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UT Athletics

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COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Rockets' Kent steps up play Getting up to speed on offense

By **DAVE HACKENBERG**
BLADE SPORTS WRITER

In a recent interview, Anthony Longstreet, Tyrone Kent's high school coach in Chicago, predicted that "when the light comes on, Ty is going to do some tremendous things at the University of Toledo."

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Rockets coach Stan Joplin figures he saw the first flicker of that light Saturday when UT beat North Carolina-Wilmington 77-74.

UT returns to Savage Hall tonight at 7 for a game against the University of Detroit and Kent will try to build on his 16-point, seven-rebound performance against Wilmington.

"Hopefully, this was Ty's break-out game on offense," Joplin said afterward. "In all the games we played on the road Ty defended and rebounded pretty well, but this was his best game offensively."

Kent scored in double figures for the first time this season and for the fourth time in his two years at UT.

The 16 points matched his career high set last season against Ball State and the seven rebounds represented his career best.

The 6-foot-5 sophomore guard opened the game with a dunk off an alley-oop pass from Kashif Payne and later added first-half dunks in transition after steals and assists by Justin Ingram and Jonathan Amos. Kent also notched six points after offensive rebounds.

"Coach Joplin always preaches intensity and I think that showed in our defense and rebounding," Kent said. "That's how we have to play. We have to commit to those things first and the offense will build off of them and be there." Kent's double-figure scoring outburst against Wilmington matched leading scorer Keonta Howell, Ingram and Florentino Valencia, who have been UT's top producers throughout the season.

"I think Tyrone may have been deferring to Justin, Keonta and Tino on offense a little too much," Joplin said. "He showed what he can do when he's more aggressive."

Kent was 7-of-7 on two-point field goal attempts and 0-of-4 from 3-point range, but Joplin said the latter could become one of his strengths.

"Teams are going to find out Ty can hit the 3-point shot," Joplin said. "Wilmington was leaving him wide open and he finally took a few. He's got a great looking shot and when he relaxes he'll start making them."

UT takes a 3-5 record into tonight's game against Detroit (2-7). Last season, a 65-63 loss to UD at Calihan Hall in Detroit was the only blemish in an 11-game stretch that fueled the Rockets' run to the Mid-American Conference tournament championship game. Brandon Cotton, a senior guard, leads the Titans with a 15.9-point scoring average while senior center Ryvon Covile adds 14.9 points and 11.3 rebounds per game.

CENTER COMMITS: Justin Anyijong, a 6-foot-9 center from East Grand Rapids (Mich.) High School, will be the sixth member of UT's 2007-08 freshman basketball class, according to published reports. The Grand Rapids Press quoted Anyijong as saying he had made a verbal commitment to join the Rockets.

He averaged 15 points, 10 rebounds and four blocked shots per game last season as East Grand Rapids finished runner-up in the Class B state tournament.

"It is just a good place for me," Anyijong told the Grand Rapids Press. "The coach at Toledo has been great and I am really excited about this opportunity. I feel like he can make me better."

East Grand Rapids coach Ed Crisman said: "Justin is our inside game and he is just a super kid. He just keeps getting better and better."

Because Anyijong did not commit during the early signing period, he can't sign with UT until after the conclusion of the current season. NCAA rules do not allow Joplin to comment on a recruit until he has signed a letter of intent.

Contact Dave Hackenberg at: dhack@theblade.com or 419-724-6398

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