

SPORTS

The Dalles looks to improve playoff position

By Mike Weber

For Columbia Gorge News

The Dalles High Riverhawk boys basketball team could very well conclude the regular season with some momentum, which is something they could greatly benefit from as they prepare for the upcoming Intermountain Conference district playoffs June 21-26.

Having a positive outlook, while possibly winning their final two games of the season, would certainly be something for second-year Coach Greg Cummings and his Riverhawks to get excited about. Unfortunately, the Hawks haven't enjoyed many positive outcomes during the short 11-game Class 5A spring schedule as they've posted a record of 1-7 in league and are 1-8 overall.

"We had quite a few kids that were playing baseball and track and field, so those kids missed two weeks of practice prior to the season," said Cummings. "Having three games a week in a compressed schedule like this also makes it difficult for us to have many days to practice too and the kids can't be in the gym six days a week."

Playing a grueling schedule of three games in four days, the Hawks started last week with a close 56-52 loss at home June 8 to the Redmond High Panthers (5-2 IMC, 8-2 overall).

"We're completely revamping our offensive philosophy and defensive philosophy, as well, because we knew this would be a tough season based on the other teams in our league," said Cummings. "Those teams have lots of strong upperclassmen, so we thought this would be a good year to revamp some things, especially since we're not competing for a state playoff berth. It's kind of one of those years that we hope to have a great season for the seniors, but we're also preparing everyone else for our future, as well."

The Hawks headed out onto the road for back-to-back contests against Gorge

rival Hood River Valley (5-2 IMC, 7-2) Thursday, followed by Friday's matchup against the Crook County High Cowboys (8-0 IMC, 12-0) in Prineville. The Hawks equaled their highest point total this season, before losing 74-56 to the Eagles and then one day later, lost 61-44 to the undefeated and league leading Cowboys.

"The reality of Friday's contest was that the outcome didn't really matter too much," said Cummings. "We wanted to go in and try some different things defensively and try some different things offensively that will hopefully prepare us for the last two regular season games and also the district playoffs. We hope to get fourth place so that we can have a home game in the playoffs Monday and then hopefully, we'll get to play in the semifinals on Wednesday. That would be cool, because there hasn't been a home playoff game here in a very long time."

The Dalles fell behind 21-12 after one quarter and trailed 36-20 at halftime. The two teams then traded baskets throughout the second half and the Hawks played more competitively while getting outscored by one point, 25-24.

A young The Dalles squad was led in scoring by junior Tristan Bass with 14 points. Spencer Taylor (10 points), one of just two Hawk seniors along with Kenape Stewart, led the Hawks in rebounds with eight. Junior Shane Floyd had seven points and a team-high four assists. Sophomore Styles DeLeon had 11 points and four steals. Junior Jaxon Pullen had two points, three assists and two steals.

"I have a soft spot in my heart for the seniors because I've coached both of them since they were in elementary school," said Cummings. "I feel grateful to have had a very good relationship with both of them and their families. I really consider both of those guys just like family members for me."



The Dalles Freshman Andre Niko (22) watches a free throw go in during Tuesday's June 8 game in The Dalles, above. Mark B. Gibson photo

The Hawks were hoping to get their second win in Tuesday's Senior Night home game against the Pendleton High Buckaroos (results came after the printed edition deadline). The final regular season game is Thursday at 6:30 p.m. versus the Ridgeview Ravens (3-4 IMC, 4-6) at The Dalles High School. The Hawks could possibly tie the Ravens in the standings with a win.

"Pendleton has always been tough, but they graduated nine seniors last year, so that's why they're struggling, but they're a well-coached team," said Cummings. "We lost a close game to Ridgeview earlier this season, so I think we have a good chance to hopefully win the last two games. Because of COVID, it's been a weird and very bizarre season and hopefully things will be back to normal for basketball next year."

The Dalles recorded its only victory 56-45 over Pendleton (0-7 IMC) on June



The Dalles junior Jaxon Pullen shoots around Redmond senior Preston Young (20), forcing a foul, during Tuesday's game in The Dalles June 8. Mark B. Gibson photo

1 and they came close to getting a win against Ridgeview, before losing an overtime thriller 56-52 June 4 at Ridgeview High in Redmond. If the Hawks tie Ridgeview

for fourth place with a 3-7 mark, The Dalles might earn the No. 4 seed in a tiebreaker and have a district playoff home game versus Ridgeview June 21. Ridgeview's last

two games are against IMC frontrunners Crook County and Redmond, which both recorded earlier blowout wins over the Ravens by 30 and 28 points.

HRV boys basketball playoff ranking decided this week

By Joe Petshov

For Columbia Gorge News

A first-round Intermountain Conference playoff bye and subsequent semifinal home game are among the incentives this week for the Hood River Valley boys basketball team.

The Eagles (7-2 overall, 5-2 IMC) enter the final week of the regular season in third place in the conference behind unbeaten Crook County (12-0 overall) and second place Redmond (8-2). HRV lost to both those teams in the first half of the season and the rematches are this week: Tuesday at Redmond (result came after the print edition deadline) and Thursday at Crook County. The Eagles conclude their regular season Friday at home against Pendleton.

The district playoff format has the top two teams in the regular-season standings earning first-round byes. The No. 1 and 2 seeds advance to the June 23 semifinals and home games against Monday's winners. The championship game is June 26 at the site of the higher

seeded team.

All the playoff spots have yet to be determined, but HRV can earn a first-round bye with a three-game sweep this week. The Eagles enter the week with some momentum, riding a three-game win streak — by an average margin of 24 points against the three teams below it in the standings: Ridgeview, The Dalles and Pendleton.

The Eagles face the two teams at the opposite side of the standings to start the week. Crook County is led by senior guard Kevin Sanchez and 6-foot-6 senior post Cayden Lowenbach. The two combined to score 53 of their team's 65 points in the first game against HRV. The Eagles will seek more consistency against the unbeaten Cowboys. HRV suffered from first- and third-quarter lulls, which enabled Crook County to build double-digit leads. Each time, to their credit, the Eagles clawed their way back into the game.

"The first time around with both teams we had chances to win the game and missed opportunities," Head Coach Christopher Dirks said. "They

were both great learning experiences and contributed to this great three-game streak we are on. We need to put together two complete games on the road to get the wins we need. Neither team will make it easy as both are talented and athletic. We need to focus on what we can do to make it happen and control what we can control."

One thing the Eagles can control is defense. "We are a good defensive team, allowing just 47 points per game," Dirks said. HRV proved that during its three-game win streak heading into the final week of the regular season. Those wins included limiting Ridgeview to 36 points on its home court June 8.

"Ridgeview was a dominant performance on the defensive end for us," Dirks said. "We were up 35-8 at halftime and held them to 35 percent shooting on the night. It was nice to have a game that we were able to control from

the start. We also did much better on the offensive end shooting 52 percent. Leading up to this game, we were 39 percent from the field from the season."

Emanuel Romero had 13 points and five assists, Jack Siekkinen had 10 points, and Davis Yates had six rebounds to lead the offensive categories for HRV.

Two days later, the Eagles dispatched Gorge rival The Dalles, 74-56, in a contest that started in a friendly manner — with an uncontested dunk.

"It was our senior night," Dirks explained. "It's always a fun environment when we get to play The Dalles, and we got to honor all of our seniors. Ian Searcy, who has had to miss our entire season due to injury, got to start the game and score a dunk as The Dalles was gracious enough to give him that opportunity. He then subbed out and resumed his role as

an assistant coach. It is too bad he couldn't play this year, but I am grateful he got to get his name called one more time."

The Eagles also honored seniors Emilio Castaneda, Siekkinen, Zac Wells, Sebastian Zeman, Michael Goodman, Yates, and Talon Achziger. They then steadily took control of the game, leading by nine at the half en route to the 18-point win.

"The guys did a great job adjusting to what The Dalles was doing on defense with a 2-3 zone," Dirks said. "Each time the game got close, we would find an opening in the defense and get a few quick buckets to keep a lead."

Romero led the way with 25 points — including 4-of-7 shooting from 3-point range — and six assists; Yates added 13 points and Siekkinen had nine rebounds.

Dirks said the season has just recently settled into a rhythm, with the "spring"

sports season extending into the "winter" season. "We had an interesting first few weeks as varsity players were finishing their prior sport season," he said. "Aden Ziemer, Tommy Ziegler, and Chris Garcia all stepped up from the JV team to help us get wins at the varsity level in our first week of games."

"Because of all of the roster moves we had to make, we are just now figuring out rotations and lineups with a week left in conference play. We are getting to know who we can be and are focused on peaking in the playoffs to make a run at the championship. Taking a step back and thinking about where we were six months ago, I just feel so grateful we were able to play. I missed this all so much and I know my guys did too."

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