

Seaside squad follows in the 'tradition'

Seniors take charge for undefeated Gulls

By Gary Henley
For Seaside Signal

The Seaside Gulls are becoming the Golden State Warriors of the Cowapa League.

With one exception. The Warriors lose every now and then. The Gulls do not. The Gulls stand at 15-0 and 5-0 within the league. They are ranked No. 1 in three polls.

Granted, Seaside has played far fewer games than the Warriors — but the Gulls win any number of ways, and they can launch 3-pointers better than just about anybody — Class 5A and 6A included — in the state.

Seaside — the runner-up in last year's state championship (another feeling the Golden State Warriors can relate to) — is one of only two unbeaten teams in Oregon high school basketball. Dayton is 18-0 at the Class 3A level.

And assuming that Tillamook does not score a miracle win tonight, Seaside will be 4-0 in league play.

Currently playing the part of Steph Curry is Jackson Januik — at least it was his turn Tuesday, as the senior guard connected on a couple of long-range, NBA-size 3-pointers on his way to a 19-point night in the latest win against Valley Catholic.

A Seaside High School graduate himself, head coach Bill Westerholm knows the tradition and process of becoming a Gull.

"I remember as a kid, looking up to the kids at the high school. I had the opportunity to have some success when I was here, and it's nice to be able to get these (current) kids involved. What we do at Cedar Ridge (an annual off-season camp), we get all the kids together, and the younger kids get to know the older kids.

"These guys we have now were the ones who were looking up to the Andrew Potter's and that group, and right now, all the youth who were sitting behind our bench tonight, they're watching their idols now."

Trophies

And when they start young, a successful program seems to



JEFF TER HAR/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Jackson Januik drives for the basket. His exciting play has electrified the Gulls and their fans.

follow. That means wins. Lots and lots of wins.

Summers are normally filled with team photos of young Seaside players holding up trophies.

In addition to Westerholm, some of those responsible for the building of Seaside basketball include Frank Januik, Byren Thompson and Gene Quilhaugh.

"Frank Januik and Byren Thompson coach them from kindergarten through the seventh grade; and Gene Quilhaugh — who has a lot of knowledge about basketball — had both groups through their seventh- and eighth-grade years," Westerholm said.

"They've won a lot of summer games. These kids have won a lot of games at the youth level, and now they've won a lot of games at the sophomore and senior levels.

"We're still trying to keep that tradition," he said. "We know what the ingredients are — the coaches we've had at the youth level. We're trying to continue that history in our youth programs right now."

Playing together

It's an advantage that private schools don't have. Whereas private schools can

"recruit," their players often don't know or play together until they reach the high school level.

Seaside players, for the most part, have been teammates from the moment they pick up a basketball.

Jackson Januik, the reigning 4A state Player of the Year, says, "That's the great thing about playing for Seaside. I've played with this group my entire life, and we know each other perfectly. Playing against a bigger team like Valley Catholic, when I drive, I know Hunter's going to be cutting, because he's been doing it for years. And Payton, Attikin, Chase ... we work together extremely well."

He adds, "We played a lot of the 6A schools in the summer tournaments, like Westview and Southridge. Those were good games for us. Those games pushed us to be better, and have more success in high school."

And now that they're No. 1?

"We know we have a target on our back, and we've talked about that target at the beginning of the year," coach Westerholm said. "We know that every team that plays us is going to bring their best game.

They want to beat the No. 1 team, the team that played in the state championship last year. And we want that challenge."

No. 1

Assuming there's no upsets on the horizon, the Gulls will likely take that No. 1 ranking into the state playoffs, and on to Hillsboro.

But even if they don't hold down the No. 1 seed, "What's important is how we're playing at the end of the year," Westerholm said. "(The No. 1 ranking) is a nice little feather in the cap, and these kids deserve it. But it's not the most important thing right now. The important thing is that we continue to work as a team, and get better with each practice.

"With our senior leadership — Jackson Januik, Hunter Thompson, Attikin Babb and Otto Hoekstre — you couldn't ask for four better senior leaders."

Upcoming games include matchups Tuesday against Banks at home and Feb. 3 against Scappoose. They'll finish their season with away games at Astoria, Valley Catholic and Banks. Their final home game is Feb. 14 against Tillamook.



The Gulls boasted state-contending teams in the 1970s. At left, former Coach Larry Elliott, now a fan.

Seagulls' success is a family affair

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The Gulls' success on the court is being celebrated throughout the community in what could go down in the books as one of the high school's great seasons.

"All of us in Seaside are very proud of our student athletes," Mayor Jay Barber said. "We have seen amazing performances from both the boys and girls swim teams as well as our cross country, soccer and football teams earlier in the year. But we are especially proud of our boys and girls basketball teams this season. They are nothing short of amazing."

Tom Maltman graduated in 1973 after a three-sport career with the Gulls, including basketball. Today he serves on the Seaside School District's board and is a big-time fan.

He is quick to say that his brother, Scott, was the real hoops star in the family, but he shared in the Seagull pride.

"It's just great," Maltman said. "We're one of the smallest schools in the 4A classification. The kids have had great success and it brings a lot of pride to the community and the board. We're awfully proud of the kids and their coaches."

'Quick as cats'

Larry Elliott coached the Gulls on the basketball court from 1971 to 1996, taking the team to the state championship tournament nine times in 25 years. He lives in Seaside and follows the Gulls every game.



Former Gulls' basketball coach Larry Elliott.

"Here's what I watched last night," Elliott said after Tuesday night's lopsided victory over Valley Catholic. "They play well together. They have a feel for each other. They are unselfish. They cover for each other defensively. They're quick as cats and always looking for opportunity. Jackson Januik — I have never seen a guard who can handle a ball as quick as he does — anywhere."

Mark Utti, the father of girls' star Maddi Utti, attributed the Gulls' success to training programs that nurture young talent.

Kerri Januik is not only the mother of two Gulls' standouts — senior co-captain Jackson and sophomore Chase — but serves as tournament director for the nonprofit Pacific Basketball League.

From January to March, teams from throughout the Northwest come to the area, bringing top young competitors to Seaside. Local kids have an opportunity to take them on one-on-one.

"I've always encouraged basketball in our community by allowing that opportunity for them," Kerri Januik said. "They don't have to travel, they can just play here and participate against all these other teams that come to town."

It is this experience, along with strong coaching in the early stages, that helped local players develop the skills necessary to successfully compete.

"These kids play six weekends in a row at their age, then they have their school ball on top of that," Mark Utti said. "When they're younger like that, it really develops them. It gives them that motivation to keep playing, that love of the game."

Family affair

Both Kerri Januik and her husband, Frank, played basketball in high school. "The kids have a passion for it like Frank and I did," she said. There are so many siblings and family combinations in the Seaside program you need a family tree.

The Thompson brothers — varsity starters Hunter and Duncan — received coaching and inspiration from their dad, Byren, who ranks among the top five free-throw shooters for the school and played a part in the Gulls' 1990s tournament teams.

Mark Utti played basketball for Astoria and helped take the Fishermen to the state tournament in 1983.

Basketball is in the Westerholm family DNA. Old-timers remember coach Bill Westerholm's dad, Jerry, as a history teacher and athletic director.

As a player, Elliott said, Bill Westerholm "was probably one of the top five competitors who have ever played with me."

A new generation, represented by former Lady Gulls' star Whitney Westerholm and this year's Gulls starter Payton Westerholm, have taken the mantle. In the wings, Jordan Westerholm, 10, plays youth basketball in Seaside.

"It seems coaches' kids bring along other kids with them," Elliott said. "They watch dad. They watch the teams since they're little tiny guys. It really makes a heckuva difference."

"Since you're little, you just know you have something to work for," Whitney Westerholm said.

Basketball, she said, was her favorite sport because of "the camaraderie and the heart you had to put into it." For many of these kids and their families, basketball is much more than a game.

"It definitely gives them a focus and a passion, and helps them do well in school and keep their grades up," Kerri Januik said. "This is important to them. It is a real priority in their lives and I think it helps them stay focused and organized in other parts of their lives."

'Good hops'

With all eyes on the Gulls, each win comes with a new challenge. Friday, Feb. 3, they'll take on Scappoose in the Gulls' nest. Four more games remain, with a finale against the Braves in Banks on Feb. 16.

"The only thing they really lack is size," Elliott said. "But what I always say as a coach, you give me five 6-foot kids who are quick and I'll play with anybody in the state. And that's exactly what's going on right here. Not only do they pass the ball, they shoot the ball, and they can jump. They have good hops, good basketball guys — they just know what to do."

"What they lack in size, they overcome in skill, so I hope skill can win out," Kerri Januik said. "I don't want to miss a thing. It's been really, really fun."

Lady Gulls back in action with win

By Gary Henley
For Seaside Signal

Seaside missed 46 shots from the field and 15 free throws — but the Gulls still managed a 15-point win Friday, Jan. 24, at Tillamook.

The winless Cheesemaker girls basketball team put a scare into the Gulls, but Seaside remained unbeaten in Cowapa League play with a 62-47 win.

Tillamook's Jennifer Tuatagaloa scored on an offensive rebound to start the fourth quarter, and the Cheesemakers held a brief 40-39 lead.

But the upset of the night in 4A girls basketball didn't happen, as Maddi Utti's steal and score seconds later put the Gulls up for good.

Seaside was 25-for-71 from the field, 10-for-25 at the free throw line.

Utti — who was in early foul trouble — added a three-point play later in the fourth to help Seaside pull away for the win.

Utti only had two points in the first half, but finished with 18 points, to go with six steals and six assists. Bryre Babbitt and Sydney Villegas added 13 points apiece, and Anesha Smart tossed in 10 points with five rebounds.

"This was not an easy game," said Seaside coach Mike Hawes. "Tillamook came to play, they were methodical in breaking our pressure, shot the ball pretty well and hurt us on the glass."



JEFF TER HAR/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Maddi Utti on defense against Astoria. Utti is a team leader for the Gulls.

He added, "Tillamook took the lead somewhere there late in the third quarter and then we responded, showed some poise and had a solid fourth quarter to put the game away. But it was not easy. Bryre was huge — she made shots from a lot of different places. She's really becoming a solid third scorer behind Maddi and Sydney."

Ideue "made some plays, especially on the defensive end," Hawes said. "Anesha Smart just made some critical buckets for us. She was a difference maker tonight and we definitely needed it."

Girls clinch title

The Seaside girls basketball team cleared one more obstacle Tuesday, Jan. 24, between themselves and a Cowapa League title.

Seaside — ranked seventh in the latest 4A coaches poll — led from beginning to end in a 56-47 win over No. 8-ranked Valley Catholic.

Maddi Utti scored 27 points to go with seven rebounds and five assists, while Sydney Villegas added 12 points and 10 boards in Tuesday's win.

Seaside coach Mike Hawes said he was "just real-

ly pleased and hoping to keep getting better." "I'm not really sure how good we are or can be, but we want to find out," he said.

The Gulls led 20-14 after one quarter, before the Valiants rallied and tied the game at 26-26, on a 3-pointer by Matti Thurman.

Seaside answered with an offensive rebound basket from Bryre Babbitt and a layup by Sydney Villegas off a pass from Lucy Bodner, and the Gulls led 30-26 at halftime.

Valley Catholic managed to keep it close until midway through the third period, when a short jump shot by Utti sparked a 9-0 run, turning a 36-34 lead into a 45-34 lead.

Utti was 11-of-25 from the field, and Villegas 5-of-10.

"The seniors were tremendous," Hawes said. "We just need Maddi and Sydney to be studs, and they were tonight, though they had to fight and struggle."

The Gulls also had "great contributions from Jetta (Ideue) and Bryre, and Lucy just plays her heart out," Hawes said. "Annaka Garhofer came off the bench to hit a couple 3's to get us a nice margin in the first half."

"We got some separation in the third quarter and kind of shakily hung on the final four minutes," he said. "We rebounded pretty well and only had 11 turnovers, though my brain thought we had a lot more."