

Loggers make it to District play-offs; Hightower makes All-League

The Vernonia High School boys varsity basketball team played what head coach Scott Finlay called "the toughest game of the year," Feb. 25 against Knappa at Concordia College.

The first game of the district playoffs ended in defeat for the Vernonia Loggers, as they lost 78-59 to "the other Loggers," Knappa High School.

"Even though we lost, we played one of the best games we've played all year," said Finlay. "We played a team that had beaten us by 40 points or more each time we played them, and went into the second half down by only four."

Senior Travis Hightower led the scoring with 27 points, plus

six rebounds and three assists to add to his statistics. Senior Jason Busch had 11 points, and freshman David Koch had nine points, seven of which came in the third quarter, as well as five rebounds. Senior team captain Bryan Dinger had seven assists.

By the end of the third quarter, Vernonia was down 57-49, and with four minutes remaining in the game, found themselves within eight points of Knappa.

Unfortunately, Vernonia was unable to score near the end of the game. "They got lay-ups and shots to earn the points, and we had to either force them to the line, or stop the

clock," said Finlay.

"In some ways, this season has been one of the most frustrating for me as a coach," said Finlay, "but it has also been one of the most rewarding."

The team lost five players over the course of the season, but Finlay said it was extremely satisfying for him to see the remaining players overcome frustrating situations and play well enough to end up in the playoffs.

The Feb. 22, 58-51 win over City Christian put the Loggers in the district playoffs

"This was an excellent win," said Finlay. "I told the team that we have two down and two to go."

Senior Kelly Baska had

high points for the game, with 18. Hightower followed with 13 points and 11 rebounds, while Dinger made 11 points and six assists, and Koch brought in 10 points and eight rebounds.

"Early in the game, we rode on Kelly's shooting," said Finlay. In the first half, Baska made four three-point shots. "Kelly countered what the Lions were trying to do, which was trying to keep Travis from being able to do anything."

By the end of the first quarter, the Loggers were down by five, but by the end of the second quarter, they were up by five.

Late in the game the Lions came on strong, trying to get back into the game by putting the Loggers at the foul line. In the fourth quarter, the boys hit five of their last seven free throws.

"We played excellent basketball," said Finlay, "and were blessed by the basketball gods to make it to the playoffs despite such a tough record."

Two members of the jayvee team were moved to the varsity level, freshman Eric Weller, and sophomore Darcy Kunkel to finish off the season.

Hightower, the team's leading scorer and rebounder, was named to the third team All-League.

Dinger also received an honorable mention.

The Loggers enjoyed the Feb. 19 playoff game against Warrenton, coming home with a 71-60 win.

Hightower had high points with 23, plus eight rebounds and three assists, while Baska followed with 14 points, five rebounds and four assists.

Hightower had a personal high of 29 points, with 11 rebounds and four assists. Busch scored 11 points.

Vernonia suffered a 98-45 loss Feb. 15 against the Knappa Loggers.

Hightower slammed in 21 points and 11 rebounds, while Busch contributed 13 points and six rebounds.

"Knappa was unreal," said Finlay. "They were hot in the first, and capitalized on any mistake the boys made."

Johnson, Vandehey each place second

Vernonia High School senior Justin Johnson and junior Blaine Vandehey each placed second in the state championship wrestling tournament Feb. 25-26 at Memorial Coliseum in Portland. Going into the tournament, the two wrestlers ranked number one in their respective weight classes, but each lost one match by decision.

Vernonia ended the tournament ranked 16th in the 2A wrestling division.

"I'm satisfied with the placement we earned in the district tournament," Johnson said. However, I cannot be satisfied with a second place finish, and I take complete and total blame for not being prepared for that match. There is no excuse for lack of concentration."

This was Johnson's third appearance at the state tournament, and he'd had his sights set on being number one for the third time. He was defeated by Jacob Boyles of Lowell.

This was Vandehey's first appearance at the state tournament, and he made it to the championship round only to lose by decision to Gold Beach wrestler Tyler McGinnis.

"It is encouraging to come so close and realize my training is paying off," said Vandehey. "I'm not totally satisfied because I didn't achieve the goal I had set. I will use this shortcoming as motivation in my future training."

Vandehey, 160 pounds, and Johnson, 119 pounds, each placed first in the district tournament at the top of his class.

Rumors have been heard around VHS that Johnson had been sponsored to attend the national wrestling tournament. Not true, he said, "I have not been sponsored for the national tournament, and I do not know where this rumor came from, but it is not true. I do plan to attend the tournament and would gladly take sponsors into consideration provided that I qualify to wrestle with our na-

tions best wrestlers."

The Feb. 18-19 district tournament at Nestucca was a good one for Logger wrestlers. "Everybody got within one match of placing," said head coach James Brookins. Some notable finishes were Johnson and Vandehey's championships, and sophomore Jeremy Brennan's third place finish. Brennan was down by three with thirty seconds to go, and came back strong for a third place finish in the 103 pound class.

Freshman Joel Mack placed fifth in the 130 pound class, while senior Jesse Templin placed fifth in the 160 pound class. Juniors Luke Ellis and Brass Sears placed fourth and sixth respectively in the 215 pound class.

"The team started the season with almost 40 members, and ended with only 13," said statistician Rande Parker. "That just shows that wrestling is a very tough sport and a lot of people can't handle it."

Season of learning ends for Lady Logger jayvees

The Vernonia High School junior varsity Lady Loggers ended their season with a 50-18 loss to Portland Christian at home.

"Last time we played Portland Christian, we lost 70-18," said coach Jeff Cheney. "We achieved our goals for the game though."

The leading scorer was freshman Kim Normand, with 10 points.

Normand was moved to the Lady Loggers varsity squad to

finish the season. Nicole Swayze, also a freshman, made the transition to the varsity squad as well. Cheney said he expects the girls to start from that level next season.

"A lot of the players who had gotten fewer minutes in other games had a chance to play in this one," said Cheney.

Against Knappa, Feb. 15, the girls suffered a 41-39 loss.

Although six players fouled out during the game, the jayvees were able to make a

comeback in the fourth quarter, closing the scoring gap to just two points near the end.

Sophomore Megan Peura attempted a three point shot at the buzzer and, just as it looked like a win, the ball bounced out of the hoop. "It was in the basket. If it hadn't bounced out, we would have won the game," said Cheney.

High scorer again was Normand, while freshman Heather Forster brought in nine points. Forster was 7-11 at the line.

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