## Lions *from B1*

against Madras. In Cottage Grove's 48-40 win over Centralia two days later, Bascue did the gritty work with 11 rebounds and three blocks while Berry (eight points, three rebounds, four assists, four steals) and fellow sophomores Jayden Cameron (nine points, three rebounds) and Landon Colburn (11 points, five assists, four steals) provided an offensive spark.

"I saw a lot of maturity. I saw a lot of kids starting to turn the corner a little bit, starting to make those next steps," Hutchison said, while adding that the team still has a long way to go.

"Now, it wasn't consistent and we're trying to get to consistency. That's kinda the goal for us, that we're doing things correctly, 100 percent of the time. That's going to take time with the youth that we have … We're really trying to gear up for January, for our first league game against Siuslaw. Everything we're doing is going towards that. Our goals start there."

The recent progress, however, shouldn't come as a surprise as taking on challenges in an effort to improve has been a part of Hutchison's plans since the summer. The Lions competed in the Eugene summer basketball league with bigger schools like Churchill, Sheldon, North Eugene and South Eugene.

"I want these kids playing a lot of basketball and I'm a big believer in being challenged," Hutchison said. "I think if you're challenged, you're gonna get to where you wanna be faster."

And the challenges will continue. After a three-day weekend tournament on the coast, the Lions head the opposite direction on Fri., Dec. 27 for the Sisters Holiday Tournament where their first game will be against defending state champion Banks.

The Lady Lions started 2019 with a small slump of their own, going 1-2 in their first three contests, but have since turned their year around in a big way. The girls have gone 4-1 in their last five games including a 2-1 record at the Seaside Tournament with a 65-21 win over Newport, a 49-46 victory over Elma (Wash.) and 60-29 loss to Washougal (Wash.).

Unlike the boys, Steve Eastburn's girls' squad will take a break for the holidays. Their next games will take place at the Stayton Varsity International Tourney at Stayton High School, Jan. 2-4.

## Swimming *from B1*

as Cottage Grove stood well above their district counterparts — Henley, St. Mary's and North Valley — on the scoreboard.

Against Salem Academy, many swimmers were tasked with swimming events they weren't accustomed to in an effort to further parse out the best lineups moving forward. Having a glut of options is certainly nothing a coach would complain about.

"Having a lot of new swimmers come in, it's definitely giving our team a lot of depth," Pilling said discussing the road to the district meet.

Despite the lineup changes, the Lions earned 16 event wins against the Crusaders. The boys won the 200 medley relay (2:06.10, Ayden Kimery, Fisher Nash, James Kelly, Iverson Bascue) along with the 200 freestyle (2:04.86, Kelly), 200 individual medley (2:40.48, Max McCasline), 100 backstroke (1:16.20, Bascue) and 100 breaststroke (1:15.43, Nash).

The girls swept the three relay events and got eight more individual event wins in the 500 freestyle (6:21.09, Kalee Walter), 100 backstroke (1:13.11, Nadia Witt), 100 breaststroke (1:26.94, Peyton Baird), 200 freestyle (2:41.28, Evie Smith), 200 individual medley (2:38.80, MJ Raade), 50 freestyle (27.35, Mikayla Baird), 100 freestyle (1:01.73, M. Baird) and 100 butterfly (1:20.77, P. Baird.)

Friday's meet was also an early test for the Warren H. Daugherty Aquatic Center and its capacity as host of February's district meet. There were five teams present and the bleachers were nearly full. Districts will bring 12 teams and their friends and family to Cottage Grove.

For someone less experienced with CG swimming and less connected to the facility and the swim community, it might be cause for concern. But not for Pilling.

"One thing that's really helpful is that we have so much support," Pilling said. "Teams that really supported us from when we had our old facility to our new facility are Marshfield and North Eugene. North Eugene helped us out a ton with pool time during our water polo season when we didn't have a home. Also, they run 5A districts so they're helping us [logistically] run 4A. Then, Marshfield ran 4A districts last year, so their people came down to help."

It's fair to say the Daugherty Center will be prepared when the time comes, but CG swim fans should be advised that arriving early for parking isn't the worst idea for the Feb. 14-15 event. For the time being, things are going just about as well as they could.

"As they were leaving, some of the coaches were saying how great it was and how much fun districts will be," Pilling said. "Some of those teams haven't been in the Cottage Grove pool for more than ten years."

Competitive swimming is well and truly back in the Grove.

## Blazers *from B1*

grade, girls are 50 percent more likely than boys to drop out of sports, "creating barriers both physically and socially that can last a lifetime."

To remedy this inequality, Nike partnered with the NBA and WNBA to create the Game Growers initiative. In October and November of this year, eighth-grade girls from around the country were invited to submit their ideas on how to grow basketball participation amongst young girls in their communities.

"They went to a Nike basketball camp over the summer and I just got a random email [about Game Growers] and I said, 'Oh, you guys should do this,'" said Sophia Raade, Lebow's mother.

The girls began discussing ideas and eventually submitted their proposal. The idea centers around physical education classes being the foundation of kids' introduction to sports. The program would invite local collegiate or professional women's players into middle school P.E. classes to both help instruct and share their stories in the sport, discouraging the concept that girls continuing in sports is in any way embarrassing or strange. It certainly helps that some of the most inspirational talent in the women's basketball world is just a short drive north of the Grove.

"They had to draw a big picture with the application and they drew a picture of [Sabrina Ionescu]," said Raade.

Once the application period ended in November, each member team of the two professional basketball leagues then selected the two local students with the best proposal to be that team's representatives at the Game Growers workshop at Nike's World Headquarters from Jan. 24-26, 2020.

Not only were Bickford and Lebow chosen by the Trailblazers, but unlike many of the participating teams who informed their winners via email, Portland decided to tell their winners in person with a little extra fanfare.

"When we found out, [the girls] had just had their last game, so we were like, 'Can we tell them?'" Raade said. "[The Blazers] said, 'No, don't tell them. Our plan is to wait and announce it at the game."

The team provided the girls and their families with 100-level tickets to last Saturday's game and a wealth of behind-the-scenes experiences both before and during the contest, including a walk through the players-only entrance into the Moda Center.

The girls, however, were kept in the dark about the real reason they were there.

"My mom told me that my uncle got these tickets through his work," Bickford said. "Then he said something came up at work so he's giving the tickets to us and two friends because he heard how much we like basketball."

As a team official continued showing them around the arena, Bickford noticed her name tag read, 'Youth Engagement Specialist', and the observant eighth-grader became suspicious.

"They were slowly figuring it out," said Raade. "So I showed them the winners from Washington on my phone and they thought they lost."

"So then we actually believed in the 'uncle' thing again," Bickford said laughing.

The jig was up for good when an event organizer, while leading the girls out to halfcourt during halftime, began asking Lebow how to pronounce her name when they read it over the intercom.

"I realized it when Blaze [the Trailblazers mascot] was coming over with Nike backpacks full of stuff," said Bickford. "Then this person named Scott came up to us and said, 'OK, we're just gonna walk into midcourt and when I wave, you guys wave because you're on the big screen.'"

It was an overwhelming moment for the young basketball visionaries, standing at halfcourt, waving to the crowd while surrounded by all the chaotic hubbub of professional sports entertainment. The girls were then whisked off the court by team personnel after their appearance on the jumbotron and team officials filled them in on what and why they had won. It was then that it began to sink in and the girls were elated.

According to the Blazers, the two Lincoln Middle Schoolers' proposal was by far the best they received and they will next get a chance to improve upon and add detail to their idea along with all the other NBA and WNBA team winners at next month's workshop in Beaverton.

The girls are already brainstorming how to further flesh out their concept and hope to add a scholarship facet that would eliminate financial barriers to sports participation that many young female athletes face. If all goes well, there could be even bigger things in the future.

"If we keep going, we have a chance to go to New York," said Bickford.

After the conclusion of the three-day training camp at Nike Headquarters, selected teams with the best proposals amongst the round one winners will be sent to the WNBA draft, held in April in New York City. At that point, the girls would have a chance to see their proposal be implemented nationally.

While still relatively early in the program's process, simply addressing this inequality in boys' and girls' sports participation is a big step in the right direction. Whether or not Bickford and Lebow make it further in the contest is beside the point. They've already shown Cottage Grove could be a community that leads the way.

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