



Low Riders Larry Craig (top) and Loren Cushing go through strength and shooting drills during preparation for their upcoming games against the Rolling Rebels from Portland next weekend.

Low Riders roll to wins

Basketball on wheels provides competition

Four basketball players zip down the floor. A fifth dribbles the ball, bringing it down slowly, looking for an open man.

Five defenders mill around, setting up a zone defense, waiting for a pass and chance at an interception.

Finally, a pass sets things in motion. The ball travels right, then back to the point, then right again. A player snatches the ball, drives to the basket and shoots.

Two points are added to the scoreboard.

This basketball game, played by the Lane County Low Riders, varies little from any other basketball game — except for the wheelchairs.

The Low Riders were founded in 1977 as the Eugene Kamikazes.

Wheelchair basketball has the distinction of being the only organized team sport for handicapped athletes, says Chester Faller, point guard for the Low Riders and director of ALERT, a University organization for the handicapped.

"We view it as football for the disabled."

The Low Riders are 10-1 so far this season, but "are probably in a comparable position to the (Oregon) women's basketball team last year," Faller says. "We deserve to be ranked, but the rest of the league is weak."

While no national statistics are kept for wheelchair basketball, the shooting percentage is only slightly lower than that for college teams, says Bob Crandall, a member of the Low Riders. In their last two games, both against the Puget Sound team, the Low Riders averaged 48 percent and 53 percent from the floor, shooting 22-46 and 17-32.

From the line the Low Riders shot 7-22 and 6-17, 32 percent and 35 percent. Free throw per-

centage is less than the college teams for two reasons, Crandall says. "We're considerably lower, close to four feet further from the basket, and we don't have any leg push off."

"Any line shot is basically a standing set shot, but we have some momentum on floor shots."

High scorer for the Lane County team is Gerry Fleming, with over 11 points a game, Faller says. Other top scorers and rebounders include Loren Cushing and Roger Anderson, who wheeled to a first-place finish in his division in the Nike marathon.

"In our last two games we only took one shot outside of 10 feet," Faller says. "It's a matter of team work and getting the ball inside."

There is a good chance the team will make it to regionals, says Low Rider coach John Smith. "We hope our percentages will be enough to take us through the league to regionals and maybe sectionals."

"We're not shooting for nationals, yet," Crandall says.

But that possibility remains strong Faller says. "This team has the potential to make it."

The National Wheelchair Basketball Association, which instituted the first national wheelchair championships in 1947, only one year after the NBA, boasts 138 teams in 25 conferences, including the Oregon-Washington conference, Faller says. "The league provides college and pro ball activity all together."

There is little difference, rule wise, between wheelchair bas-

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