

## Clackamas men complete NWAACC title run

By Ben Reynolds, Tri-CityHerald staff writer

KENNEWICK -- It just wouldn't have been right if the men's championship game ended in regulation.

After Clackamas survived two overtimes Saturday night to beat defending champion Yakima Valley and Lower Columbia needed some extra time to beat Highline, the two teams needed an extra five minutes to settle the final Sunday night.

And this one wasn't decided until the final half-second.

Lower Columbia's Alex King had his catch-and-shoot fall short at the horn and top-ranked Clackamas survived in a 71-69 thriller at Toyota Center.

"Nobody can say we had an easy road," said Clackamas coach Clif Wegner said.

It is the second title in three seasons for the Cougars (29-3).

Lower Columbia (20-11), the tournament underdog, was the first No. 4 seed to reach the championship game since Highline in 2001.

After the game, coach Jim Roffler was not happy just to have his team reach the title game for the third time in six seasons.

"We should have got some better shots down the stretch," he said. "It was there for the taking."

Tournament most valuable player Chehales Tapscott scored 18 points and grabbed a team-high 16 rebounds. Austin Dunn led the Cougars with 19 points, including five of his team's eight points in overtime.

"We're all a little tired right now, but this feels great," Tapscott said.

The win also had sentimental meaning for the Cougars, who lost longtime assistant coach Jim Worden earlier this year to cancer.

"This is for Jimmy," said Wegner, whose players wore Worden's initials on their jerseys.

Clackamas' road to the title game was filled with close calls like Sunday night.

In the opening round, the Cougars went down to the final minutes before beating Whatcom. Then, they found a way to rally past third-ranked Tacoma in the semifinals.

And then Saturday night, they needed an extra 10 minutes get past fifth-ranked Yakima. Finally, they dodged a late 3-pointer at the end of regulation, and a short jump shot that came up empty in overtime. The Cougars won their four games by a combined 24 points.

"We had a hell of a path to go through to get here," Wegner said.

Lower Columbia, which trailed by as many as 12 points in the first half, had the ball with 16.9 seconds left in regulation and the game tied at 63.

That was despite shooting just 27-of-74 (36 percent) from the floor, and included just 3 of 23 shooting from Ryan Freeman and Marice Tolliver, two of the Red Devils leading scorers. The two finished with a combined eight points, after averaging 26 points per game.

Jeray Key led Lower Columbia with 21 points and Alex King added 15 points and 13 rebounds.

"It should have never come down (to the last play)," Roffler said.