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College basketball: Undefeated Chaps pose quite a challenge for Wranglers

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Just one week ago, tonight's Western Junior College Athletic Conference game between Odessa College and Midland College would have been the marquee matchup in the nation.

The Wranglers were ranked No. 10 in the nation, while the Chaparrals continued to hold down the No. 1 spot in the rankings, as they have for most of the season.

Odessa College, however, has failed to keep up its end of the bargain.

So instead of looking at a matchup between two of the top teams not only in the country, the crowd at Midland College's Chaparral Center will see one team hitting on all cylinders and another looking to get back in tune.

The tipoff is scheduled for 7:45 p.m.

"Midland College is a good team and they have been playing very good," Wranglers sophomore Josh Brown said. "We can't play the way we have been."

That's because over the course of four games, Odessa College hasn't been playing very well at all.

After opening WJCAC play with a pair of victories, the Wranglers have lost three of their last four games

— at Frank Phillips, at New Mexico Junior College and at home against Howard College on Thursday.

Averaging nearly 85 points a game heading into the contest against New Mexico Junior College in Hobbs, N.M., Odessa College has combined to score just 98 in its past two losses.

Against the Thunderbirds, Odessa College had more turnovers (17) than points (16) in the first half.

“We didn’t take care of the ball against New Mexico and we didn’t do a very good job against Howard College,” Wranglers coach Dennis Helms said. “We are going to have to do a much better job.”

That’s because the Chaparrals (22-0 overall, 6-0 WJCAC) have broken the 100-point barrier six times this season, most recently last week against New Mexico Military Institute (105-67), and defeated Western Texas College on Thursday to remain unbeaten.

First-year head coach Ross Hodge has Midland College playing to a high level, and that doesn’t bode well for the Wranglers (18-4, 3-3), who dropped both contests last season (66-56 and 61-43) and have not defeated the Chaparrals since Jan. 21, 2008, at the OC Sports Center.

Brown, who leads Odessa College in scoring at 17 points per game, is hoping to help end that streak, though he played limited minutes in the loss to Howard College after injuring his back against New Mexico Junior College.

“It’s going to be exciting because both teams want to win for bragging rights,” Brown said. “We need to go 100 percent in order to compete with Midland because they are the top team in the country and they want to protect that ranking.”

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