

Nichols begins waiting game for a chance at pros

By Lukas Eggen
The Itemizer-Observer

FONTANA, Calif. — Julian Nichols closed the door on his Monmouth apartment for the last time on Friday.

After two years, 54 wins and a trip to the NCAA Division II Final Four with Western Oregon's men's basketball team, Nichols returned home to California.

There, he'll face the most difficult part of chasing his professional basketball career — the wait.

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Since the end of June, Nichols has taken part in multiple showcases, including one in Las Vegas featuring 60 to 70 players.

"My mindset was just to play hard and let the fluidity of the game come to me," he said. "Don't force anything."

He received feedback from scouts and agents in attendance, but no formal offers were made.

"I'm at the point where it's a waiting game," Nichols said. "I don't stress out at all about this part of the process. I can only control what I can control. Everything else really isn't up to me. It's just a matter of someone taking a chance on me now."



Julian Nichols returned to California while he waits for a chance to play pro basketball.

While he waits, he's returning to his hometown of Fontana, Calif. Don't let that fool you into thinking it's a sign of resignation.

The move back to California officially closes a chapter of his life — saying good bye to Western Oregon.

"The people around Monmouth, when you go to Subway or Yang's or Koyotes and

people come up to you, and you see the coaches everywhere, I miss that segment of it," he said. "The community came together and it was bigger than basketball at that point. I'll never forget about Monmouth."

After plans to take Sunday through Tuesday to settle back in and Nichols will be back in the gym Wednesday (today) after a brief break from his 14-

hour drive south.

"I'll be ready to go whenever I get called," he said. "I'll continue to climb. I don't see myself losing at the next level. I do see success."

Nichols believes there are some real possibilities of several different professional leagues — though he's not quite ready to share the details with the world just yet. But he is hopeful he'll get a call soon.

"People can see what I did at Western and what I've been able to do at these showcases," Nichols said. "I want to play at the highest level possible, and they'll see I give my best every time out."

For now, professional basketball remains just out of reach. Nichols isn't frustrated, though. He's just waiting for his chance — and like when he arrived at Western, he's ready to make the most of it whenever it comes.

"I want people to know that wherever I'm at, I'm not going to lose sight of the bigger goal, and that's getting to the NBA," he said. "To go 23-7 at Western my first year and then 31-4, at the end of the day, they know Julian wants to win, and Julian wants to play at the highest level, and that's that."

Track: Condition up for debate in district

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"Several schools have gotten more life," Montague said. "Gresham, I know, got 14 years out of theirs. Corvallis is on year 12. It's not a hard and fast marker."

Masei said if the district believes the track is still in good condition, he and his staff will make it work.

"Ultimately we'll try and keep the kids off of it as much as possible and milk the facility for everything its got," Masei said.

Despite differing opinions on the track's condition, it has affected other schools' decisions on whether to come to Dallas or not.

"Through no fault of their own, we probably wouldn't go there for an in-

vitational or anything like that," Lebanon track and field coach Josh Dykes said. "Their shot ring goes 50 feet. Well we had a kid who threw 65 feet this year. We'd have to have discussions with some of our athletes about whether they should compete in certain events if the meet is in Dallas. It's not really conducive for the top tier kids."

The track itself also presents problems.

"The other thing is you don't take 100- or 200-meter times at Dallas because it's so sloped you can't take a time recorded there seriously. The surface really does need resurfacing, but it's tough I know. We went through it," Dykes said.

Montague maintains it has several years of life left. In the meantime, he hopes the district can start setting aside money each year to prepare for the eventual moment when a resurfacing is needed.

The track is also one of several projects the district is trying to balance, not just for athletics, but school buildings as well, Montague said. It's a struggle, but one that he hopes leads to better results.

"We've made a lot of changes to look at long-term planning instead of reactionary planning," Montague said. "We have \$45 million of work to do. The track is part of that, but we have a lot of maintenance district-wide."

Dirtbags: Rally falls short at tournament

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"We had a pretty solid run," Dallas High graduate Tucker Weaver said. "It's not exactly the end you're hoping for, but only one team gets to win it. It was tough because we have that uncertain feeling of never knowing if we could have come out the next day and won the title."

The loss meant for the second year in a row, the Dirtbags' season ended as one of the final four teams left in the state tournament.

"It was kind of a downer for us," Central's Peter Mendazona said. "Especially knowing the two teams ahead of us lost to

us earlier in the summer, but of course life doesn't always go the way you want it. Making it to the final four still isn't too shabby."

The Dirtbags' up-and-down run production throughout the tournament meant players were alternating between easy going and more tense than usual depending on the situation.

"Striking first was the biggest thing for us," Weaver said. "It gets you feeling really good about everything and carries throughout the game. You don't feel as much pressure with every pitch, every play and every at-bat."

For players like Weaver, who graduated from Dallas in 2016, the end of the American Legion season marked the true end of high school baseball and the beginning of a new chapter.

While the sting of losing hurts, the thrill of experiencing one last run with fellow high school students was well worth it.

"I learned a lot about my mentality," Weaver said. "The coaches really helped me shake things off and remember to forget everything that happens in the past. It was a lot of fun and was absolutely ecstatic to play a high level of baseball with a bunch of new guys."



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