



Broncos rope first CIF section title in 12 years

José A. López

Published 03/10/2010 - 11:45 a.m.

It was a moment 12 years in the making, and when it was all over, the Rancho Bernardo boys basketball team secured its place in the record books.

The team pulled off back-to-back upsets of higher-seeded opponents in the CIF section Division I tournament to come away with the 2010 title, the first for the school since 1998.

It was a remarkable finish to a season that had early ups and downs.

Going into the Palomar League season, the Broncos were 10-8. They would go on to lose their first league match against Vista, then fall to El Camino, the league's champion, and to Carlsbad on Feb. 9.

That would be the last loss that the Broncos would have against a team from San Diego.

The Broncos would go on to win their next seven games (and 10 out of their last 11) including a decisive 64-55 victory over El Camino at the section finals.

"I challenged the kids to do something special and to make history, not only for themselves but for the school," Coach Jim Choe said after his team won the section title.

Although during the course of the regular season the team depended on 6-9 senior center Tanner Clayton to set the tone for the team's offense, by the time the playoffs came around the other teams had honed in on him.

Though the team still provided plays down the center and three-point plays so he could score, Clayton's biggest strength was at defense, where he averaged 12.7 rebounds and 5.4 blocks per game, according to Maxpreps.com stats.

"He's a very unselfish basketball player," Choe said.

For the Broncos, victory often depended on having several players step up during the games when Clayton was being double-teamed.

"Our number three, four and five options have been stepping up big for us," Choe said.

Against Mira Mesa, senior guard Scott Fuller sunk seven 3-pointers, tying a school record for most in a single game. Against La Costa, it was senior guard Justin Inman who sank in a three-pointer during the final buzzer to eliminate the tournament's No. 3 seed. Against Eastlake it was junior guard Michael Moniz, who scored 12 points (second only to Clayton's 13).

In the final against El Camino, the standout player was senior Brett Stephan, who sank 20 points.

"At the beginning of the playoffs we were hitting a lot of 3-pointers," Stephan said, adding that the other teams caught on and were able to close up the main shooters. "I just went back-door and I was able to get a lot of reverse layups and back-door cuts."

Stephan said having such a good game in the championships was a surreal experience.

"I've had games this season where I scored a lot, but to do it in the championship game is different," he said. "It's what you do in your backyard, counting down three, two, one to yourself."



The Rancho Bernardo boys basketball team celebrates after winning its first CIF Section title since 1998.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



José A. López

Email:
sports@pomeradonews.com