

Men and women show their desire

Michael McCormack
Sports Co-Editor

The Cougar men hit their stride at the right time last weekend in the NWAACC tournament where they earned a third-place finish.

"I didn't know we could do this," Head Coach Cliff Wegner said. "I remember saying that we couldn't win with only eight players, but I was wrong; I am so proud of the job the players did."

The tournament was held in Kennewick, Wash. at the Three Rivers Coliseum. The team started tournament play on Thursday against the Tacoma Titans, the second seeded team from the West Division.

The contest started as any typical first game in a tournament would, with players being jittery and tight. The Cougars took an early lead in the first half with the score being 17-11 seven minutes into the game, but the fun was just getting started for Clackamas.

"We got off to a normal start," Micah Mooney said. "It was really even in the beginning, but we started breaking them down on defense and pushing the ball up the court to open the game up."

By the end of the first half CCC had found their tempo and got rid of the nervousness that plagued them in the first 10 minutes of the game. At the half the score was 35-23 in favor of the Cougars.

In the second half Clackamas came out with a sense of urgency, and by the 13-minute mark had stretched their lead to 63-43.

"At that point Tacoma just stopped playing; we went on a huge run, all starting with great defense and passing," Wegner said.

The Cougars didn't shoot well against the Titans, but the defense was able to cancel out the sub-50 percent shooting performance with nine steals and out-rebounding Tacoma by 19.

The final score was 93-51 and Clackamas had shown the NWAACC that they were a team to be reckoned with as the tournament continued into the second round.

Matt Sanders led the Cougars with 20 points, while Wes Jensen and Brian Freeman added 19 points of their own. Freeman also pulled down 19 boards in the Cougar victory.

On Friday the Cougars took on the Spokane Sasquatch in the second round of tournament play.

Spokane came out strong and took an early 6-0 lead stemming from consecutive three-pointers. The Sasquatch shot an eye-opening 71 percent from beyond the arc in the first half.

"I told the team not to get bashful from the hot shooting of [Spokane] and to go out there and just play their game," Wegner said.

The game remained close during the first 10 minutes of the contest. Clackamas was able to counter the Spokane outside shooting by going inside to Wes Jensen on multiple occasions; Jensen had 12 points at the half.

At half-time Clackamas was down 39-32 and needed to make half-time adjustments to stop the

sizzling Sasquatch squad.

"We didn't defend them close-up in the first half, but we knew we were still in the game," Wegner said. "Anthony Mink did a great job of picking us up in the second half with his high energy."

Mink, who has been a role player all season for CCC, played arguably his best game of the season, scoring 10 points, but more importantly played intense defense on the outside guns of Spokane. Mink and Jensen set a tempo in the second half that

you the heart of this team," Wegner said. "The team came together and won; everyone contributed in this win."

Jensen led all scorers with 27 points and added nine rebounds in the winning effort. Kettles also contributed with 16 points of his own, while shooting 8 for 12 from the floor.

As Saturday rolled around the Cougars were one of four teams remaining in the post-season with zero losses to their name in the

up right where they left off scoring on consecutive trips, taking a 44-30 edge.

"We wanted this game more than anything," Freeman said. "We weren't going to just give up; we knew that we would make a run sometime."

With nine minutes remaining the Raiders were still in control with a 54-44 lead, but Jensen and Sanders showed that sophomore leadership that their fellow Cougar teammates had followed all season.

Because this tournament couldn't just take a seat and on the loss to Pierce. They came back on Sunday and played trophy against Grays Harbor.

"We put that loss behind us; we need to focus on the game at hand; we are playing for third place and that means something to Freeman said.

Clackamas came out of the locker room with a determined look on their faces and seemingly would be denied. Kettles gave the Cougars an early 5-0 lead on a three-point shot a minute and a half into the game, but the Chokers from Grays Harbor wouldn't be denied.

The Chokers came on a 5-0 run of their own and took their first lead of the game, 8-7. In the first minutes of the game both teams were excited and played at a tempo pace. Once the 15-minute mark rolled around, the game started to slow down.

Micah Mooney played his offensive game of the tournament and in the first half led a surge built the Clackamas lead to 20 by way of hitting two three-pointers and a lay-up. Mooney also counted with five rebounds and steals in the first stanza.

Grays Harbor put on an 8-0 run in the waning moments of the half, but two free-throws by Jensen and a three by Sanders put a stop to the Chokers' comeback attempt. The break Clackamas was up 44-40 and were halfway to victory.

As the second half began, Chokers again started to charge away at the CCC lead.

"Coming out of the half we knew they were going to make a push; we'd have to weather the storm," Freeman said. "It all started on defensive end."

Grays Harbor made a 10-0 run right off the bat and cut the Clackamas lead to two points. The leadership of Sanders and Jensen came through again in clutch time.

"I told the guys to follow me and Micah lead; those who refused to get out of here, out of the place trophy," Wegner said.

Jensen finished with 30 points, control of the offensive with his scoring on the side and made while Sanders navigated the squad with unselfish play all the way to the end.

The difference-maker in the contest was the blazing free-throw shooting of the Cougars, who shot 22 of 23 from the charity stripe.

"We stepped up and made free-throws down the stretch," Jensen said. "They couldn't find in the end because they just knew that we would make them."

Despite the second-half surge from the Chokers, the Cougars prevailed in the end, winning the test 83-73. Jensen was a first-team all-tournament performer, while Sanders was rewarded by being named to the second-team.

"When I remember this game I will think back and know I wouldn't feel bad for ourselves," Wegner said. "The eight guys had did a great job on focusing what they had to do to be successful. I couldn't be prouder."



Michael McCormack Clackamas Print

The Clackamas men took third place at the NWAACC Tournament held in Kennewick, WA last weekend. The team poses with the trophy (clockwise from left): Mychol Rivera, Garlod Howe, Cody Bass, Jake Kettles, Wes Jensen, Brian Freeman, Martin Axick, Head Coach Cliff Wegner, Micah Mooney, Anthony Mink, and Matt Sanders (not pictured: Josh Spirlin and Asst. Coach Jim Worden).

would eventually bring Clackamas right back into the game.

"Wes is a warrior. He sets the tone of mentality for the team and never backs down from a battle," Wegner said.

As the second half began, Clackamas started to chip away at the Sasquatch lead. A Jake Kettles drive and lay-up brought the Cougars within two points at 40-38, and that was where Clackamas knew they could win the game.

With 14:15 remaining Clackamas started a 13-0 run with two free-throws by Jensen and stretched their

lead to 53-44.

After the Cougar run they never looked back, regardless of a couple Spokane attempts to make a comeback.

Spokane pressed the Cougars in the final minutes of the game and chipped away to come within two points at 74-72 with one minute remaining, but the determination of Jensen wouldn't let Clackamas walk away with a loss.

Jensen got inside with 40 seconds remaining and got fouled as he made the bucket in the act of shooting. Eventually, the Cougars would walk away with an 80-72 victory and a spot in the NWAACC Semi-finals.

"We deserved that win more than anybody, after losing three players to injury earlier in the season, it shows

double-elimination tournament.

In the Semis CCC would face the athletic Pierce Raiders, a team that Clackamas knew they would have to play tough defense against in order to win.

"We have to pack it in and make them shoot from the outside," Wegner said. "We need to get back on defense and not get into a track meet with these guys."

Clackamas started out in a zone defense trying to entice the Raiders into taking the outside shot. The zone seemed to work in the first few minutes as Pierce started one for five from beyond the arc, but soon enough the Raiders would start finding their outside touch.

Matt Sanders gave the Cougars an early 6-2 lead by way of hitting back to back threes in the first two minutes of the game. But as fast as the Cougars had gained that lead, Pierce made a run of their own and started to pull away as the first half continued.

The Raiders Devon Connor-Green was one player who was not scared to throw up three-pointers against the Cougar zone. Connor-Green, who had 20 first-half points, was a one-man wrecking crew for Pierce and gave the Raiders a 19-8 lead on consecutive threes with nine minutes remaining.

The Cougars shot an abysmal 10 percent from inside the three-point line in the first half, which helped Pierce gain a lead that reached as much as 15 points.

"We couldn't make our lay-ups. It's hard to win a game when you shoot one for 10 from the inside," Cougars Associate Head Coach Jim Worden said.

At the half, Pierce led the game 40-30, while the Cougars were just happy to still be in the game.

To start the second half of the semi-final match-up, Pierce picked

The Cougars started to carve into the Pierce lead with two threes by Jensen, which cut the Raiders margin to 60-55.

Time started to become a factor in the Cougars' comeback attempt and their intensity on both ends of the floor started to pick up.

Freeman converted a three-point play on the blocks and brought Clackamas within two at 66-64. Another defensive stand by Clackamas on the following Pierce possession gave the Cougars a chance to tie the game with two minutes remaining on the clock.

Sanders drove the lane and was fouled and headed to the line. The CCC point guard converted one of two free-throws and Clackamas was down one with a buck forty-five on the clock.

Pierce was able to get a bucket of their own on the following possession and led by three with 34 seconds remaining in the game. On the Cougars' final possession of the contest they were looking for a three, but the Raiders were switching on all screens and got in the face of Jensen on his attempt to put the game into overtime. In the end Pierce squeaked by with a 69-65 win and an appearance in the Championship game.

Jensen again led all scorers with 25 points, as Sanders added 20 for the Cougs in the losing effort.

"We put that loss behind us. We need to focus on the game at hand; we are playing for third place here and that means something to us."

Brian Freeman

Cougar Post
On the team's determination to beat Grays Harbor

"We deserved that win more than anybody, after losing three players to injury ... it shows you the heart of this team."

Cliff Wegner
Cougars Head Coach