



NCAA PREVIEW

Valparaiso hopes experience pays off #13-seed looking to pull first-round upset in third straight year in NCAA's

VALPARAISO, Ind. (AP) -- Valparaiso's Crusaders practiced, if not twice as hard, at least twice as long on Tuesday. It wasn't by choice.

Trying to prepare for their third straight NCAA tourney appearance, the Crusaders were kayoed by a heavy snowstorm that blanketed northern Indiana on Monday.

"We had no power anywhere on campus, so they had to cancel practice," sports information director Bill Rogers said Tuesday. "As a result, they're going to go twice today."

Power was restored to campus about 8 p.m. Monday. The team plans to take a charter bus Wednesday morning to Chicago, about a 90-minute drive, and then fly to Oklahoma City, where it will play Mississippi in the first round of the Midwest Regional on Friday.

The storm dumped about a foot of snow on the area, and high winds and drifting made travel almost impossible.

"I got stuck three times yesterday, twice in my own driveway," Rogers said.

The roads had improved somewhat on Tuesday.

Valparaiso (21-9) earned its third straight tourney appearance by winning the Mid-Continent Conference tournament and its automatic bid. The Crusaders lost in the first round in each of their previous NCAA appearances, to Arizona in 1996 and Boston College

last year. They're seeded 13th this year.

"The last two years we've been sent to Arizona and then to Salt Lake City," coach Homer Drew said. "We really wanted to stay in the Midwest ... but we'll be able to take some of our fans to Oklahoma City."

He called the Crusaders' first NCAA appearance, a 90-51 thrashing by Arizona, "truly a learning experience." Last year's 73-66 loss to Boston College was a better experience, Drew said.

"It showed by the score of the game and the competitiveness of the game. I was just proud of our team. We played the best we could," he said.

He's looking to go a bit farther this time.

"We've got five seniors who have been to the last two dances. That experience definitely will be a factor that will help us," Drew said.

"We're really going to be concerned with the quickness of Ole Miss. Quickness is something that we don't face day in and day out. That's going to be our challenge. Our seniors are very focused."

LRT moneyless pool update:

11 students and teachers are officially entered in the men's pool, with more than 30 more expected to turn in their brackets today or tomorrow. 12:20 PM tomorrow is the deadline. The deadline for the women's pool is not until the end of the day Friday. In that pool, 5 are officially entered and 15 more are expected to enter by Friday.



Valparaiso Crusaders

Seed: #13 in Midwest Regional

Record: 18-8

RPI: #82

Bid: Automatic (Mid-Continent Conference tournament champ)

Recent NCAA Appearances:

- 1996, lost 90-51 to Arizona in first round
- 1997, lost 73-66 to Boston College in first round

First-round opponent: Ole Miss

Opponent's RPI: #11

Gametime: Friday, 12:30 PM

Line: Ole Miss by 12

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