

# NWAACC: Freeman named MVP

Continued from NWAACC, Page 1

Round two found Clackamas matched up against the reigning NWAACC champion, the Highline CC Thunderbirds. Coach Wegner knew the team would have to step up and play better than they did in their first round game in order to be successful against a very athletic group who returned four starters from last year's championship team.

Unlike their previous game, Clackamas got off to a poor start and quickly found themselves down early. Western Division all-star guard Morris Anderson led a balanced Highline attack that was able to get CCC's Freeman into early foul trouble. Freeman was whistled for his third foul with almost nine minutes remaining in the first half. But instead of panicking, the team resorted to a zone defense, and Vaughan and company were able to step up and fill the void that Freeman left.

Ross also came up clutch and was able to tie the game at 34 by calmly sinking a three as time expired in the first half.

In the second half, the game see-sawed back and forth as the teams exchanged blows in an emotionally-charged setting. Vaughan led the team on offense most of the half, but Freeman tied the game at 69 when he scored inside with under a minute left. Clackamas got a chance to end the game in regulation, but just barely missed as Alex Brock's long three-pointer rimmed out at the buzzer with the crowd on their feet.

Things continued to go back and forth in overtime with Freeman, Vaughan and Cernin matching buckets with Highline's talented trio of the aforementioned Anderson, Western Division MVP Derrick Webb, and Vaughn Gaines. One extra period was not enough to decide the outcome, as it concluded with the score tied at 75.

The second overtime began with Clackamas running out to an early advantage, but saw Freeman foul out in the closing seconds with the game still in doubt.

"I was pretty mad [about fouling out], but I had confidence in our team. It was never a question if we were gonna win. I knew our team was gonna take care of business, and we did," Freeman said after the game.

The Cougars held on to defeat the Thunderbirds by a final score of 87-86 in what was by far the most exciting and intense game of the tournament. The heart of the team showed, and the effort they exerted was apparent to everyone in attendance, especially Coach Wegner.

"It was a tremendous college basketball game. It was the kind of game where no one should have had to lose ... We knew they weren't going to give it up easily; we would have to grab that trophy out of their hands with every scrap and bit of determination, toughness and poise ... It was a tremendous effort by our kids, and I couldn't be more proud of how we played."

Vaughan finished with 30 points on 9-12 shooting and nine rebounds. Cernin had 17 points and seven boards, while Freeman finished with 19 points and 17 boards, despite playing limited minutes.

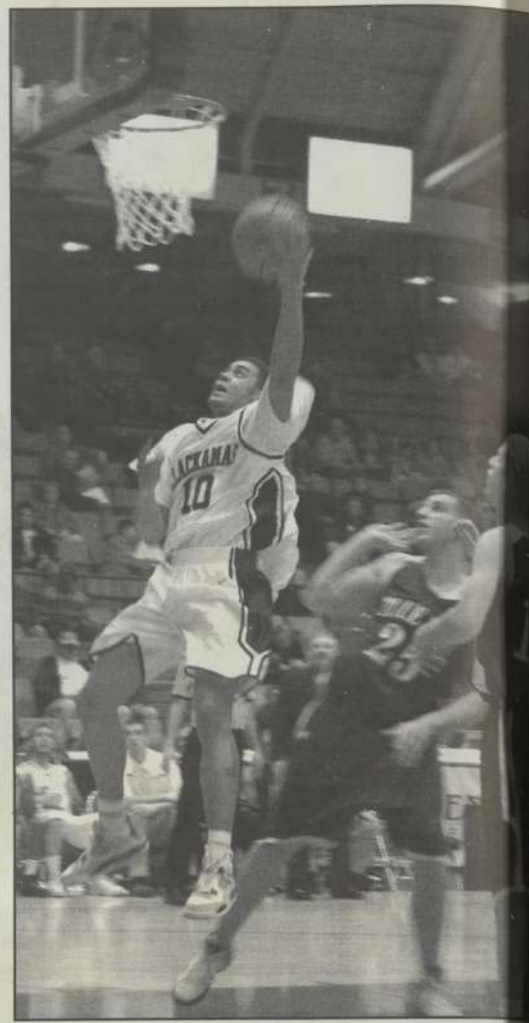
In Saturday's semis, Clackamas took on Walla Walla CC. This game featured much more than just Walla Walla's hideous yellow and black-striped warm-up pants. In a sensational match-up of big men, Brian Freeman opposed the Eastern Division MVP, six-foot-six-inch Curtis Carlson.

From the outset, the Cougars utilized their post game, regularly feeding Freeman and Vaughan with little resistance from the defense. Clackamas grabbed seemingly every rebound in the first half and was able to maintain a near double-digit lead most of the first half.

Walla Walla's coach became irate and called a timeout at one point, giving his team an intense tongue-lashing, demanding that they step up and rebound. Their lack of success inside was evident as Freeman had a double-double even before the first half concluded.

As is generally the case in postseason play, the opponent didn't give up and Walla Walla got themselves back in the game, getting within two at one point in the second half.

Clackamas responded only as champions know how. With key buckets by the big three, Cernin, Vaughan and Freeman, the Cougars were able to put a final run together and grab the victory by a final score of 75-65. Walla Walla's



Carlson finished with 34 points and 11 rebounds, sinking four from long range. Despite these numbers, only shot 13-33 from the field, and when compared to Freeman's 36 points on a 14-19 shooting night, the better player clearly got the victory in the match-up.

Freeman also came up with 18 big boards and was presence on D, blocking three shots and altering countless others. Luke Defrees was solid off the bench, hitting three-pointers at will, and Ross accounted for eight boards and five dimes. Vaughan, who Coach Wegner said "has the heart of a lion," chipped in with 10 points and nine boards, and, once again, the victory was a total team effort.

After the win, the chant of "we going to the 'stap" could be heard resonating off the walls of the locker room and into the hallways of the venue. The team was confident, but in no way content with what they had done thus far.

Next up for Clackamas: the NWAACC championship final vs. the Bulldogs from Bellevue CC.

Sunday night, the script went similarly to the previous contests. Clackamas led the majority of the first half, imposing their will on the Bulldogs. Freeman was a force inside, Cernin and Nick Eldridge stroked from the perimeter, and Vaughan out-worked people on all facets of the game. In the second half, as if on cue, things got tighter.

... Continued on Page 11



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TOP LEFT: Diminutive guard JR Morgan comes off the bench and immediately makes his presence known as he dives for a steal and gains possession for the Cougs.

TOP RIGHT: Maurice Ross drives the lane and attacks the rim as the defender pulls back in hopes of not committing a foul. Ross proved to be extremely durable as he played much of the tournament after dislocating one of his fingers.

ABOVE: Nathaniel Germaneri gains possession of the ball and looks to push it ahead to the streaking Luke Defrees.

RIGHT: JR Morgan finds himself in a rather precarious situation as he attempts to claim the ball. Teammate Luke Defrees also gets low as he tries to gather in the loose ball.

