

Champs: The Gulls had nine players in the scoring column

Continued from Page 1A

The Gulls were ranked No. 1 at the Class 4A level almost from Day 1 of the season.

With the returning state Player of the Year and a host of quick and talented (but not very tall) athletes, the Seaside boys showed early on that they would be nearly impossible to beat.

They lost just once, to Valley Catholic, Feb. 10. After that, the Gulls closed out the regular season with two must-wins. And with their colors of Red, White and Columbia Blue, they flew past the competition in the play-offs and the state tournament, winning five in a row — including two victories over the Valiants.

They played Valley Catholic four times — twice in the regular season and two times in the post-season. And no match-up between the Valiants and Gulls was ever bigger than Saturday night's championship.

Night of the Gulls

Seaside trailed just twice (5-4 and 10-7), but the rest of the night belonged to the Gulls, their fans, their alumni ... the entire town, it seemed, was either in attendance, or at home watching or listening.

As the 11 o'clock hour came and went, it was hugs and parties all around as Seaside celebrated in the stands and on the court at Forest Grove High School.

"Looking up in those stands and seeing how our community supports our youth is special," said Seaside coach Bill Westerholm, who finally made his way off the court and into the locker room.

"And it's nice to get our first-ever state championship, as well," he said. "There's been some great basketball teams in Seaside. This may not be the greatest basketball team that we've had, but this year, it's the greatest basketball team at the 4A level.

"And these kids deserve it," said Westerholm, equally deserving in his 19th year as the Seaside coach. "Our senior leadership is by far better than on any team I've ever had. Jackson Januik is a leader. Hunter Thompson is just a warrior. Attikin Babb, Otto Hoekstre ... they've done everything we've asked them to do since they were in the third grade."

Januik went out in style — with a game-high 29 points, Player of the Game honors, chants of "M-V-P" from the student section ... it was the stuff of dreams.

"That's a fairy-tale ending," said Seaside's senior floor leader. "I couldn't picture it any better than that. This season was amazing, with my teammates, coaches and the fan support ... that was the greatest ending I could ever think of."

It was a nostalgic night for Westerholm, a graduate of Seaside and long-time community member.

"Seeing our community there ... I could have walked through and hugged every single person," he said. "Because I knew every single person there, somehow. Growing up in that community, the alumni that came back and the kids and players who came back ... and players who I looked up to, alumni that played basketball at Seaside."

They were all there, on hand to witness a first for Seaside basketball.



Photos by Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Seagulls' Jackson Januik celebrates his team's win at the conclusion of the game as Seaside defeated Valley Catholic in the 4A state championship game on Saturday in Forest Grove.



LEFT: Seaside Seagulls' Payton Westerholm goes up for a rebound during the first half against Valley Catholic in the 4A state championship game on Saturday. RIGHT: Seaside Seagulls' Chase Januik goes up for a layup against Valley Catholic in the 4A state championship game on Saturday in Forest Grove.



The game

Trailing 10-7, Januik knocked down a 3-pointer to tie the game, then hit a jumper moments later for the lead.

The Valiants tied the game at 12-12, but Seaside's Ryan Hague — who missed a good portion of the season with an injury — responded with a jump shot that gave the Gulls a 14-12 after one quarter. And Seaside never trailed again.

Januik opened the second period with a trey, Duncan Thompson scored on a baseline drive, Chase Januik drained a 3-pointer for a 24-16 lead, and his big brother knocked down another for a 27-18 advantage. Valley Catholic didn't surrender easily, as the Valiants reeled off seven straight points to draw within 27-25 at halftime.

"We had gotten out of our offensive flow," Jackson Januik said. "We were stagnant, and needed to get back to what we were doing."

Westerholm said, "We did a good job the first quarter, but the second quarter we became stagnant. You just can't pass the ball without dribbling against this group. You have to create some sort of angle, and we didn't do a very good job of creating angles in the second quarter, because (the Valiants) are long, athletic, and we gave them some turnovers in the second quarter that let them back in it."

Not to worry, however.

Hunter Thompson's 3-pointer highlighted a quick 8-2 run for the Gulls to open the second half.

And a couple of sophomores made perhaps the plays of the night that put

Seaside over the top.

Payton Westerholm's 3-pointer at the 3:35 mark of the third quarter made it 38-29, and moments later he stole the ball and dished it to Duncan Thompson, who scored, drew the foul and completed a three-point play for a 41-29 lead.

The Valiants made a brief run, highlighted by a steal and dunk by Daniel Hardy that had the Valley fans on their feet ... but Valley Catholic never seemed to recover from Seaside's 14-4 run in the third period.

Following Hardy's slam, the Gulls quickly regained the momentum, as Chase Januik beat the buzzer with a running jumper to end the third quarter, and Jackson Januik opened the fourth with a trey, pushing the lead right back to 46-36.

"We did a better job offensively the second half," coach Westerholm said. "The tide turned a little, and we handled that adversity in the second quarter. Attikin had some decent plays here and there, everybody contributed."

"We became more patient in the second half. There was one possession in the third quarter where we made three or four passes, reversed the ball, came back, reversed it again, and Chase hit the three. That was some great ball movement."

"That 3-point play (by Duncan Thompson) was big," said his big brother, Hunter. "Then we had a steal right after, where either Jackson or Payton stole it. And we just kept the pressure on and wore them down by the time the third, fourth quarter came around."

And the Valiants were done.

Seaside's final 12 points came at the free-throw line, as the final period turned into a free-throw shooting contest. Both teams combined to shoot 67 free throws (the Gulls were 26-of-36, Valley Catholic finished 22-for-31).

Last year's loss to Philomath in the state championship game served as a motivation for those who played in the game. A motivation to not lose.

"Sitting where Valley Catholic is tonight, that was us last year," Hunter Thompson said after the game. Last year's loss "killed us. It was horrible."

Januik added, "We just came in last year like, 'oh, we're playing in the game.' This year we were playing to win. Our game plan was to win."

"Only a couple of us played and got minutes in that game, but I think our confidence tonight was huge. Everybody was just screaming before the game. We were energized. We came into the game with energy and gave a lot from the beginning."

In addition to the Seaside crowd, students from Banks High School were on hand (the Braves had lost the girls' state championship just hours earlier), and gave the Gulls a little boost with the crowd noise.

"The Banks fans were great," Januik said. "Combined with our fans, that was the greatest student section I've ever seen."

Senior leaders

Seaside's senior guard tandem of Jackson Januik and Hunter Thompson — one of the most talented backcourt

duos in Clatsop County since Astoria's Bobby Anet and Wally Johansen — went out as state champions.

Between summer ball, camps, off-season scrimmages and winters spent as teammates from the first grade through their senior years, the goal was finally reached.

"We knew Seaside had never won a state championship, and to do that for the city and for the school was a goal," Januik said. "And it feels amazing. To win a state championship in front of all those fans ... for the first time for Seaside ... it's incredible."

Thompson said, "I remember being at the third-place game (in 2011), and cheering them and being super excited."

Another state Player of the Year award would be the perfect way to cap a perfect season for Januik.

"Jackson played a good tournament," coach Westerholm said. "I know he was disappointed last year, because he didn't shoot the ball very well (in last year's championship game). But he bounced back, and that's not always easy to do. When you can come back the following year and redeem yourself ... or himself — because he puts a lot of that on him."

Two reporters were overheard in the hallway after the game, talking about the undersized Gulls ("they're fast and fearless," said one), with no player on the roster over 6-foot-4. The Valiants have nine players from 6-4 to 6-8.

"There's teams from Portland that would come down and look at our team and play us," Westerholm said. "They'd get beat and say it's the officials' fault."

"I think you can say that we were the best team in the state this year," he said. "It wasn't a fluke. I've never seen a team that has this much heart, this much fight in them. They're basketball savvy, they've been coached well throughout their whole careers ... these guys are special."

Road to the final

In Friday's semifinal game at Forest Grove High School, Seaside led from start to finish on its way to a 67-55 win over North Bend, securing a spot in Saturday night's championship game for the Gulls.

The Bulldogs came into the game riding a 16-game win streak ... and, not coincidentally, the last team to beat the Bulldogs was the very same Seaside team, 82-62 back on Dec. 20.

North Bend's guard play "has gotten a lot better," Seaside coach Bill Westerholm said. "We created a lot of turnovers at their place and went on a 3-point barrage. But (the Bulldogs) do a lot of good things. They're big and long and lanky. Our game plan tonight was to get them up and down the court."

The Gulls had nine players in the scoring column, led by Jackson Januik's 16, with Chase Januik adding 12.

"Last year, we were excited that we were in the championship," Westerholm said. "And we forgot that we had to play the championship game. We were taking pictures and all that stuff the night before the game. This time, these kids know what they're here for."

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