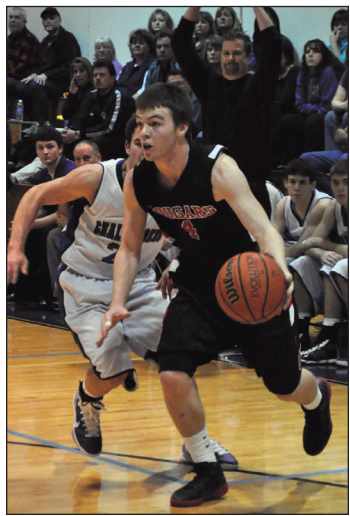


Sports

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Conference Champs!



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, *Illinois Valley News*)

Seniors Jesse Bethke, Alex Hess, Roger Hulst, Curtis Paulson and Jim Buck prior to the IVHS Cougar basketball victory against St. Mary's Feb. 8.

The "Brotherhood" clinch

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

For years, Cascade Christian's boys' basketball team consistently dominated the 3A Southern Cascade League. Few others could beat them, let alone come close to challenging their position.

But this year, Illinois Valley High School brought Cascade Christian's league winning streak to an abrupt end Friday, Feb. 11, during a 58-54 showdown in Medford.

It was the second time this season that the Cougar boys' basketball team beat Cascade Christian, shaking up the pecking order in the 3A Southern Cascade league.

"I guess you could call it a game of runs," said boys' basketball coach Jeff Winters. "We'd get seven points, then they'd run up seven. But these guys have been there before. They don't give up."

The Cascade Christian Challengers hosted Friday's game, a physical, back-and-forth game where both teams racked up fouls in the effort to overcome the other. Cougar fans and family members filled the visitor's section in support.

The "Brotherhood" scored first in the game, but that didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the rowdy Cascade Christian crowd. At the end of the first quarter, the Challengers

led the Cougars 14-15.

The stakes picked up in the second quarter, with both teams trading points. Illinois Valley scored several points in a row, only to watch Cascade Christian catch up again.

Though Illinois Valley missed some scoring opportunities, they capitalized on foul shots, an area that was a major part of Cascade Christian's undoing in the end. "We converted seven out of nine [foul shots] and they only made about five out of 13," Winters said. "That's one thing we work on all the time that's showing some improvement."

At the half, the Cougars led 27-25 after the Challengers fell behind, then caught up again during the second quarter. In the third quarter, Cascade Christian took the lead again as the intensity continued ramping up.

But the final quarter would spell the end of Cascade Christian's league championship run, their players missing key foul shots while Illinois Valley's Roger Hulst sunk the last few in a row. After a grueling three-and-a-half quarters, the Cougars finally managed to clinch a four-point lead, asserting themselves as league champions.

"Somehow, they always pick it up at the end," Winters said. "They don't want to lose. They have heart, they have the will and when it gets late in the game they just dig down deep and come back."

Challenger fans could only watch as they saw their league-winning streak come to a sudden, disappointing end. For Cougar seniors, it was a moment of triumph.

"It was one of those things where as soon as the buzzer goes off you're standing there thinking, 'Wow, we just went undefeated in conference games,'" said Curtis Paulson. "We won because we're aggressive and we held our composure."

"The basketball gods were on our side," Winters said. "You definitely have to have some luck to win as many games as we've won."

The Challengers lost to Ashland on Saturday, Feb. 12, meaning they'll go into playoffs coming off of four straight losses. They are scheduled to host Lakeview on Wednesday, Feb. 16, and Illinois Valley will play the winner of that game.

"The past few years they've always been the top dogs," Paulson said. "Now, they're coming in and they're not at the top anymore, and it's going to get to them I think."

But that doesn't mean the Cougars will be any less aggressive against either Lakeview or Cascade Christian in their first playoff match-up on Friday, Feb. 18.

According to Athletic Secretary Robin Jackson, gates will open at 6 p.m., with the first 40 Illinois Valley students and the first 40 adult fans receiving free T-shirts. Team boosters note that Illinois Valley students will be out of school on game day, but are optimistic that a large number of fans will turn out, anyway.

"We want to get all our fans out there," Winters said. "We have a good community response to sports. If you took away the student section [of Cascade Christian] we might have had more fans than they did."

Lorna Byrne basketball teams get one loss, one win

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

Lorna Byrne Middle School seventh- and eighth-grade girls' basketball teams traveled to Lincoln Savage Middle School on Wednesday, Feb. 9.

The seventh-grade team, comprised mostly of sixth-grade students, lost a tough match to an advanced Lincoln Sav-

age squad, falling 8-29.

But Viking eighth-graders had better luck against their Lincoln Savage counterparts, winning 39-32 in a game that started slow, but took off in the second half, according to middle school basketball coach Aaron Mathews.

"Alex Laflamme led the way with 14 points," Mathews said. "Brittney Burns scored ten and

McKayla Yoman eight."

Jaycee Frederickson got four points in the fourth quarter, another contribution to the Vikings' victory.

Wednesday's matches bring the seventh-grade team record to 1-5 and the eighth-graders to 3-3 overall so far. Lorna Byrne hosted White Mountain on Monday, Feb. 14 and will go to St. Mary's on Wednesday, Feb. 16.



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, *Illinois Valley News*)

Lorna Byrne's Alex Laflamme and Brittney Burns fight for the ball Monday, Feb. 16 against White Mountain.