Promising Season Ends Abruptly

By Gerry McCray, Sports Editor

Anna Schrade sank two free throws with four seconds left on the clock to put NIC up three points, which proved to be enough to upset second-seed Lower Columbia in the first round of the NWAC tournament.

Normally, winning a first-round match-up would just be a footnote for any college basketball season, even if it was an upset, but this was not a normal end to a season.

The COVID-19 pandemic stopped the sports world in its tracks, and the NWAC tournament and NIC’s season was not immune to its reach. After NIC won their first game in Tacoma, Washington, the NWAC moved the tournament to Albany, Oregon. NIC leadership decided that the team would not travel to the tournament due to concerns over the pandemic.

“For our student-athletes, their health and safety was the most important thing that kind of drove our decisions,” said athletic director Bobby Lee. “Traveling at this point in time was just not in their best interest, so we chose to not participate in it and cancel our trip.”

Shortly after NIC’s decision to not travel, the NWAC canceled its postseason tournament and eventually all spring athletics.

The Cardinals finished with an overall 18-10 record and seemed to be playing at their best near the end of the season riding a five-game winning streak. Sophomore Sydney Peterson, Anna Schrade, Halle Eborall and Alex Carlton did not know they played their last game in an NIC uniform until a week after their victory over Lower Columbia.

Few college athletes got the opportunity to end their season on a postseason victory, even fewer end it on a win that doesn’t crown them as champions.

“I think we all knew things were getting bad and that there would be a chance that it was our last game together,” Eborall said. “I think we are all happy with how much we’ve grown this season and that our last game together could be a win even though it wasn’t the championship game.”

Head coach Chris Carlson announced his retirement before the final home game of the year after 16 seasons of leading NIC women’s basketball. Carlson amassed a 356-158 record during his time at NIC, and collected three NJCAA Coach of the Year awards along with an NJCAA National Championship in 2011.

All four sophomores were starters and key factors to the Cards success this season, but NIC will see star dual-sport athlete Demi Randall return to the starting rotation along with key contributors Cheyenne Green and Rilee Mangun next season.

Photos by Gerry McCray