

Clackamas captures division title

Sixth straight victory earns Cougars NWAACC tournament berth, respect

JOHN THORBURN
Sports Editor

It's official.

The Cougars are the best team in Oregon.

Any arguments were laid to rest Saturday, as second-ranked Clackamas dominated Lane Community College, 87-55, in a game that clinched the Southern Division title.

The division, part of the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges [NWAACC], is comprised of all of the Oregon community colleges in the league. Clackamas defeated all of those schools throughout the season.

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Karen Twain
Head Coach

Against Lane, the Cougars [12-2, 21-5] flexed their muscles a bit with three players scoring in double figures.

"The girls really went after it in that game," said Head Coach Karen Twain. "We played a complete game from top to bottom. Everybody played extremely well for us in that game. All of the players had at least 10 minutes of playing time which will help us in the playoffs. We've talked about it before about how our rebounding and defense is crucial and it just came together on Saturday."

Sophomores Robbie Nix, Denise Bean and Michelle McKinney paved the way in the victory. Nix led all scorers with 27 points and eight rebounds, Bean added 17 points while McKinney collected 13 points and eight rebounds.

"The girls knew what was at stake and they just went out and got the job done," noted Twain. "This was a huge emotional win for us heading into the playoffs. We need that momentum."

Lane was vying for the final playoff spot along with Mt. Hood Community College. With the loss, com-

bined with Mt. Hood's victory over Southwestern Oregon, the Titans [6-8, 14-13] close out their season.

On Wednesday, Clackamas faced Mt. Hood [7-7, 12-14] in a showdown of two of the best teams in the division.

In a game that was, to say the least, a little physical, the Cougars outlasted the Saints 65-51 amidst poor shooting and sloppy passing.

"The momentum wavered up and down in that game," said Twain. "It was pretty evident that we were tired but the girls knew what was at stake and they gutted it out. We got pretty banged up in that game. We came home with an ankle, knee and hand injury but we'll be fine."

"We really stuck it to them for the first five minutes of the second half," added Twain. "Robbie [Nix] had some key baskets and Lauren [Mohan] did a great job breaking the press. We didn't play tremendous but we did what we needed to do."

Clackamas was led by freshman Melinda Freeman's 15 points and eight rebounds. Nix added 13, Bean recorded 11 with eight rebounds while McKinney scored 11.

The win dropped the Saints to 6-7 in league, three games behind third place Chemeketa.

The Cougars will face the Saints for the third time this year tomorrow night in the first of two playoff games.

A Clackamas win would guarantee home court advantage for Saturday's matchup against the winner of the Chemeketa-Umpqua game. The winner of Saturday's contest would enter the NWAACC tournament as the #1 seed while the loser would go as #2.

A Clackamas loss on Thursday would give the Cougars the #2 seed and Mt. Hood would play the winner of the other playoff game to decide the top seed from the Southern Region.

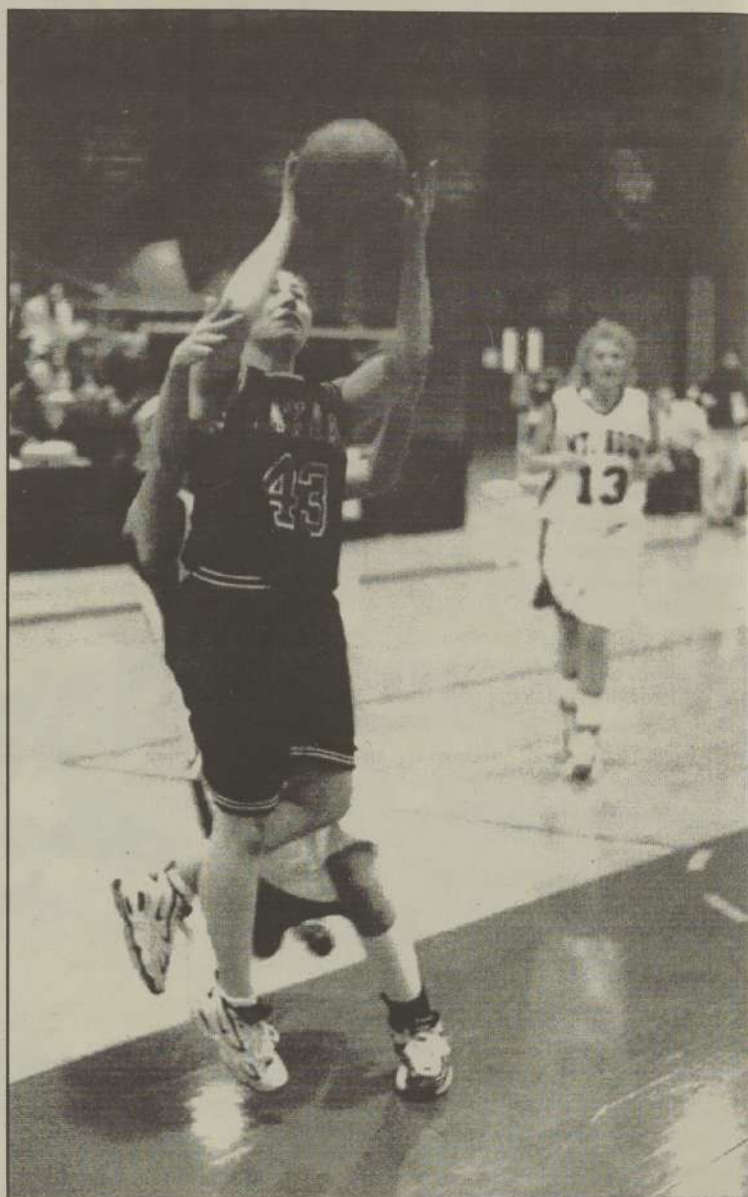
Coach Twain doesn't expect a loss.

"It's really important that we get a win," said Coach Twain. "We will end up playing somebody from the East. Our [Southern Division's] #1 will play their [Eastern Division's] #2 and vice versa so it makes it a lot tougher if we don't get that win."

The Cougars defeated the Saints in both regular season victories.

With the guaranteed tournament spot, Clackamas prepares to face the best teams in the northwest.

"The teams [in the tourna-



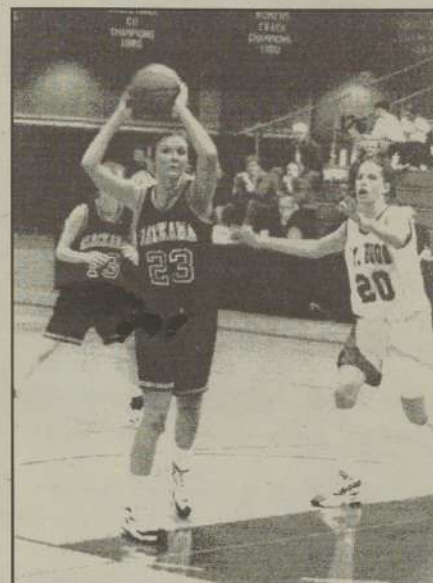
Freshman Melinda Freeman is held from behind by a Mt. Hood player in the Cougars' 65-51 win last Wednesday.

JOHN THORBURN / Clackamas Print



Coach Twain, in her fifth year at Clackamas, has engineered two division champions and a second place finish at last year's NWAACC tournament. She will guide her team against the Mt. Hood Saints tomorrow night in a regional playoff matchup at home.

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Sophomore Michelle McKinney has been a key player in the Cougars' run for their second Southern Division title in three years.

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NWAACC/Horizon Air FINAL 1998 TOP 8 COACHES POLL WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

SCHOOL	WL	VOTES	PVS
1. Skagit Valley	27-0	88 (8)	1
2. Clackamas	21-5	62	6
3. Lower Columbia	24-4	50 (1)	3
4. Umpqua	25-3	36	2
5. Wenatchee Valley	24-3	34	7
6. Chemeketa	21-8	11	5
7. Olympic	22-6	4	8
8. Spokane	21-7	1	4

Rankings and records as of Feb. 22



Women's Southern Division Standings

School	League	Season
Clackamas	12-2	22-5
Umpqua	11-3	25-3
Chemeketa	10-4	21-8
Mt. Hood	7-7	12-14
Lane	6-8	14-13
Portland	5-9	8-19
SW Oregon	5-9	14-14
Linn-Benton	0-14	3-22