

Cougars continue comeback

BY JACOB THOMPSON
SPORTS EDITOR

Clackamas Community College's men's basketball team overcomes slow start at Chemeketa Community College to win their fourth straight game, improving to 12-6 on the season and 4-1 in league play.

Coming off of a 76-65 win over Linn-Benton Community College on Jan. 17, the Cougars looked to keep things rolling against their rival Chemeketa Storm Saturday.

"[Chemeketa] always seems to be jacked-up for us," said Head Coach Cliff Wegner. "They always seem to play well against Clackamas. I don't know what they say or do, but yeah, it's been a rivalry for 20 years before I was here."

With full bleachers and enthusiastic Chemeketa fans at full throat, the opening tip went Clackamas' way, and sophomore guard Briggs Young hit a 3-pointer just 24 seconds into the game. But it would be the Storm who controlled the first five minutes of Saturday's game. After Young's 3-point basket, Chemeketa outscored the Cougars 19-9. Chemeketa was ahead by nine for most of the first half, but big layups by freshman post Adam Gehrig with 4:52 remaining and sophomore guard Isaiah Gentry at the four-minute mark pulled Clackamas within six points of Chemeketa at 31-37. Gehrig completed another big lay-up at the end of the first half to shrink the deficit to one; 47-48 Chemeketa.

"Every team in this league is good, they can beat you any day," said Young. "You just got to stay persistent and take it one step at a time. We got down by 12, but then we came back real well going into the second half."

The Cougars shot well in the first half, hitting 17 of their 31 shots from the field. Clackamas' leading scorers were sophomore guard Nygil Carr (13 PTS), Gentry (10 PTS), and freshman forward Donovan Tafua (9 PTS). Chemeketa shot 18 for 38 from the field and were led by sophomore guard Austin Evans (9 PTS), freshman forward Gage Johnson (8 PTS), and sophomore guard Jack Frazier (7 PTS).

The second half saw the Chemeketa Storm come out hot once again, and before four minutes had passed, the Storm was once again up by 11, leading 60-49. Wegner called a full timeout at 16:31 to regroup the Cougars, and the strategy paid off. Out of the timeout,



Donovan Tafua, a freshmen forward for Clackamas, clashes with Gage Johnson of Chemeketa. Clackamas ended the game 92-88, granting them a fourth straight win.

Clackamas got the ball to Young, and he hit a 3-pointer that sparked a 10-2 run that evened things up at 62-62 with 13:45 remaining in regulation.

"It was an intense game," said Wegner. "There was some stuff going back and forth and the referees were trying to settle people down, but I think our kids really kept their posse, and didn't make any dumb fouls, and run their mouths and get a [technical foul] like they did. Kudos to our kids for staying with it and battling from behind."

The game was neck and neck from that

point until 8:30 remaining were behind Gentry's near perfect free throw shooting (4-5), and Young's 3-point shooting, the Cougars pulled ahead by 11 in a little over a minute; 81-70, Clackamas.

"It comes with the game and it goes with the game," said Carr. "We never give up. We're going to keep on fighting until we see double zeros on the scoreboard."

Chemeketa then went on a run of their own, outscoring 9-2 to tighten the score at 83-79, but once again Young canned a clutch three-pointer with 2:21 remaining to put Clackamas up 86-79.

"We have a lot of chemistry," said Gentry. "We work on this stuff in practice, at the beginning we kind of tried to go one on one, but at the end we realized what we wanted, and that was a win. So we all came together and found the hot hand, and tonight it happened to be Briggs in that second half."

Young's hot hand (15 PTS in the second half) helped the Cougars regain, and maintain the lead, but it was Gentry's performance from the free throw line that kept the Storm from making a comeback, making seven of nine from the charity stripe, three of which came with 40 seconds or less remaining in the ball game.

"Mostly we made our free throws and didn't turn it over," said Wegner. "That's a really good win because they have been playing well. That's the fifth ranked team we've beaten in this stretch. We've won eight out of nine. I feel like we're playing well and peaking at the right time."

The Cougars finished the night shooting 33 for 68 from the field, and were led offensively by Gentry (21 PTS), Young (18 PTS), and Carr (17 PTS). Tafua and Gentry grabbed five rebounds a piece, and Gentry led the team with three steals.

Chemeketa shot 32 for 74 on the night, and their high scorer was freshman forward Bryson Gray, with 17 points.

So far this season Clackamas has averaged 91.9 points per game driven by Carr (21.6 ppg), Gentry (16.4 ppg), and Young (10.7 ppg) the Cougars have consistent guard play that may have them ready for a run at a NWAC title.

"We practice this, we go to practice and put up a bunch of shots," said Carr. "These two are probably the best shooters I've ever played with in my life. [Gentry] catches fire, [Young] catches fire, [Young] knows how to shoot, but sometimes he gets nervous. Briggs knows how to shoot the ball, Isaiah knows how to shoot the ball, and they are going to get a lot of shots in, and I'm going to chip in wherever I can."

The Cougars look to continue their winning streak at home this week versus Clark Community College (6-11 overall, 2-4 in league) on Jan. 24, and Umpqua Community College (12-6, 3-2) on Jan. 27.