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Grizzlies face colorful, fast, talented Evansville purple aces in tourney opener

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MISSOULA---

When the University of Montana Grizzlies travel once more into the hotbed of basketball, the Midwest, to compete in the Evansville Invitational Tournament, they will open against a team that has been dominant in that hotbed for many years.

The Evansville Purple Aces, coached for the last 21 years by Arad McCutchan, who in his spare time works at being athletic director and director of the physical education department, reached their highest prominence in recent years. (By the way, McCutchan also teaches.)

The veteran coach has a 345-209 record in 21 years at the school where he gained recognition as one of its all-time basketball greats in the mid-30s.

His best team, record-wise, was the 1964-65 contingent which went undefeated in 29 games and won one of four national titles (small college) garnered by McCutchan-coached teams in the past eight years. McCutchan was named Coach of the Year nationally in 1964 and 1965.

Grizzly coach Ron Nord has had the Aces scouted well, and he says he is underestimating things by saying "they are a darn good ball club."

The Purple Aces, ranked third and fourth by the two major press polls last week, have beaten one team that was higher in the polls, and theoretically be first or second among small college teams when the Grizzlies hit Evansville late this month.

Because of a fine collection of talent, McCutchan has his team playing platoon (you heard it right) basketball, with the second five, known by the appealing name of the "Vampire Five", sporting a pair of 6-4 guards.
"They're big, fast, and just plain good," Nord said Friday, "but they're not unbeatable as far as we're concerned."

Nord will count on good performances from 6-4 guard Ron Moore, the team's leading scorer, and 6-7 center Don Parsons, second to Moore in scoring, to set the pace, and they will need help from the remainder of the Tips. Both Moore and Parsons, along with soph John Cheek, had excellent showings against Fresno State last Tuesday in Missoula, with the Grizzlies winning that one, 88-72.

Nord and assistant Bob Cope have added some new offensive twists, and apparently with some success, or so practice would indicate.

"The kids are able to set up better and break better, and should be able to shoot and score better, as a result of the changes," Nord said. "And they like working under the new changes."

So when the Grizzlies take the court against the Evansville Purple Aces next Friday night, they will have their work cut out for them. But what would basketball be without challenges.