

MURRAY

Continued from 1B

experience with young players helped establish his fundamental philosophy.

“I coach for the kids, and if I can teach them something, then I’ve done my job. And yes, you want to be competitive and you want to win. Those are great things. But it’s more important to instill what an honor it is to it to play this sport and play it hard,” he said.

After coaching Murray for three years at Marist and knowing his basketball pedigree (Murray’s father, John, played at Oregon during the 1970s Kamikaze Kids era), Schmerbach was not surprised to see him blossom as his assistant at Sacred Heart.

“Michael was a natural, and the program hasn’t been the same since he left,” said Schmerbach, who is now an assistant at Southern Oregon — his

alma mater. “He was a tough, hard-nosed player who did everything you asked of him. He understands all the little things a team has to do to be successful.”

Prior to his junior year, Murray attempted to return to competitive basketball.

“When you love something that much it’s hard to let go,” he said. “So I thought to myself, ‘why not try?’ If I didn’t make it, I would know the reasons why.”

He tried out for Southern Oregon and Northwest Christian, and although he was more physically mature than a couple years before, both schools were set at the guard position.

“It was a hard transition and brought about that defining moment of, ‘what am I going to do now?’ And still to this day I miss it,” Murray said.

After graduating with a degree in elementary education, Murray returned to Eugene and be-

gan coaching eighth-grade boys in the Oregon Amateur Basketball organization. After meeting Marist head coach Bart Pollard at an open gym, he was offered the J.V. boys’ job.

“Coaching J.V. was fine, but your last game is your last game. The only real measurable outcomes are: Did the kids have a good experience? And did they learn something? I wanted to coach at a higher level because you can play for something, and that teaches kids to fight for something.”

And although the girls’ season ended sooner than expected, that type of heartbreaking finality affirmed his decision.

“This season wasn’t what I thought it would be, but it was more than I could have hoped for and wouldn’t change it for the world,” Murray said. “Getting to the tournament would have meant a lot to this team, but there’s always an ending

point.”

At this time, Murray is undecided on his future. He currently does construction work in Eugene. The schedule allows him the flexibility to coach during the after-school hours, but he doesn’t know if it’s in his long-term career plans.

If he sticks with coaching, he is leaning toward returning to Cottage Grove. Murray said he developed a good working relationship with Clawson and would hate to leave the team after building a rapport with the players.

"I was glad to hear that he branched out to girls' basketball, and I hope that he sticks with it because he is an up-and-coming coach in the state," said Schmerbach. "I wouldn't be surprised to see him coaching at a championship level within the next few years."

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Continued from 1B

lead with under two minutes to play in overtime, and Cottage Grove committed a turnover on its very next possession as well.

The Lions also had uncharacteristic struggles at the free-throw line, where they went 8-for-21 and missed on an opportunity to take the lead at the end of regulation.

“Obviously we’re disappointed and understand that we didn’t play well enough to win,” said Lion coach Kerry Clawson.

Cottage Grove (14-11) swept Junction City (13-12) in the regular season, with both wins coming by double digits. And after the Lions jumped out to a 9-0 lead, they appeared to be on their way to three in a row.

However, coach Liz Bolton was confident that her Tigers would be able to put those previous losses behind them and reverse their fortunes this time around.

“We had more time to prepare for this game, and we came in with a completely different mindset and game plan,” she said.

After the initial foray, Junction City capitalized off of Cottage Grove turnovers and missed shots to score in transition. And in their half-court game, the Tigers saw opportunity in the paint against a depleted Lion frontcourt. Junction City brought down 11 offensive rebounds.

According to Clawson, usual starter Hannah Arnold strained a hip muscle in practice; she was only able to play for brief stretches of time. And while Delia Nichols-Ferguson was effective in her place, foul trouble meant more playing time for Hannah Albrecht, who typically plays a wing position.

“This team has showed tremendous resiliency all season long, but we never caught a break as far as injuries,” said Clawson, who noted that only two players were available for every game this season.

The Tigers opened the second half on an 8-2

run, but Conner Borigo scored seven of her game-high 25 points in the third quarter to keep the Lions within range.

Junction City increased its lead to 33-26 midway through the fourth quarter and began milking the clock with each possession. However, this lack of urgency may have cost them, as Cottage Grove outscored the Tigers 7-0 down the stretch to force overtime.

The Lions scored the first two baskets of overtime and appeared on their way to escape until the fateful series of turnovers.

Clawson said that in hindsight she should have considered calling a timeout to regroup after the first turnover but trusted that her team would know how to respond in their 25th game of the season. However, the Lions the allowed 50 seconds to run off before fouling Junction City, leaving them precious little time to run a final play.

“It was tough, especially being a senior,” said Sayles. “They came out ready to play and we weren’t ready for it.”

Since winning the state championship in 2010, Cottage Grove has yet to return to the state tournament. Junction City moves on to face No. 3 Valley Catholic in the first round of the playoffs.

“When it’s close to being over, everyone on this team plays their best,” said Tiger McKenna Straube. “The playoffs are a whole new season, and we’re really enjoying this moment.”

Sky-Em Boys Basketball						League: Cottage Mixers						2. Jennifer Fox 560					
						Date: Feb. 25						3.Jacki Jackson 514					
												MIDDLEFIELD MENS GOLF					
												Date: Feb. 23					
												Game: 2 Points					