

Basketball Championships



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Going into the NWAACC Championship tournament, the Cougar women's basketball team was rolling. They were holding a 12-2 league record and a 24-4 record overall, were the co-champions of the Southern Region and had an eight game winning streak that began all the way back at the end of January. But as they headed up to the NWAACC tournament in Kennewick, Wash., the Cougar women melted down into a team that couldn't execute plays and was unable to make easy shots.

"Just coming up here and playing the way we did was very, very disappointing. Somewhere along the way between Oregon City and Kennewick, we lost our confidence. We just weren't the same team," Head Coach Jim Martineau said. "I don't think we played well all week long. I was very disappointed about that."

This drastic change from playing like the NBA's L.A. Lakers to the L.A. Clippers knocked the women out of any chance at a high placing early on, and landed them at the eighth-place spot out of the sixteen women's teams at the tournament.

They went 2-2 for the week, and according to Martineau, were pretty lucky to have finished with even those two wins.

Clackamas started their run in the tournament on Friday, March 8, by facing the Clark Penguins, a tough team that beat the Cougars twice earlier in the season. To begin the game, the Cougars didn't look their best, allowing Clark to jump ahead early on. Going into the half, Clark led 37-24. But the Cougars didn't roll over just yet. After playing catch-up for most of the game, Clackamas finally did overtake their opponents by a score of 49-48 with eight minutes left in the game. After multiple lead changes, the Cougars were leading

by one with a little over three minutes to play. But it all snowballed after that. After some missed shots and a lot of frustration, Clark knocked the Cougars out of the winner's bracket with a final score of 61-71. This loss killed all

hopes of Clackamas bringing home anything higher than fifth place.

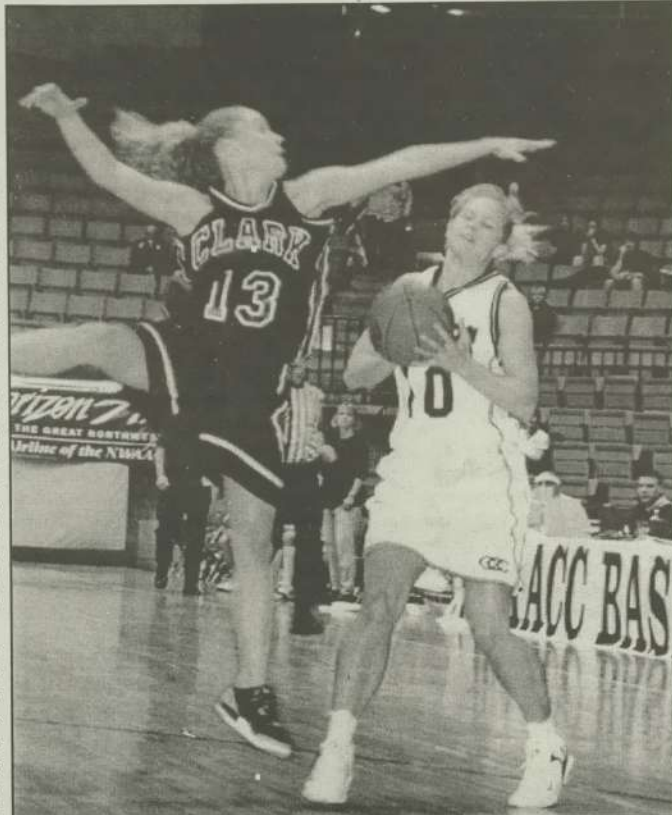
"We knew they were good, we just dug ourselves a real big hole, and made a nice run at it, but could never get it done," said Martineau. "We... didn't play as well or as hard as we should have the first 30 minutes of the game and then when we had to, we got after it and played well and played hard, but we just kind of ran out of gas. They made some shots, and we made a couple of bad turnovers and got us down five or six with a couple of minutes to go... we couldn't make any big shots."

After the disappointment of the first loss wore off, the Cougars came back on Saturday to take on the Skagit Valley Cardinals. With the pressure of the first game behind them, the Cougar women went out and played a little better, but still struggled to score baskets. Going into halftime, the Cougars were up 28-27. The game remained pretty close until the last four minutes. By then the Cougars were up by six and were starting to look much more focused than the day before. They won by 10 points, 58-48, but still hadn't gotten back into the rhythm they had possessed all season long.

"The difference was that we finally relaxed a little bit. Even the first seven or eight minutes of this game we struggled to score points. But we finally went out, relaxed and scored enough points to get it done," said Martineau. "I'm obviously worried about the offense a little bit.

(We're) not as aggressive, not as strong. We're shooting up air balls and stuff like that because of nerves. They're putting too much pressure on themselves to do well and they just need to go out and play basketball. As a coach it's frustrating because there is nothing you can tell them to help them make shots."

The next team Clackamas faced was the Centralia Trailblazers. The Cougars



we're just a different team. Offensively we're not the same. I can't explain it."

That victory put the women in a match-up against the Whatcom Orcas to determine if they were going to be fifth-place finishers, or left in eighth place. To begin the game, the Cougars looked like the team that they had been during the season. They were making more of their

shots and had a six-point lead within the remaining 11 minutes. But then fatigue set in on these women. Whatcom quickly took advantage of Clackamas' handicap, leading by five at the halfway mark. From there, it continued to get uglier and uglier. With ten minutes left in the game,

the Cougars were losing by 20 points. Although they were able to get within 12 down the stretch, at the end of the game, the Cougars were on the losing end of a 78-66 game. This final loss of the season put the Cougar women at a 26-6 record overall, and an eighth-place spot in the NWAACC tournament. But the most disappointing aspect of this tournament is the potential the Cougars had.

"In the back of my mind, I know we're as good as the two teams playing for the championship," said Martineau. "That's probably the

The Cougar women finished the year as the eighth-best team out of the 36 teams that are members of the NWAACCs. Their trip up to the championships at Kennewick, Washington on March 8-11 was full of both highs and lows. Left: A Clark player jumps at Melissa Gibson in an attempt to distract her from shooting. Below left: During halftime of the Cougars first game, Head Coach Jim Martineau tries to get his players fired up to come back from a 13-point deficit. Bottom: The Cougar women get pumped for their next battle. Below: Kayla Steen shows her disgust with a call made during the Cougars 10-point victory over the Skagit Valley Cardinals.

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most frustrating, disappointing thing is that when we're playing well and we're confident, I think we're as good as anybody."

While the disappointment of this year's finish is still weighing heavily on the Cougars' hearts, there is still hope for next year's team. Four freshmen started at least six games this year, and should be able to help lead the team.

"I don't expect us to take a step backwards next year," said

Martineau. "The freshmen need to step up. And they're going to get better this spring and summer and we're going to come back and add a few good kids and be ready to go. I would be very shocked if we're...not doing the same thing we just did, playing for a league championship and coming up here and trying to compete."

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