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GRIZZLIES OPEN BIG SKY SEASON
AT NEVADA-RENO, N. ARIZONA

MISSOULA--

The "real" season begins this week for the University of Montana Grizzly basketball team, as they open the Big Sky Conference season on the road with Northern Arizona University Jan. 3 and University of Nevada-Reno Jan. 5.

NAU, a postseason playoff team last season, as was UM, is currently 8-3 and returns three starters off its 13-14 team of a year ago. (NAU was 8-6 in the conference.) Reno, in its first season in the Big Sky, has a 3-8 record. However, Reno's win-loss record has come from some of its opening-season foes, which included Kansas, Nevada-Las Vegas, Utah, Utah State and North Carolina State.

Coach Mike Montgomery's Montana team was 14-13 overall last year, and 7-7 in the conference, qualifying for the postseason playoffs for the second straight season in 1978-79. This year UM is 7-4, and has suffered three straight losses, after compiling a 7-1 record early in the year. The Grizzlies return three starters in Craig Zanon, Blaine Taylor and John Stroeder.

The Lumberjacks are led by 6-6 forward Mark Stevens, a second team all-conference pick last season. He is averaging more than 14 points and 9 rebounds a game this year. Guard Larry Johnson (6-1, Sr.) is the team's leading scorer, averaging 17 per game. Forward Wayne Wharton (6-5) is a returning starter along with Stevens and Johnson.

Reno's "main man" is Cal-Berkeley transfer Gene Ransom, a 5-9 senior point guard. He was an impressive player in the Pacific-8 for Cal, twice named all-league. He was selected by the Golden State Warriors in the 1979 National Basketball Association draft.

(over)

GRIZZLIES OPEN BIG SKY SEASON--add one

Other top Wolf Pack players are guard Bobby Fox (6-2) and forward Alvin Alexander (6-5). Reno has no returning starters off its 21-7 team of last season.

Montana's top player the last couple of weeks has been Zanon. The Grizzly co-captain scored 40 points, grabbed 12 rebounds and dished out 9 assists in the Nevada-Las Vegas hosted Rebel Roundup tournament last weekend. For his efforts he was named to the all-tourney team. He is the team's leading scorer, averaging 16.7 points a game. He scored 16 points in UM's 88-77 loss to visiting Long Beach State last Saturday. That loss snapped a 14-game home winning streak by UM.

Montana currently leads the Big Sky Conference in team scoring defense (65.5) and opponent field goal percentage (42.8). The Grizzlies hold the conference record in scoring defense (60.3, set last season), and have led the Big Sky the past 8 seasons in-a-row in that category.

NAU is the league's top rebounding team, averaging 47.6 per game.

Other team leaders for the Grizzlies are: Stroeder, top rebounder (7.3), Taylor, top assists man (4.0), free-throw percentage (.812) and steals (14). Zanon leads in field goal percentage (.490) and minutes played (32 per game).

The Grizzlies will leave for Flagstaff Wednesday afternoon, and will be staying at the Pony Soldier Inn. UM will lodge at the Holiday Inn while in Reno.

Montana will return home to host Idaho State University on Thursday, Jan. 10, and Weber State Saturday, Jan. 12. ISU is currently 4-6, while pre-season favorite Weber State is 11-1.

PROBABLE STARTERS

G-Blaine Taylor (6-1)	Larry Johnson (6-1)	Gene Ransom (5-9)
G-Craig Zanon (6-6)	Joedy Gardner (6-4)	Bobb Fox(6-2)
C-John Stroeder (6-10)	Mike Evans (6-9)	Earl Hill (6-9)
F-Rod Brandon (6-6)	Wayne Wharton (6-5)	Alvin Alexander (6-5)
F-Marty Green (6-9)	Mark Stevens (6-6)	Aaron Cusic (6-7½)
<u>COACHES:</u> Mike Montgomery	Joedy Gardner	Jim Carey
(21-17, 1½ years)	(80-70, 5½ years)	(29-24, 3½ years)