

Rhoden sparks golden era on mats

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It was 2006 and now Head Coach Josh Rhoden and his wife Keri were living in Redmond, Oregon. Rhoden had just finished his master's degree and was a long-term substitute teacher for a second grade class. The Rhodens had built a house just six months ago, and Josh was setting up an interview for a full-time fourth grade teaching position. Rhoden had just helped lead Redmond High School to fifth place in the OSAA 4A Wrestling Championships as an assistant. If not for a phone call from Lou Coy, it's hard to know exactly what Rhoden would be up to today, but after the phone call, Rhoden was on the way to becoming the leader of arguably the nation's most dominant NJCAA wrestling program in the last decade, whether he knew it or not.

Coy informed Rhoden that Clackamas Community College had an opening for head coach of wrestling after Mike Haluska departed for Portland State. Coy believed that Rhoden should apply for the job and Rhoden had interest, but also had doubt.

"I remember being super nervous because I wanted to coach at this level, but thought I was too young to be hired at 26 and lead a program," Rhoden said.

Despite the nerves, Rhoden threw his hat in the ring for a chance at the job, which had plenty apply. Rhoden's first interview was via telephone with the hiring committee and the interview went well enough to earn him an in-person interview with then Athletic Director Jim Jackson.

Rhoden headed to Oregon City from Redmond to meet with Jackson and despite feeling like the interview went great, accepted the fourth-grade teaching job when he returned to Redmond because he was so worried he wouldn't get the job. But Rhoden's worries were for not, he soon received a phone call from Jackson asking him if he would like to become the next head coach of Clackamas Wrestling.

"I was scared to death to be honest," Rhoden said. "We had just built a house. I had been a graduate assistant and a high school assistant, but never had my own team."

After talking with Keri and praying about it, Rhoden decided he would take the coaching job at Clackamas. But he still needed to



Awarded the 2011 National Coach of the Year as well as the 2015 National Junior College Athletic Association Man of the Year, Rhoden has been recognized throughout the college wrestling world for his accomplishments at CCC.

inform the elementary principal of his decision and again he was nervous.

"Now I gotta go tell this principal and it's the most nervous I've been because I'm young so it's like I don't have a lot of experience telling people 'sorry,'" Rhoden said. "He was on playground duty. I'll never forget it. I walk out there and I was like, 'Hey I really appreciate this opportunity but I have the opportunity to go teach and coach in college over in the valley and coach wrestling nationally and he was like, 'Man you gotta do it, you gotta do it, I understand. Don't worry about it.'"

And with that the Rhodens were leaving their new home and headed for Oregon City.

Even though Rhoden didn't know exactly where to begin, he knew what his vision for the program was and that it would take a lot of work to accomplish the goals he wanted to pursue.

"The vision early on was, 'Hey I think we can do something really special here,'" Rhoden said. "And just the commitment from our staff and the guys that have been a part of what we've done from the very beginning is, 'I think we can be excellent.'"

Rhoden knew what type of program he wanted to build at Clackamas from his own experiences wrestling for different programs, but the young coach found himself behind the competition when it came to program resources.

"I knew we could be successful here, but I knew it was going to take some time," Rhoden said. "When we first got here, we had eight scholarships and everyone else was working with 16. The budget was super tiny and it still kind of is, we just fundraise the heck out of everything. I just knew it was going to take some work."

With a small budget, Rhoden had to figure

out what his program could afford right then.

"Little by little you had to pick away at the things that can help right now and the wrestling room wasn't there," said Rhoden in his office overlooking the Cougars new mat room. "We needed scholarships because we could get kids if we had scholarships."

Former Clackamas dean of students Bill Zuelke and Jackson believed in the value of the wrestling program and helped secure more scholarships for the Cougars.

Before the Cougars ever took the mat under the leadership of Rhoden, he needed to track down the remaining wrestlers from the 2005-2006 team and convince them to stay with the program through the coaching change.

"As soon as I could I got the number of the guys that were here because some of them were like, 'Eh I don't know what I'm