

Cougars inch closer to division title

With only two games remaining, Clackamas could win the Southern Division title this week

JOHN THORBURN
Sports Editor

The women's basketball team moved two steps closer to winning the Southern Division title this week.

With recent wins over Portland and Linn-Benton Community College, the Cougars hold a one game lead over second-place Chemeketa and Umpqua.

On Saturday, the sophomores played in their final home game of the regular season, winning easily, 89-58 over the visiting Roadrunners [0-12, 3-20] of Linn-Benton.

Clackamas [10-2, 20-5] exploded early and jumped out to a 13-0 lead behind excellent defense.

"I was really pleased with the defensive pressure we put on Linn-Benton," said Head Coach Karen Twain. "We came out strong again and had a good first half."

Sophomore Robbie Nix entertained her remarkably large fan following with 18 points, nine rebounds and two blocks while freshman Nichole Hayden had one of her best games of the year with an 18-point performance and seven rebounds. Hayden also had two blocks and one steal.

Sophomores Denise Bean and Lauren Mohan also turned in excellent performances. Bean collected 15 points and three steals while Mohan had eight assists and two steals.

On Wednesday, Clackamas took on the Panthers [4-8, 7-18] at Portland Community College.

The Cougars, hoping to avenge an earlier 63-62 upset loss to the Panthers, came into the game fired up and never trailed throughout the contest.

Clackamas outlasted Portland, 65-55, in a game that saw momentum shift back and forth from team to team.

"Portland is a good team," noted Twain. "There were a lot of swings in that game, but we still kept our head up and scored when we needed to and made some defensive stops when we needed to."

Nix and Hayden both had stellar performances in the victory. Nix had 15 points while Hayden had 12 points and 14 rebounds. Sophomore Michelle McKinney had 11 points and nine rebounds while Freshman Melinda Freeman collected eight points. Mohan had eight assists.

With the wins over Portland and Linn-Benton, Clackamas is now in a position to clinch their second Southern Division title with victories in their two remaining games.

Clackamas last won the title two years ago when they were co-champions along with Chemeketa Community College.

With playoffs quickly approaching, the Cougars are playing the best basketball of the season.

"This is a good time for things to come together for us," said Twain. "A lot of teams peak early in the season and what I feel is that we've started to peak but we're still getting better. We haven't stopped."

"We know that the tournament is coming up," added Twain. "We're grabbing some momentum as we get into it and our goal has been the same since the beginning of the season which is to finish first. We're still taking things one day at a time but we realize that if we win these next two games then we're in."



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Sophomore guard Lauren Mohan is fifth in assists in the NWAACC, averaging eight per game.

The champions of the four regions in the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges [NWAACC] earn an automatic berth into the championship tournament.

"We're really shooting for first place," noted Twain, "because then we know that we're in the tournament for sure. It takes a lot of pressure off us during playoffs."

The Cougars face off against Mt. Hood Community College tonight in Gresham.

Clackamas last faced the Saints [6-6, 11-13] on Jan. 28. The Cougars shut down Mt. Hood's star point guard Kelli Hedlund in a 79-75 win.

"They have a really athletic team and as I've said in the past, they match up very well against us," said Coach Twain.

"The first game we were really focused on stopping Hedlund and of course that will be big again for this game, but, there's a lot more to them now than just Hedlund. They're a much better team than before."

Since the Cougars' first meeting with the Saints, Mt. Hood has dropped two games and is struggling to hold onto the fourth and final playoff spot.

"Mt. Hood is really in a must-win situation as well," added Twain.

"They really need to win to make the playoffs so we know that this is going to be a battle."

The Saints are currently in a tie for fourth place along with Lane Community College.

The Titans [6-6, 14-11] have come on strong in the second half of the season and stand as a big threat for the Cougars, their final opponent of the regular season.

"Our last two games are against Mt. Hood and Lane at their places so they're are not going to be easy," said Twain. "That's okay though because we need two big games to get ready for NWAACC's and the playoffs."

"With Lane, I think we have better talent than they do but apparently they're running some new things down there that a lot of people haven't seen and are pretty difficult to defend."

"We may mix up some things against them. Our bread and butter has been our man-defense and we've been playing great defense lately. Apparently they've got some pretty good offense to combat it so might try some different things against them. They've really come on strong since the beginning of the season but either way we'll be ready from a



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Sophomore post Robbie Nix attempts two of her 18 points in the Cougars' 89-58 victory over Linn-Benton on Saturday. Nix finished the game with nine rebounds and two blocks as well. The Cougars [10-2, 20-5] travel to Gresham to take on the Mt. Hood Saints tonight.

coaching perspective to play them.

"With a win on Wednesday, things would be down to that last game where we just have to win it so I think our girls will be fired up to play."

Mid-way through the schedule, Clackamas was ranked sixth in the northwest behind Southern Division teams second-ranked Umpqua [9-3, 23-3] and fifth-ranked Chemeketa [9-3, 20-7].

Since the rankings, the Cougars have pulled away from their rivals to the south and have begun to earn respect throughout the NWAACC.

"I've had a number of coaches outside of our region call me just to say 'Congratulations' and 'We didn't expect that' and clearly in the rankings that's been the case," noted Twain. "But there are some tough teams from other regions this year. If and when we do make it to NWAACCs, there's going to be eight teams that are just awesome. "Right now we're just focused on one game at a time," added Twain. "Once we do get there, of course, it's going to be 'win it all.'"

If Clackamas wins their final two games of the regular season, the Cougars would face the fourth place team on Thursday, Feb. 26 at home.

“Right now we're focused on one game at a time. Once we get there, it's going to be a 'win it all.'”

Karen Twain
Head Coach
-on the Cougars' chances of clinching an NWAACC tournament berth