

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Red Hawks building on success

LMC women ride 15-game win streak

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Winning has become customary for the Lake Michigan College women's basketball team.

With 103 wins over the past four seasons and trips to the junior college national tournament the past

two, the Red Hawks know success.

But this year's team could be one of the best under head coach Jason Cooper.

With three games left in the regular season, the Red Hawks are 22-3 overall and an unblemished 13-0 in the Michigan Community College Athletic Association's Western Conference.

"Coaches are always looking for comparisons in teams," said Cooper, in his

seventh season as LMC's head coach. "The teams I had the last two years made it to the national tournament. At this point, this year is better than the last two years."

And they are doing it with a team made up of almost entirely freshman.

With just three sophomores, only one of which is a returning player from last season's tournament team, LMC has been taking a

team-oriented approach compared to recent years.

"The last couple of years we have had a really good core," Cooper said. "Maybe this team is not as top heavy as the last two with players we go to night-in and night-out."

"But this team is solid from top to bottom."

The Red Hawks get production out of nearly every

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player on the roster, and have someone different step up on a nightly basis.

But the one constant is the lone returning player, DeYahnna Styles.

"She understands the level of play the teams who are ranked up there in the top five have to play with," Cooper said of his point guard. "She is one who can be that person who understands the past and the tradition. She understands that role."

And her role changes on a nightly basis.

"One game it might be her scoring, another night she might have to be the one who gets things going on defense or a night where she distributes to the others and gets assists. She does what she has to each game."

Under Styles' leadership on the floor and consistent play from a host of freshmen, LMC has been un-

beatable as of late.

With its last loss coming on Dec. 27, LMC is on a 15-game winning streak and is beating teams by an average of 14.9 points per game.

"The way we set up our offense is setup by our defense," Cooper said. "If you play strong defense and rebound the ball it helps on the offensive end. Our offense opens up shots and we aren't going to get upset about people taking good shots."

As the wins keep piling up, the Red Hawks continue to climb the rankings and are currently seventh in the National Junior College Athletic Association Division II poll.

The top 10 spot is nice, according to Cooper, but not a team goal.

"The rankings are important for the excitement for your program, and it can help if we can have a good run in regionals. But we have individual team goals that happen at the beginning of year."

And LMC is close to one of those goals: a conference championship.

With a win on Saturday against Kalamazoo Valley, the Red Hawks would have a two-game lead on the Cougars with two games left to in the season.

"We are trying to win it (the conference) outright and to not have a share but the whole thing is important to us," Cooper said.

After conference play is over, LMC will set its sights on a regional championship and, possibly, another championship banner.

"We want to win the conference championship, we want to compete for a region championship, we want to make it to the national tournament and we want to compete for championships," Cooper said. "What has helped is the program has been being successful for the last 5-6 years, which keeps us moving up toward the top."

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