

The Road to the Cup

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Contributing Writer

The Portland Winter Hawks are on more than one mission in this '98 postseason.

They are not only out to win the league and advance to the Memorial Cup tournament, they are out to prove that they are worthy of their #1 ranking in all of junior hockey.

They are talented, determined, focused, and just two wins away from the Memorial Cup having defeated the 6th place Seattle Thunderbirds in 5 games and earning a second round bye, due to their regular season championship.

The Hawks were rested and eager to meet the Spokane Chiefs who many felt would be the Hawks strongest competition in the post-season. The Hawks would take a two-week break into the series while the Chiefs had won two hard-fought series with the Kelowna Rockets and Prince George Cougars and would come in with just two days rest.

The two teams would not disappoint. Fighting through nagging injuries, hard-fought games, and unbelievable goaltending the teams would take the series to an emotional game 7 in Portland. The teams never said die with the Hawks scoring the eventual game and series winner with 15 minutes left in game 7.

Brent Belecki was stellar in goal and held the swarming Chiefs off in the final minute of play to help the Hawks become the Western Division Champions and advance to the WHL finals.

Despite the thrilling game 7 win the Hawks were already preparing to meet the Eastern Division Champions Brandon Wheat Kings.

Despite the Hawks season-long number one ranking, many believed the bigger, stronger, Wheat Kings would be quite a challenge for the finesse-oriented Hawks.

The Hawks would once again make non-believers believers with a convincing 7-3 win in game 1 and a 5-1 thrashing in game 2.

The Hawks are currently taking a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series on the road and will play game 3 tonight, the first of three games in Brandon.

Should the Hawks win the series they will be bringing home the president's trophy for the first time since 1982.

If Brandon is able to regroup, games 6 and 7 will be next Tuesday and Wednesday in Portland.

The Hawks season-long goal, the Memorial Cup, will take place May 9-17 in Spokane and will feature the three best teams in junior hockey with representatives from the WHL, Ontario league, and Quebec league along with the host team, Spokane Chiefs. The tournament will be a week-long round-robin to determine who will become the 1998 champions.

The Hawks believe this is their year, you can listen to tonight's Game 3 on 970 AM and follow the Hawks Road to the Cup at www.winterhawks.com.



JOHN THORBURN / Clackamas Print

Sophomore Dani Soldani gets a sign from Clackamas Head Coach Denise Nasuta. Both Soldani and Nasuta haven't enjoyed the same success that they did last year but are in a position to make a run for the playoffs in the next two weeks.

Cougars defeat #1 Red Devils, stumble against Trailblazers

JOHN THORBURN
Sports Editor

The softball team looked good on Friday. They didn't on Saturday.

Things have gone that way all season for the three-time defending Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges [NWAACC] champions.

"I've been saying it all year," said Clackamas Head Coach Denise Nasuta. "Inconsistency is kind of becoming our theme this spring."

The frustrated coach watched her team explode for nine runs against first place Lower Columbia in game one of a double-header.

The Red Devils of the southern Washington school were the only team to have swept the Cougars [7-9, 14-11] going into Friday's contests.

With rain threatening, Kelley Comstock pitched a five-hitter against a powerful team.

"Kelley had a great game," noted Nasuta. "Lower Columbia is a tough squad and she did a really good job."

"We scored runs in almost every inning. We did well because everybody on the team contributed. It wasn't just the three or four players that we've been used to this season."

Freshmen batters led the way for the Cougars.

Cecily Burton was 4-4 with two doubles and two runs batted in. Billie Williams was 2-4 with two runs batted in, one homerun and one double while Marissa Smith was 1-3 with a homerun, one run batted in and two runs scored.

In game two, Cortney DuPree started the game strong as the Cougars jumped out to a 3-0 lead.

DuPree was then chased from the game in the fifth inning after giving up three runs and Megan Smythe replaced her.

In the sixth, the Devils scored two more runs to make the score 5-3.

In the seventh, Clackamas threatened but could only manage one run and lost 5-4.

Williams was 2-4, Burton was 2-3 while freshman Lisa Cullison was 2-4 at the plate.

"This was a good day for us," noted Coach Nasuta. "We played hard all day and played with intensity. In the second game we just came up a little short in runs but I was very pleased. It was the first time we played as to our potential since spring break."

On Saturday, the Cougars did their best Portland Trailblazers impression against the Centralia Trailblazers.

"It's very frustrating," noted Nasuta. "We never know who's going to show up and play. The inconsistent play is killing us."

Clackamas committed seven hours in game one and couldn't produce a run in the 3-0 loss.

In the second game, the Cougars outhit Centralia 10-9 but lost 6-3 for the sweep.

With only two weeks remaining before the playoffs, the Cougars need to make up one place in the standings to qualify.

With games against Green River and Grays Harbor, traditionally weaker teams, the Cougars should make postseason play.

Coach Nasuta, however, is not certain of anything right now.

"We play up to the level against teams like Lower Columbia," said Nasuta, "but then we turn around and get swept by a team that we can beat."



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Sophomore pitcher Kelley Comstock is 6-3 with a 1.42 ERA.

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