

# Boys' basketball team picks up 2 more wins

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The Illinois Valley boys' basketball team played three games last week which resulted in two wins and a loss for the Cougars against Lost River, Myrtle Point and Days Creek.

The first game of the week Tuesday, Dec. 12, was a home game against Lost River - a team whose non-league record is 4-2 - in which the Cougars suffered a loss. The final score was 53-60.

"We just had a couple little mistakes here and there," said head coach Matt Knight. "We were also missing Tyi Brummett who had injured his ankle in the previous game."

Elijah Polk was the top scorer in the game against Lost River with 16 points, along with Bryce Bruner who scored 15 points and Caleb Hess with 14.

Then Thursday, Dec. 14, the Cougars hit the road to find themselves victorious against the Myrtle Point Bobcats, whose non-league record is 2-5. The final score for that game was a whopping 62-32.

"We finally had some things start clicking together," said Knight regarding the game against Myrtle Point. "The last two games, really. Things started clicking together defensively."

Leading the team in points that game was Polk again with 21; Hess had a 14-10 double-double, which is where a player earns double digits in both baskets and rebounds respectively; and then Bruner and Brummett both had 10 points.

And finally Friday, Dec. 15, the Cougars destroyed Days Creek (5-2) in a home game that sent the wolves away with their tails tucked between their legs. The final score was 66-55.

Bruner led the team in points against Days Creek with 16; Polk scored 14; and then Cody Box and Hess both had 10. The team ended up with a total of 20 steals.

This week, the Cougars play two away games - one against New Hope Christian Tuesday, Dec. 19 and the other against Klamath Union Friday, Dec. 22 - and then break for a week before playing Bonanza the following Friday.



(Photo by Michelle Binker, Illinois Valley News)

**Freshman guard Alexis Gomez drives the lane against Days Creek Friday, Dec. 15. The ladies currently sit at a 4-4 record after coming off two back to back losses against Myrtle Point and Days Creek.**

## IVHS ...

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"At a professional development meeting, one teacher gave a sample lesson: 'Look at this picture and come up with three questions.' We don't want to say, here's two lines, stay between them. We want to say, here's a great big area; explore it."

Student support and advocacy is another place where Smith has made new hires. These include student advocate Sara Creek, graduation coach Scott Thornhill and student counselor Jessica Skinner.

Smith explained that both Scott and Sara are charged with focusing on increasing course passing rates of freshmen and sophomores.

Another new hire was Gene Merrill, filling the newly-created Three-Rivers-School-District position of college and career coordinator.

"Gene wrote a grant for about \$200,000," noted Smith. The grant is focused on getting kids out into community doing internships. That way they see the options from continued education."

Smith has also beefed up an existing course called Senior Forum, which helps students prepare for the next step, whether that is a community or four year college or a first job. The course, previously taught by one teacher, is now team-taught by teacher Megan Brown, and Gene Merrill. The course also sometimes includes staff from College Dreams.

College Dreams, according to its website, is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to increase access to opportunities, remove barriers and prepare low-income, first generation and underrepresented youth to thrive in school, college and careers.

The Ghost Project is another of Smith's innovations. At one point

in our interview, Smith stood up and pointed to a large white board on his office wall, plastered with the photos of every single student in the school. Underneath each photo were a series of hand written X's.

"Something that's really, really important to me is that we know our kids," he said. "Teachers come down and put a mark under a photo if they have a great relationship with that kid. This is how you find 'ghosts.' Take this kid here (Smith pointed to a photo). I know this student lives with his grandmother and his grandfather. I know what this student's schedule is. I know what sports he plays. I've sat and talked with him. I'm going to put a mark right there."

Smith went on to explain that every single kid in the school already has good relationships with at least three staff. That's Round One. In Round Two, he plans to make something similar to baseball trading cards for kids with fewer marks and

hand them out to teachers and staff with the goal of encouraging them to sit down and get to know those kids.

As with our other two Illinois Valley public schools, chronic absenteeism is a serious problem at IVHS. Defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days, the high school's rate was 33 percent last year.

"At this age," said Smith, "you can't just put it (school attendance) on the parents. I talk to kids about accountability being the best ability."

Smith blamed a shift in local culture, from times when the logging industry was thriving, away from seeing schools as important. But he seemed reluctant during the interview to discuss underlying social issues such as drug addiction and homelessness. Instead Smith, who coached college football at Willamette University before moving over into academic administration in the Salem school system, spoke of the drawing power

of sports.

"I've spoken to people and they've told me this school used to be the epicenter of town. When there was a basketball game, you couldn't find a seat. When there was a football game it was packed ... I would love to get back to that. I would love for our town to have pride in our school."

Smith explained that, while sports might not relate directly to academic achievement, participation in sports is what brings some kids to school; success in sports gives kids a sense of self confidence and pride.

"But," he added: "There are kids who come here, and school and learning is down the list a little bit. They're here because it's warm. They're here because they get fed. They're here because they know I love them."

"Smith concluded, "I will never be able to do enough to feel like, 'Oh, we're satisfied.' That's why I wake up at 4 in the morning."

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