

From Egypt to the Big Dance

Amin enjoys trek with Oregon to participate in the NCAA tourney

By **TERESA M. WALKER**
Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Ehab Amin believes his unusual journey to the NCAA Tournament that has taken him from his home in Egypt to Wisconsin, Texas and now Oregon has been worth every second.

The guard chose basketball over soccer for the chance to play some day in the tournament. He is fully embracing the moment.

“And it finally happened,” Amin said Wednesday. “It happened my senior year.”

Actually, Amin made his NCAA Tournament debut in his fifth college season and has helped No. 12 seed Oregon (25-12) reach the Sweet 16 in his lone year with the Ducks.

It has been an unusual trek.

Amin’s parents put him in every sport as a child including swimming, handball, volleyball, basketball and soccer. He stuck with basketball, playing with clubs and three years with the Egyptian National Team. Amin was named the best shooter under 16 in Africa in 2011 when he also was MVP of the under-16 African championship in 2011 and again in 2012 for under-16.

With long-distance interest from Texas A&M Corpus Christi, Amin decided it was time to see if he could be better and headed to the United States.

First, he arrived in Wisconsin to spend his senior year of high school at St. John’s Military Academy to work on his grades and prepare for college. An injury kept him from playing that season. Living between Madison and Milwaukee in a frigid winter with no other Egyptians and a heavy accent didn’t ease any of Amin’s culture shock.

His parents had a simple message for him: Stick it out.

“I mean, it was all for basketball, and I knew that was why I was here,” Amin said.

He transferred to Oregon after graduating from Texas A&M Corpus Christi and went from starter over the first seven games to providing energy off the bench.

Amin played a pivotal role in the Ducks’ 73-54 win over UC Irvine to advance to Thursday night’s South Region semifinal against top-seeded Virginia (31-3) in Louisville. He scored 12 points by knocking down four 3-pointers, grabbed six rebounds, handed out two assists and made three steals.

“We were really struggling against California-Irvine, and he came in and hit a big shot,” Oregon coach Dana Altman said. “But



Oregon guard Ehab Amin (4) celebrates after scoring against UC Irvine during the first half of a second-round game Sunday in San Jose, Calif.

defensively (he) really got us going again. So his energy off the bench, defensively has been really good. He’s been real active on the boards. But he’s really a good leader defensively and he’s been making some big shots for us.”

He also made an impact in Corpus Christi, which with the heat at least reminded Amin of his home in Alexandria, Egypt.

But the Islanders helped him become more familiar with the shot clock, balls, style of play. Amin set the Southland Conference record in 2016-17 with 124 steals when he led the nation with 3.4 steals per game, then spent last season sidelined by an injury.

Altman came calling, looking for help to replenish his roster. Amin decided to head to Eugene after an opportunity at Nevada fell through. Again, he found himself in an area with few, if any, Egyptians aside from himself.

“It’s been really different and tough for me,” Amin said. “But I think everywhere I go my teammates do a good job of like blending me in, especially like here my roommates Payton (Pritchard) and Paul (White) and Will Johnson. I spent most of my time with them.”

Pritchard’s puppy helped break the ice between the new roommates, making a mess in Amin’s room.

No. 1 Virginia seeks easier path in Sweet 16

By **GARY B. GRAVES**
Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Top-seeded Virginia has already gone two games further than last year’s NCAA Tournament.

Now in the Sweet 16, the Cavaliers aim to be more assertive against No. 12 seed Oregon.

The Cavaliers hope that playing in a venue they’ve thrived in helps that quest in Thursday night’s South Regional semifinal.

Virginia (31-3) has won its past four visits to the KFC Yum! Center, home floor of fellow Atlantic Coast Conference member Louisville. The Cavaliers have overcome double-digit deficits in the past two wins, including last month’s 64-52 victory over the Cardinals.

Sophomore guard De’Andre Hunter has been the star in both games, scoring 26 points a year after banking in a game-winning 3-pointer against Louisville.

Virginia’s next challenge in stopping the surging Ducks (23-12) who have won 10 in a row by an average of 18 points. That run includes routs of Wisconsin and UC Irvine in the NCAAs.

Having four 6-foot-9 starters has helped, though Oregon coach Dana Altman partly credits the turnaround to having everyone again after a rash of injuries.

“Everybody has injuries,” Altman said. “But the guys have stepped up. Our communication’s been a lot better here lately. Guys have taken a lot



Oregon head coach Dana Altman watches during practice for the NCAA men’s college basketball tournament Wednesday in Louisville, Ky.

more pride in doing a good job with the scouting report and with their defense. Hopefully, we can keep that up.”

The winner advances to the Elite Eight against the winner between No. 2 Tennessee (31-5) and No. 3 Purdue (25-9).

ON THE BRINK: An Oregon victory would push Altman past Ernie Kent as the program’s winningest coach. Each has 235 wins with the ninth-year coach averaging 26 per season.

SERIES RECORDS: Virginia is 2-0 all-time against Oregon. Tennessee and Purdue have split four meetings.

Curry scores season-high 20 as Blazers rout Bulls on the road

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Seth Curry scored a season-high 20 points and the Portland Trail Blazers beat the Chicago Bulls 118-98 on Wednesday night.

Still shaken by Jusuf Nurkic’s gruesome leg injury two nights earlier in a double-overtime victory over Brooklyn that secured their sixth straight playoff appearance, the Blazers made it look easy against a short-handed team.

Curry made four 3-pointers, Rodney Hood added 15 points, and Enes Kanter and Zach Collins each had 13. Portland won its fifth in a row even though Damian Lillard scored a season-low 11.

Chicago’s Shaquille Harrison set career highs with 21 points and 10 rebounds.

NBA



Blazers
118



Bulls
98

Robin Lopez had 15 points and nine rebounds. But with mostly reserves in the lineup, the Bulls lost for the eighth time in 10 games.

Lauri Markkanen sat out after remaining overnight in Toronto because of what the team called “extreme fatigue.”

He was evaluated in the trainer’s room and underwent more tests at a hospital after exiting the Bulls’ loss to the Raptors.

Markkanen was examined again after returning

to Chicago on Wednesday. He joined leading scorer Zach LaVine (bruised right thigh, right knee tendinitis), Otto Porter Jr. (strained right rotator cuff) and Kris Dunn (back) on a lengthy list of unavailable Bulls players. And that doesn’t include Wendell Carter Jr., Chandler Hutchison and Denzel Valentine, who have season-ending injuries.

Third in the Western Conference behind Golden State and Denver, the Trail Blazers led 27-14 after the first quarter. They went on a 13-3 run to turn a 12-9 lead into a 25-12 advantage, with Hood capping it with a 16-footer and 3-pointer.

It was the lowest-scoring first quarter for the Bulls, and things didn’t get better after that.

Curry and Kanter made

3s for Portland in an 8-0 run to start the second quarter, and the Blazers took a 59-41 lead to the locker room.

TIP-INS

Trail Blazers: Coach Terry Stotts said Jusuf Nurkic was hoping to head home Wednesday or Thursday. ... The Trail Blazers held Phoenix to nine points in the first quarter on Dec. 6.

Bulls: Coach Jim Boylen said Markkanen was in his office at 2 p.m. and wanted to play against Portland. ... The Bulls’ previous low for points in the first quarter was 16 against Orlando on Jan. 2. Their low for any quarter was seven against Houston on Nov. 3.

UP NEXT

Trail Blazers: At Atlanta on Friday night.

Bulls: Host Toronto on Saturday night.



Portland Trail Blazers forward Jake Layman, right, blocks a shot by Chicago Bulls guard Antonio Blakeney during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday in Chicago.