are dynamic. They share the ball, they hit the 3 and they like to dazzle.

Defensively, they have outrebounded all three opponents, but it's an area they can still improve on.

"We have to do better rebounding, and that's been our area of focus today (Monday). And, I like the way the kids responded," Verlin said.

Tipoff for tonight's game will be at 7 p.m. in Memorial Gym.

Sandra Kelly can be reached at (208) 882-5561, ext. 231, or by e-mail to skelly@dnews.com.