

Cougars ready for upcoming NWAACC tournament game

By John Howard
The Clackamas Print

Coming off back-to-back championship seasons, men's basketball Head Coach Clif Wegner is getting used to facing hungry teams.

"For a lot of teams, beating us is like their (Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges) championship," said Wegner. "I don't want our kids to dance on the floor after every game, but I always tell them, 'You have to match that emotion. You have to match that energy because they want to beat you more than anybody, so you have to come out feeling the same way.'"

Although the season got off to a rocky 0-2 start, Wegner's team has come storming back to take the Southern Region title, finishing at 19-6 and looking ahead to the upcoming tournament. The team has been led in scoring by freshman post player Max Jacobsen, who Wegner said has been central in the Cougar's successful season.

"The impact of Max is that he's brought a lot of poise and leadership. He came out of a Division 1 program at Portland State, so he's been around big-time college basketball," said Wegner. "He's so good in the low post that he makes it so people can't guard him one-on-one, so they either have to double him and give us something on the perimeter or he just does his thing."

Jacobsen's dominant interior play has placed him with the leaders in points and rebounding, averaging 20.1 points and 8.1 rebounds for the season. Jacobsen is also one of the league's most efficient players. He leads the league in field goal percentage and is fifth in scoring but has played fewer minutes than all

but three of the league's top 15 scorers.

Wegner said that he would go beyond putting Jacobsen as the team's most valuable player.

"He's the most outstanding player on the championship team," said Wegner. "I would think he'd be the (Southern Region) MVP and there won't be much discussion about it."

Despite Jacobsen's strong nightly showing, the significant injury to wing Paul Walter, whom Wegner deemed as the team's "glue player," has opened opportunities for a host of other players. Assistant Coach Paul Fiskum noted that it was important to have a deep team in order to take the next step in competition.

"It really was a total team effort this year. We've had a lot of different contributions," said Fiskum. "I think that's a good sign as we get to the (tournament) because you definitely need more than a starting lineup to win the championship."

Fiskum went on to say that the team lives and dies on the effort that they put into each game.

"The low point (of our play) is whenever we hit the floor and we're not ready to play. We don't have the energy that you need to play and win college basketball games," said Fiskum, who has been teaching PE classes and coaching at Clackamas since 1976. "We felt like every loss we had this year, we contributed greatly to it by not going quite as hard as we could have."

Focus and energy issues aside, the Cougars have had a remarkable season. After setting a goal of shooting 50 percent from the floor for the season, the team has emerged as the best percentage team in the league and the only team to shoot over 50 percent. They have also accomplished their goal of winning the Southern

Region Championship. Not only did the team win the region, they clinched the region title finished with a three game margin over the four teams tied for second place.

As is standard for Wegner's team, they didn't celebrate after winning the title.

"They didn't talk about it much. They started talking about the NWAACC championship like that," said Wegner, whose team stayed as calm and composed as they do all game, sitting on the bench and supporting their teammates. "I've gotten on them at different times for being more emotional and more energetic, but that's just a product of how good we've been and how bad teams want to beat us."

Both Jacobsen and sophomore Travis Robbins agreed that, after they dropped a few games, they had a successful season and were prepared for the playoffs.

"As far as progress as a team, we know we could have won those games and we could have played a lot better," said Robbins. "I think those losses are going to make us a better team and going to make us real fired up when we get to the tournament."

Wegner is happy with the team's focus, and is positive about the outcome of the challenge of this weekend's 16 team tournament presents.

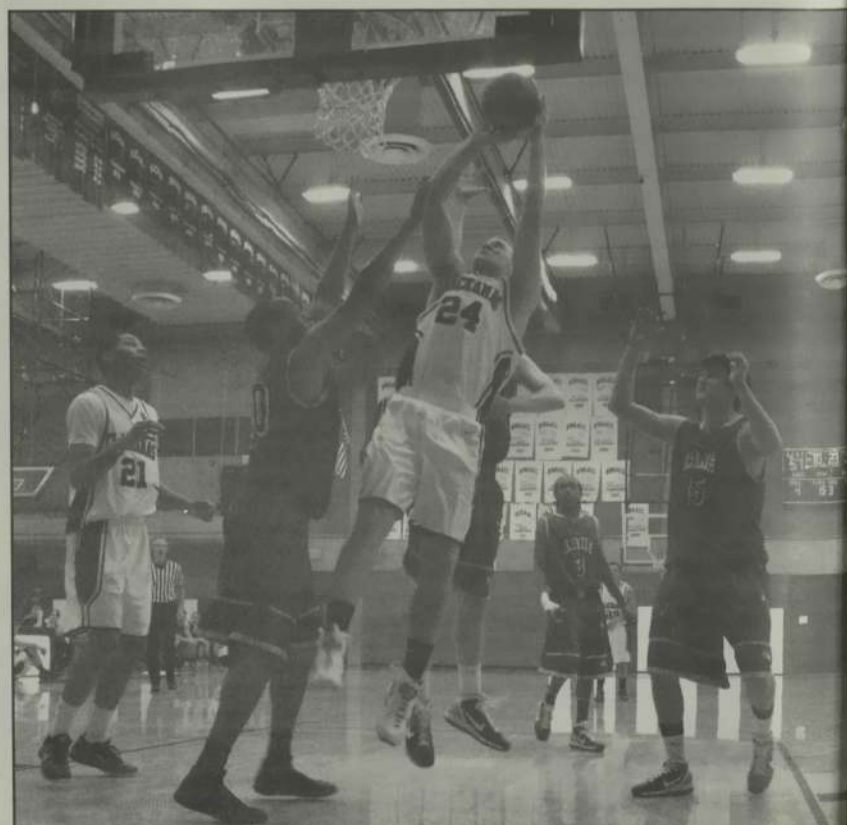
"I think everybody is in a really good state of mind," said Wegner. "I like the team attitude. I like how they're playing together. Kids are coming off the bench and contributing; they're not being selfishly. They're buying into the big picture and trying to win the championship together."

The team leaves Friday for the NWAACC tournament, which will be held in Kennewick, Wash. The Cougars tip off at 6 p.m. at Clark Community College.




All photos by John Howard Clackamas Print

Freshman Max Jacobsen goes for the tip-off against Lane Community College in the game on Friday, Feb. 25, held at Clackamas in the Randall Gym. Jacobsen has led the Cougars in scoring for the season, hitting the bucket for 27 in this game alone.



Sophomore Brandon Troxel (24) shoots for two of his 18 points against Lane's defense. Troxel shot a team high nine free throws in the 79-61 win for Clackamas.



i wonder ...

WARNERPACIFIC.EDU

what is my next move?

Ranked as one of the best values and best baccalaureate colleges in the West by U.S. News & World Report 2010, Warner Pacific is an urban, Christ-centered liberal arts college in the heart of Portland. With 27 undergraduate majors, you can choose from hundreds of career options.

WARNER PACIFIC COLLEGE
2210 SE 68th Avenue • Portland, Oregon 97215
503.517.1020 • 503.517.1540 • warnerpacific.edu