

SPORTS

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ASTORIA GIRLS FISHING FOR STATE HOOPS TITLE

Lady Fishermen play La Grande in first round

By **GARY HENLEY**
The Astorian

It’s a group that has been winning trophies their whole careers, and over the next three days these Lady Fishermen will be after their biggest catch ever.

Opening Thursday against La Grande, the Astoria girls basketball team is hoping to win the state title Saturday in Forest Grove.

All games will be broadcast on osaa.org.

It would be the first championship in Astoria school history for girls basketball, and a first for the coach.

Mike Jacobson has taken girls basketball teams from Knappa and Seaside to past state tournaments, and out of all of those great teams from the past (and no offense to the Loggers and Gulls), he says this year’s Astoria team may have the best shot at reeling in the blue trophy.

The strength of Astoria’s team is obviously its harassing, smothering, dominating defense. Teams at the 4A level just don’t know how to deal with it. The first obstacle is just getting the ball across the mid-court line. And if they do, then pick up their dribble, Astoria’s defenders are all over the ball handler like sharks in the water.

“This is probably the best defensive team I’ve coached, overall,” Jacobson said. “I just don’t remember ever having this deep of a team, where you can bring three kids off the bench, plus your starting five to go eight players deep. Not many teams can do that.”

Other teams “might have one off the bench, but after that it usually drops off quite a bit. We really don’t.”

Jacobson is currently at 340 victories over his 20 years coaching. The next milestone (win No. 347) would put him in the all-time top 25 career coaching wins in Oregon girls basketball.

He was 117-47 in six years at Knappa (2000-05), and 125-102 in seven seasons with Seaside.

His current assistant coaches include Alex Eterno and daughter Corey Jacobson.

Mike Jacobson’s last trip to a state tournament was 2008, when he took the Lady Gulls to Gill Coliseum in Corvallis. Seaside went two-and-out, with losses to Marist and Ontario.

“We just weren’t quite as deep,” he said of that team, led by the duo of Ashley Mayfield and Marla Olstedt. “If any of those girls got in foul trouble, we were in trouble.”

Astoria’s current group of seniors includes Brooklynn Hankwitz, Julia Norris and Hailey O’Brien, along with juniors Halle Helmersen and Kelsey Fausett — insuring another title contender next season and in the years to come, which will feature younger sisters of players on this year’s team.

In addition to that, “we have Kajsa (Jackson), Sophie (Long) and Kailee (Fisher) coming in off the bench,” Jacobson said.

Astoria’s top six players can lead the team in scoring on any given night, “and not many teams can do that.”

In attendance at last Saturday’s Junction City vs. Astoria game (won by the Lady Fish, 73-34) was Olstedt, now an assistant coach at Seaside. If anyone knows how Mike Jacobson’s teams play, it’s Olstedt.

“Astoria is ready to play,” she said. “Coach Jacobson has high expecta-



Astoria’s Kajsa Jackson and Julia Norris, right, trap a Junction City player in last Saturday’s playoff win.



Mike Jacobson talking with his Seaside team at the 2008 state tournament.

tions, and he prepares his teams so they know what to expect. He’s in a great position, because he has a lot of players. They’re pretty deep. It’s an awesome group of girls, and I hope the best for them.”

This time of year, athletes are in the habit of thinking softball, track or golf.

“Sometimes they do, but this group has a goal in mind,” Jacobson said. “They wanted to be league champs, which we got, and we have some other goals that we want to reach. They’re pretty hungry for it, just looking at them and the way they played (last Sat-

urday),” against Junction City.

“All the starters played well, and even the kids who came in off the bench.”

In addition, “we’re playing good defense,” Jacobson said, which is scary, since the Lady Fish came into the season with one of if not the best defense in the state at the 4A level.

“We have to limit teams, and play our game,” Jacobson said. “We don’t want to switch our style of play to fit somebody else. Even the girls said that at halftime,” in the win over the Tigers. “Like they say, ‘defense travels,’ so



The Astorian
Mike Jacobson’s defense looked much the same in 2008, when he took Seaside to the state tournament with Ashley Mayfield (10) and Marla Olstedt.

hopefully we can keep it up. They’ve put a lot of time in on the floor, from middle school to now,” Jacobson said of his players. “They’re ready to do it.”

It was former college coach Bob Walsh who said, “Great team defense is a separator. There are a lot of programs that don’t emphasize it and coaches that don’t spend time teaching it. So if you do it and do it well you can put your program on a different level. Great defense travels, and allows you to overcome a lot of deficiencies. You can count on it every night.”

Olstedt also knows that style — both playing it and facing it.

Jacobson’s teams are “always high-intensity,” she said. “They set the pace and the tone for the game. It was fun to be a part of when I played at Seaside. It’s great when it works out, when you’re creating turnover after turnover. That’s easy basketball, and that’s when it’s fun. But that pressure ... it’s not fun to be on the other end of it.”

The Astoria players “know their responsibilities, and they’re good at finding your weaknesses early. And they’ve got lots of weapons,” she said. “That’s the great thing about their team. This is a special group that Mike has, and I’m excited for them.”

The key to this year’s state tournament for the 4A girls: The Astoria Lady Fishermen know they can outplay any team in the field.

“You have Philomath and Baker, which are both good teams,” Jacobson said. “And Hidden Valley and La Grande ... the final eight are all good teams.”

At the same time, Astoria thoroughly outplayed No. 1-ranked Philomath Dec. 21, even though the Warriors eventually won the game, 51-50.

“We were up by 13 at one point in that game,” Jacobson said, in the second half. “We just had too many fouls, and we fouled them on a shot with less than a second left, and they made two free throws to beat us.”

The Astoria players “know they can play with anybody in the state at our level. We’re looking forward to it. It’s going to be a fun time. Hopefully we can get a lot of people there.”

And, hoping there’s a Cowapa League team from the North Coast that bring home a trophy, Olstedt says, “Mike is a great coach. You know his group will compete every game. He makes sure his teams are in great shape and that will help tremendously playing three days of basketball. This group of girls has worked hard and hopefully they take care of business.”

SCOREBOARD

PREP SPORTS SCHEDULE	
THURSDAY	
4A state tournament at Forest Grove High School	
Girls	Vale 34, Willamina 33
1:30: Cottage Grove vs. Philomath	2A Girls Championship
3:15: La Grande vs. Astoria	Kennedy 48, Monroe 26
6:30: North Marion vs. Hidden Valley	Third/Fifth
8:15: Valley Catholic vs. Baker	Bandon 56, Union 34
Boys	Fourth/Sixth
1:30: Gladstone vs. Marist Catholic	Coquille 51, Central Linn 34
3:15: Stayton vs. Henley	3A Boys Championship
6:30: Klamath Union vs. Philomath	Oregon Episcopal 35, Cascade Christian 33
8:15: Woodburn vs. North Marion	Third/Fifth
STATE TOURNAMENT RESULTS	Creswell 73, St. Mary's 68
3A Girls Championship	Fourth/Sixth
Clatskanie 51, Sutherlin 40	Salem Academy 45, De La Salle 43
Third/Fifth	2A Boys Championship
Burns 49, Brookings-Harbor 41	Toledo 58, Western Christian 48
Fourth/Sixth	Third/Fifth
	Columbia Christian 64, Knappa 49
	Fourth/Sixth
	Santiam 60, Oakland 43

Astoria’s Hunt inducted into Thurston Hall of Fame

The Astorian

Former Astoria volleyball coach Angee Hunt was a Hall of Fame inductee last month, as part of Thurston High School’s Class of 2020 athletic Hall of Fame.

As Angee Henderson, Hunt was a stand-out athlete at Thurston, located in Springfield. She graduated in 1991, and went on to play volleyball at the University of Oregon (1991-94), where she still ranks in the top 10 all-time in



Angee Hunt

block assists.

Hunt later coached volleyball at Cottage Grove and Astoria, where she led the Fishermen to the state title match in 2012.

Hunt joined Thurston graduates Bryan Sorenson (1987), Lisa Beckham-Stedman (1990), Josh Sessums (1995), Travis Harwell (1997), Sarah Barrett Levrets (1998), Josh Heacock (1999) and Sheila Lewellen (coach 1980-present) in Thurston’s Class of 2020 Hall of Fame class.