

Cougars claw their way into NWAACC

John Thorburn
Assistant Sports Editor

The women's basketball team is headed to Skagit Valley for the Northwest Athletic Association of Community College's Championships.

After an electrifying 84-79 overtime victory over Chemeketa Thursday, the Cougars assured themselves a cede in this week's NWAACC tournament held at Skagit Valley Community College in Mt. Vernon, Wash..

A packed gymnasium of rowdy fans was the setting as Clackamas took the floor in Salem last week to face the Chiefs in hopes of capturing the tournament berth. As both teams went through drills during their pre-game shootaround, tension began to rise in their third meeting of the year. The Cougars won the opening tip-off but failed to convert on two lay-ups, so Chemeketa quickly stormed down the court for the score. Clackamas quickly fell behind 15-5 in the opening minutes and soon faced a 15-point deficit as the first half progressed.

At times, the Chiefs seemed to have the game well in hand. The Cougars could not seem to manage any consistency on offense. Small momentum shifts in the game, however, allowed Clackamas to keep the game close and only face a 37-26 score at half-time.

"There were all kinds of momentum shifts," said Head Coach Karen Twain. "Anything could have happened."

In the second half, the fired-up Cougars took the game to the Chiefs as Clackamas jumped out quickly to cut the Chemeketa lead to four.

"We wanted to attack them in the first five minutes of the half, and we did that," said Twain. "We cut the lead immediately. We knew if we could just hang around until the end, something good was going to happen."

Lauren Mohan guided the Clackamas offense to within two points with 16 seconds left in regulation and went to the free throw line shooting two shots. Mohan's first shot hit the rim and fell out, but her second shot found the hole to cut the Chemeketa lead

to one point.

"I had total confidence that Lauren was going to go in and knock down both of her shots," said Twain. "She missed that one and that was too bad but that wasn't the game-deciding factor. We missed some easy shots early on, so it wasn't just one play. It was one of those shots that rimmed out. It wasn't like 'Ooh, ah, she bricked because she was nervous', it was a nice shot."

Immediately after the shot, the Cougars fouled the Chiefs to preserve time on the clock which sent Chemeketa star Kelly Johnston to the foul line. Johnston made her first free throw to increase the lead to two points once again, but missed her second shot.

Melissa Hollenbeck raced down the sideline to the basket but her shot was partially blocked, stopping the clock with eight seconds remaining. On the Chemeketa in-bound pass Johnston was fouled once again. This appeared to seal the fate of the Cougars and secure a Chiefs victory.

"I think all of us had thought that Kelly Johnston was going to make that free throw," said Twain. "She didn't. I had coached it like she was going to make it and I think he [Chemeketa Head Coach Dennis Melcher] had too. We were going to look for a three-pointer and I think they had set up to defend against that."

When Johnston missed the game-clinching shot with six seconds remaining, Mohan quickly scooped up the rebound and took the ball down the floor to weave in between the Chiefs defenders to knot the game at 69-69 as regulation expired.

"I don't think anybody was expecting that," said Twain. "Not even me. That wasn't a diagrammed play. That was Lauren with her head up. You can say that she missed that free throw but, hey, that kid, she practically won the game for us."

Coach Twain went on to praise Mohan.

"She had an outstanding game for us," said Twain. "She found people on the floor that I couldn't believe. She found Clair. She found people on the fast break. She made good decisions on when to pull it out top. She just found the open person a lot."

The Cougars seemed to feed off of the momentum and went on to take their first lead of the game in overtime. Michelle McKinney clinched the win for Clackamas, sinking two free throws in the closing seconds to win 84-79.

All five starters scored in double figures. Clair Cox led the

team with 20 points.

"Clair's an ice player," said Twain. "She's just totally clutch. You can tell a lot about girls who come to play when the chips are down. Clair's that type of player. She played like that for us last year and she played that role for us this year. She has a laid-back attitude towards life and a lot of people like to say 'hmm'. But she showed up last night and she proved it."

On the defensive side of the ball, Lisa Sorenson shut down the hot-handed Johnston.

"Lisa's defense has been questioned at times," said Twain. "And that's too bad because she plays good defense. Lisa's a scorer, that's what she's known for. She put individual stats aside and just went out there and played the best defense she could against Kelly. She forced her to take some bad shots at the end. That was definitely a key to the win."

Robbie Nix contained the Chiefs star player Wendy Olsen but eventually found herself in foul trouble. Shara Bormuth came off the bench to cover the 6'1" Olsen.

"Shara probably played the best defense on Olsen out of all the posts," said Twain. "No holds barred, she didn't care. She just got in her face. She wasn't worried about getting a foul or whatever, she just gets after it. To have her come off the bench and play like that was a big elevation for us."

Nix fouled out in overtime but, soon after, Olsen found herself out of the game as well.

"I think they kind of fell apart after she fouled out," said Twain. "It was like, 'There goes our player,' and then they made mistakes in the end. It was exciting for us because we had worked so hard to try and get her fouled out. That gave us a little swing of momentum for sure, and we breathed a little easier. I think they got a lot more worried more than anything."

The team as a whole, however, made the win possible.



Photo by John Thorburn

A smothering Clackamas defense in the second half forced the Chiefs into poor shooting and led to the overtime win on Thursday.

"Every single person made a contribution during the game," said Twain. "Even those players that didn't get into the game, they were so noisy, so into it, that it made everyone else on the court or off it into the game too."

The Cougars fell to the Umpqua Timberwomen on Saturday, 92-77, in a game that decided ceding into the tournament.

"We're in NWAACC now. Win or lose, no one can take that away from us. The girls are really excited. This group deserves it more than any team I've been around. I mean they're just great people. They get along with each other and are just a real class act. Going to this tournament, you're going to be facing the top eight teams in the Northwest, so it's always competitive. There's not a weak team up there. Nobody can just sit back and think it's a breeze. This is anybody's tour-

namment", noted Twain.

Coach Twain also commented of her first appearance in the NWAACC tournament last March.

"Last year, it was my first time as the coach and I didn't really know what to expect," said Twain. "Now I know what to expect, and we'll be more ready. We were also ranked number one last year so teams were looking to knock us off. This year we're going in as a bit of an underdog and we're ranked seventh. And we just beat the number two team in Chemeketa, so I won't think teams will be aiming for us. But either way, we know what it takes."

Clackamas will open the tournament against host Skagit Valley in what will most likely be a packed gym of home-team supporters tomorrow night. Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Wrestlers place in nationals

Glenn Garrison
wins national
championship

Brendon Neal
Sports Editor

The wrestling team placed seventh in the nationals.

Three Cougars placed in the top ten at the tournament and now are All-American.

"This tournament was a coach's dream," said Assistant Coach Lloyd Martindale.

Glenn Garrison won the 142-pound division. Garrison had struggled some during the regular season.

"Glenn had the tournament of his life. He wrestled to the po-

tential we knew he had," said Martindale.

Garrison also was awarded the title of "Outstanding Wrestler of the Tournament." A wrestler, usually one of the champions, is chosen by the coaches for the honor.

"This is the first time in at least five or six years a Clackamas wrestler has received an 'Outstanding Wrestler of the Tournament'," said Lloyd Martindale.

Tyler Bransford (128 pounds) placed seventh. Bransford lost in a close match that went down to not being able to make an escape in the third round. The wrestler he finally lost to went on to place second in the tournament.

"Tyler beat handily a guy who he lost to in overtime twice in

tournaments [earlier this season]," said Lloyd Martindale.

Damion Martindale was runner up in the heavy weight class. Damion Martindale beat several wrestlers he had lost to before.

"Damion pinned a guy in the semis that he lost to in overtime before," said Lloyd Martindale.

Lonnie Eggert was injured in the medal round to a wrestler he had beaten previously and was unable to finish the tournament. Eggert was headbutted and had a tooth knocked loose. Eggert won his division in the Region 18 championships at Clackamas last month.

Clackamas, as a team, placed seventh in the tournament. The Cougars were coming off a fifth place finish in the regionals.



Photo by John Thorburn

Clair Cox led an inspired Cougar offense with 20 points against the Chiefs.