

# Chemawa basketball: turning things around

Story and photos by Brent Merrill

The girl's basketball program at Chemawa Indian High School has a new direction and a new attitude.

Head Coach Kristi Daniels (Coeur d'Alene) has a message for other Tri-River League opponents — "Be afraid. Be really afraid."

After years of losing seasons, things have changed.

"We have a new direction here at Chemawa," said Daniels who is in her third year as the coach. "We have talent and we are gaining momentum."

Daniels is teaching the girls about the difference between success and mediocrity.

"A lot of these kids didn't care if we won," said Daniels. "It was the same feeling around here if we won or if we lost. There was no team spirit. It took me almost until the middle of the season to get those girls together and understand what being a team was all about."

Talks about pride and privilege became the norm for Daniel's team. They talk about being proud of their heritage and how that could carry over onto the basketball floor. They talk about what a privilege it is to be a student athlete.

"I told them being Native American was something they should be very proud to be," said Daniels.

Daniels said she knows her team faces an uphill challenge if they are going to be successful. Chemawa plays in a league where teams have played together since elementary school and have been groomed for success. The teams they face play all year long and participate in holiday tournaments.

"The league that we are in is one of the hardest leagues in the state," said Daniels. "At least two of the teams from our league have placed in state every year. We are an all Native team. These girls that we are playing against have all grown up together and have played together since grade school and junior high. And, we come together. We are a team. We're a family."

"It's really hard, but I wouldn't coach anywhere else," said Daniels. "I really love these girls."

Daniels said the team has become close. She said there is more at work in her program than just basketball skills. She said the team has built a solid foundation that gets stronger with each new year.

"For me, I don't think that anyone really real-



izes how good a feeling it is when we win another game," said Daniels. "Our reputation is that we are very physical and one of the hardest teams to play in our league and nobody wants to come to our gym," said Daniels of why other teams should take notice. "I think that we have taken it good. These kids live here."

Daniels wants the girls on her team to make good choices in life. She wants them to learn respect for themselves and others.

"I really believe in respect and respecting yourself," said Daniels who is a single parent, full-time college student and full-time basketball coach. "That is my big message to these girls that I preach everyday."

## Boy's basketball is back at Chemawa Indian High School.

After years of losing, the team now has a chance to win in almost every game. In the past, blowout losses were regular happenings and wins were rare. League wins were unheard of.

Last season, when the first victory came, a seed was planted.

Momentum began to grow. The idea that winning was possible became a reality.

Head Coach Rick Waddell said he tries to teach the players more than just how to win. He said the team has regular talks about how to conduct themselves as men and how to make the right choices in life.

"Last year was the first game the team had won in at least four years in basketball," said Waddell. "This year was the first time in many years that



we won any league games and we won three of those. We have had several close games and there were another five games that we probably should have won."

Part of the rebirth of the team is an outstanding tandem of seniors — center Lloyd Whatoname and point guard Elvin Lee Fred.

The duo has played well enough to keep the team in many games they would not have had a chance in during the last few seasons. Whatoname was named the player of the week earlier this season for back to back outstanding performances.

"Last year no one in Oregon had really seen me," said Whatoname. "But, this year it's better because people are seeing what I'm capable of doing. They try and stop me but they can't. It makes you feel pretty good."

Fred said the team needed time at the beginning of the season to get use to each other.

Students at the school come from all over the country and for the most part meet each other when the school year or basketball season begins. The teams they play against in the Tri-River Conference usually have been playing together since junior high.

"Our season went pretty good. We started out and we needed to learn how to function together," said Elvin Lee Fred. "It's the first time Chemawa has won in a long time."

"Basketball is just one of the things I'm trying to teach these kids," said Waddell. "I want them to be successful at whatever they do. If they go back to the reservation I want them to feel like they can shoot for the best job available there. If they don't go back — I want to encourage them to further their education and not accept anything less than what they are capable of achieving. I want them to be the best that they can be."

The success of the boy's and girl's athletic teams has carried over to the rest of the student body according to Principal Larry Beyers. He said this year has been the most positive year in a long time.

## Youth Leadership

Continued from front page

School, and Portland/Salem Title IX. Tribal Youth Education Supervisor Lisa Leno said Rainier's energy is truly inspiring to everyone he meets.

"I think the thing about him is the way that he works — I think with people, adults or youth — he just brings you to another level of what you're capable of," said Leno of Rainier. All the staff and the youth really, really like him. Some of them had worked with him last year when he was here."

Leno said the course consists of five one-day sessions over a five month period. Public speaking ability, cultural pride and the ability to work within a group setting are the skills the Youth Leadership Academy tries to enhance and nurture.

"The idea behind this is to teach youth leadership skills," said Leno.

Leno said part of the program is sharing circles where small groups examine important issues more intently than possible in a larger setting.

"In every sharing circle there is two youth leaders and one adult leader," explained Leno. "The whole idea of this is really hands-on and pushing you outside your comfort zone. It teaches you to be able to stand up in front of a group and tell them your message."

"The idea is to bring these youth together and



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~ Lisa Leno  
Tribal Youth  
Education Supervisor

make them aware of other Native people — where they are from, the differences and similarities," said Leno.

The idea is that they form a coalition of Native people that will continue to have working relationships and friendships, said Leno.

"We want to get people together for one cause and that is what the Academy hopefully gives them," said Leno. "I think what is really interesting to me, being involved in it, is that a lot of students don't typically speak out in class and don't speak out in groups. However, when you get them in this kind of a learning environment you see them seek out and say things that you didn't know

they could — because everybody else is doing it. Everybody is here to gain leadership skills, cultural awareness and self-esteem."

Leno has been the youth education supervisor for grades 6-12 for the last three years.

"It (the job) is fun. One thing our program is really trying to do is get involved with as many other Native groups as possible," said Leno. "It's working. The kids in the leadership academy are getting to know each other."

Rainier said he could see changes taking place in the faces of the young people he spoke with.

"The most important thing I saw, already, is growth," said Rainier. "Spurts of growth. In today's world — these young people they have so many questions," said Rainier. "What it really comes down to is who is teaching what to whom."

Rainier then told a story about a student who was about to go to law school and needed advice. Rainier said he told the student to be proud and do his job well when the opportunity came. He told the student everything he needed was inside.

"It is right here," said Rainier pointing to his heart. "Nobody can take that away from you. I don't care where you go — you are Indian. Feel it. Say it. Defend it. Get out there an act like a warrior."

"The impact is powerful," said Rainier of his message of pride in all things. "It is powerful."