

# The tears, triumphs at NWAACC

• Clackamas' men's and women's basketball teams journey to Kennewick, Wash. to compete in the NWAACC Championships, March 8-11, for the opportunity to call themselves the best in the Northwest.

## A day-to-day journal of the basketball championships

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### Thursday, March 7

2:10 p.m.

Two white rental vans, filled to the brim with the men's basketball team and its cargo, leave the Clackamas campus for Kennewick, Wash. The atmosphere is jovial. The players crack jokes and laugh at their teammates. Hip-hop music blares from the speakers as Matt Tabisz raps along, his face contorting into expressions that even Eminem would envy.

9:30 a.m.

Lights out and t.v.s off as the Cougars await their 8 a.m. match.

### Friday, March 8

7 a.m.

The team gathers in the locker room of the Tri-Cities Coliseum. For one last time, the Cougars go over, the Cougars go over the scouting reports of Clark College, their first round opponent. Mat Tondreau stares into nowhere, focusing his concentration on the approaching game.

7:30 a.m.

Clackamas' players begin to pump themselves up for their duel with Clark. Some athletes listen to music, others yell words that a sailor would love, and jump up and down as their head coach, Cliff Wegner, speaks to his team one last time before their match. Wegner asks his team to consider all the sacrifices they have made over the last two years, and to visualize what each one must do against Clark in order for their team to be successful.

7:45 a.m.

The team hits the Coliseum floor and begins their warm-up routine, which includes passing and lay-up drills, while music blares throughout the arena. Marvin Noble goes through the prepping motions, handling the ball and practicing his jump shot, all the while listening to music through his headphones.

8 a.m.

Clackamas' game against Clark takes off.

9:42 a.m.

The game ends with a 76-73 Cougar

win. The team sits in the locker room. Wegner calls his team's performance "jittery," and pushes them to stay focused and intense. Clackamas knows they dodged a bullet this morning. The coaches scout out their next opponent for the tired players.

### Saturday, March 9

10 a.m.

The team loads up into the two white vans and takes off for Columbia Basin's campus for their light practice.

10:25 a.m.

The Cougars are at the gym, practicing for a 4 p.m. game. When the team fails to execute a drill to the pleasing of the coaches, assistant coach Jim Worden fills the gym with a booming yell and clap of his hands. The players freeze, some daring to not even breathe, and when Worden's outburst is through, the team steps up its work ethic.

11:20 a.m.

After the team practices free throw shooting, Wegner wraps up practice. "I think we'll be ready," he says.

3:28 p.m.

Once the Southwestern Oregon and Bellevue game ends, the floor is swept and Clackamas steps out to shoot baskets and begin warm-ups.

4:01 p.m.

The players are introduced, with badly pronounced names, and the game begins.

7:34 p.m.

The game flies to a dramatic ending. With one second remaining, Clackamas emerges the victor. Players Lawson Struve and Noble sing a homemade song with just one line, "We're going to the 'ship,'" a reference to the Cougars being just one game away from the championship game of the tournament. Wegner walks into the room, shaking some athletes' hands, hugging others. "AAAH... that was a great win!" Wegner says.

10 p.m.

Back at their hotel, excited after their thrilling defeat of Shoreline just hours earlier, the squad pours over stat sheets for what turns out to be a bonding moment, in Wegner's room.

### Sunday, March 10

10:05 a.m.

The men show up at the Coliseum to watch the Cougar women's team in their game against Skagit Valley.

10:58 a.m.

"Don't let up on any play, not any play," Wegner tells his team at practice. The Cougars spend time perfecting their defensive schemes, as well as beating Big Bend on the offensive end of the court.

5:15 p.m.

Preparation for the game begins one last time, as Wegner goes over specific offensive sets that he feels will work against Big Bend. "I gotta' think we're fresher, and I gotta' think we're

them. Wegner says, "Let's not let ourselves get caught thinking past tonight," a reference to Monday's championship game.

6:02 p.m.

With the blow of a whistle and the toss of a ball, the match begins.

7:40 p.m.

The Cougars' shot at first place vanished in the wake of their loss to Big Bend. Emotions are displayed in a variety of ways in the locker room, with Noble and Kuebler covering their faces, and their eyes, with shirts over their heads. Other members of the team hold their heads in their hands, while still others just stare off into the distance.

Wegner enters the room and takes a seat, most players avoid eye contact with the him. As Big Bend's cheers seep through the white brick walls, the coach sits and waits, finally speaking to his team. "I'm proud how we played," he says. "I'm sorry for everybody in the room who's worked so hard who doesn't get to play for a championship." Coach Wegner continues.

He said that their loss was not for lack of effort. He believes that perhaps a rebound or two, or a well-executed play or two, would have made the difference in the game. But he feels that his team left everything that they had on the court.

After Wegner is done speaking to his players, he gives the assistants an opportunity for their thoughts. But

both coaches, Rothenberger and Worden, pass, their faces expressing their feelings sufficiently. The Cougars huddle in the middle, where Wegner

speaks softly to his team, and the coaches head out to scout their next opponent.

### Monday, March 11

11:05 a.m.

The team watches the women's team take eighth place in the tournament; in which they showed their displeasure at the calls the officials made by singing "A rope, a tree, hang the referee."

1:55 p.m.

With their stomachs full, the Cougar men watch a portion of the game that must end in order for theirs to begin. The coaches don't mention the previous night's loss, and they keep the game plan simple for their players.

"There's a huge difference between sixth and third," Wegner says to his athletes.

3 p.m.

The Cougars' last match of the season kicks off.

4:30 p.m.

With the game over, Clackamas coming out on top, Wegner and his squad take hold of the third-place trophy. The players' parents come onto the court out of the stands and hug their sons, who pose for a team photo with the trophy. Once the improv photo shoot is finished, the team goes into the locker room for one last time.

Their faces seem more relaxed than they have been in months, their eyes glow with pride of their accomplishment. Wegner speaks of team effort in the last game against Walla Walla, and made plans for end of the year banquets and meetings.

Kuebler approaches his coach in the hall outside of the locker room, shakes Wegner's hand and the player thanks the coach for his efforts in the sophomore's two years under Wegner. The coach then congratulates the player on two great seasons, telling Kuebler that he is welcome to play for Wegner any time.

Clackamas' season was over, and the team was heading towards the west, off into the sunset.

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SALENA DE LA CRUZ / Clackamas Print

**Clackamas' Evan Kieling fights for the ball at the beginning of the game against Shoreline. In the match, Kieling scored 17 points on five-of-eight shooting from the field.**

better tonight," Wegner says. Assistant coach Ty Rothenberger gives his analysis on the Vikings' individual starters and how the Cougars can defend

## Win or lose, respect remains

By Nick Barron

Grown, proud men, disappointed in their demise, oblivious to a reporter who could shred the stereotypical image of cocky, egotistical jocks. But just as they were able to show their emotions freely after a victory, so did they illustrate them after perhaps the worse defeat they had ever encountered.

Wegner sat in silence for what seemed an eternity, finally speaking as a father does to his brokenhearted children. He asks for their eyes, some filled with tears, and tells them it will be ok. Yes, he says, it was a loss, and it seems the worse thing to have ever happen to them, but tomorrow is a new day, a new game, and they will be ready for it.

The coach gives them time to sulk, to reflect and to grieve. He rises and

prepares for his next game, a task that must have seemed the last thing the man wanted to do at that time. How easy it would have been for him to slide back to his hotel room, chain the door, and lie there, hoping the night's events were just a bad dream.

Basketball is just a sport, a mere game that little boys play, and continue to do so into manhood. But those little boys have dreams, and as their bodies grow larger, so do those aspirations, and it seems unfair that one moment can dash those hopes.

I came out here for this tournament, thinking that Clackamas had a shot at claiming the championship, but not believing it would happen. It was March, and the Cougars had fallen on hard times recently, and I knew that in

tournaments, all bets are off.

While their game against Big Bend proved my theory true, I walked out of that depressing locker room believing in something besides wins and losses. My faith in a team was renewed, and that is far more important than a victory.

After Coach Wegner had finished consoling his team, I quietly stood, shut my notebook, and walked out of the locker room. As I made my way out of the arena, I was grateful for the opportunity to join Wegner and his players during this tournament.

I strolled out into the cool March air, a believer in the power of a team, and I could have never been prouder of the Cougars.



I had been given the privilege of joining the men's basketball team to the NWAACC tournament, from the van ride to Kennewick, to the locker room before, during and after their games. It is what I have witnessed in those locker rooms that has made some of the biggest impacts on my life.

Before their games, the team was relaxed, yet serious, knowing the battle they were about to be thrown into. After their first two games, I saw joy and pleasure on their faces, as they had emerged from the battlefield victorious. Yet it was after their most recent match that I saw the true character of the team.

For two years, Coach Cliff Wegner has worked with some of the Cougar players on obtaining a championship

trophy. The athletes themselves have logged countless hours in gyms, working on their post moves, jump shots and footwork. They pushed their bodies in the hope, the belief, that they were capable of accomplishing something that most players only dream of.

In one game their dreams came to a tragic and obscene ending. For forty minutes, the Cougar players poured every ounce of their beings into winning a basketball game, and as they filed into the locker room, they felt that as if their efforts had fallen to the wayside.

So they sat on the benches of the white brick room, some with heads in their hands, others staring into the unknown. Tears began to come, flowing from broken dreams.