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Cats-Grizzlies in must game

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CATS-GRIZZLIES IN MUST GAME

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MISSOULA--

A must win situation. You hear of it quite often in the sports world.

Here it is again.

"We must beat the Bobcats in Bozeman if we are to be in the chase for the Big Sky title," Coach Jud Heathcote said of the Montana Grizzlies battle with homestanding Montana State Friday night.

Heathcote is right.

It is being prophesized around the league that a 10-4 record will take all the marbles. It is also being said the way to compile a 10-4 league mark is to win three on the road and all seven home games.

The Grizzlies have seven home games remaining, but have garnered only one win in four road outings. Therefore, Montana must win two of the three remaining away games with Big Sky teams. A loss to the Bobcats would put the Grizzlies in the unenviable position of needing a sweep of their journey to Arizona and Utah to face Northern Arizona and Weber State Feb. 14 and 16.

Montana came out on the short end of both basketball battles with the Bobcats last year, losing 70-65 in Missoula and 53-52 in Bozeman. The previous season, Heathcote's first at UM, Montana won 75-66 in Missoula and lost 59-57 in Bozeman.

"They play good team basketball. They have shown consistent improvement during the season and they get maximum effort at all times from the group they have on the floor," Heathcote said of MSU.

"They have hard working personnel and in forward Willie Weeks and guard Kirk Rocheleau they have two explosive players who can score from just about anywhere in the gym," Heathcote commented.

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CATS-GRIZZLIES IN MUST GAME--2

Weeks is the leading scorer with a 17.1 average. The 6-5 senior is also hauling in seven rebounds each game. Rocheleau, a 6-1 freshman from Missoula, poured in 40 points against Gonzaga two weeks ago and has a 10.3 point average.

Friday's meeting will be the 196th in what is one of the nation's oldest basketball rivalries. MSU has a 114-81 edge in the series.

The Bobcats are 7-8 on the season after dropping a narrow 53-48 decision to Washington State last Friday night. MSU has a 2-2 Big Sky record.

The Grizzlies take an 8-7 season mark and a 1-3 Big Sky record into the 8 p.m. MDT game. The frosh squads of both schools meet in a 5:45 preliminary.

The Grizzlies took a successful break from Big Sky play last weekend with easy 79-68 and 88-49 victories over the College of Great Falls and the University of Puget Sound.

In the 11-point win over Great Falls, Heathcote shuffled his lineup constantly and 11 Grizzlies saw between 15 and 22 minutes of playing time.

"Since we had so many kids miss practice with colds and the flu during the week, we tried to keep everyone rested for Saturday night's game," Heathcote said.

Saturday night Heathcote allowed his regular playing group to spend a great deal of time on the floor. "We wanted to let them play together because of all the missed practice time. We played very well and should have some momentum for this weekend," Heathcote said.

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