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Chinooks like their championship chances

Portland will play Elkhart (Ind.) in the IBL title game

BY KERRY EGGERS

The Portland Tribune, Jul 10, 2007, Updated Jul 10, 2007

When he took over as general manager and coach of the Portland Chinooks before the start of the 2007 International Basketball League season, Terrance Dickens wasn't sure how far his team would go.

But Dickens was confident he had a deep array of talent and, if things came together, the Chinooks could have a nice season in their third year in the league.

It's been more than that.

On July 21 the Chinooks travel to face the Elkhart (Ind.) Express in a single-game duel for the IBL championship.

Portland advanced to the finals by winning the Western Conference title, running through its West playoff competition at Warner Pacific College June 29 through July 1.

In succession, the Chinooks — who entered the West tournament as the No. 4 seed — knocked off Las Vegas 151-130, Salem 140-123 and Santa Barbara 119-106.

After ending the regular season on a 7-1 tear — the only loss by one point to Salem — Portland has won 10 of its last 11 games.

The Chinooks and Express didn't meet during the regular season, "but the Western Conference is generally tougher than the East," Dickens says. "Taking nothing away from Elkhart, I feel strongly that, with the way we play and how things are going for us right now, we're going to bring the championship back to Portland."

Dickens' scoring machine, David Lucas, feels the same way.

"I don't know much about Elkhart, but I know us, and our team is strong," the 6-7 1/2 forward out of Oregon State says. "We have a real good shot at going in there and taking the title."



Former NBA point guard Shammgod Wells is averaging 24.7 points and 12.5 assists for the Portland Chinooks, who play for the IBL championship July 21.

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Portland finished the regular season 20-6, good for second place in its division of the 22-team IBL, which includes teams in Vancouver, Wash., Salem, Eugene and Bend.

The Chinooks can score. During the regular season, they topped 130 points 13 times, were under 100 only once and beat Central Oregon 178-147 in the finale.

“We have an awesome team,” Lucas says. “And it starts with God.”

No, not the heavenly father, or even Morgan Freeman. Shammgod Wells, formerly God Shammgod, is Portland’s point guard, a whirling dervish who can score (24.7 points per game), pass (12.5 assists) and lead a team.

“He’s an amazing guy to play with,” Lucas says of the former Providence star, who played a season with Washington in the NBA (1997-98) and is now 31 years old. “Tremendous handles, sees the court so well and is very unselfish.”

Adds Dickens: “I just sit back and just let him go. He does not like to lose. Every one of our players loves playing with him. After every game, he asks how many assists he has. That’s way more important to him than scoring.”

Lucas has been pretty amazing this season, too, leading the league in scoring at 36.5 points despite missing 11 games with a broken bone in a hand.

In his first game back after the injury, the former all-Pac-10 selection scored 59 against Central Oregon.

Lucas collected 36 points and 11 rebounds in the West final against Santa Barbara and was named MVP of the game and West tournament.

“David is the real deal,” Dickens says. “He’s one of the best offensive big guys I’ve seen play the game. Everybody knows if he were two or three inches taller, he’d be in the NBA.”

Lucas was still recovering from knee surgery after a stint playing professionally in Portugal last season when he was approached by the 34-year-old Dickens about joining the Chinooks.

“When I tried to recruit him, he thought he was bigger than the league itself,” Dickens says, laughing. “He didn’t have a bad attitude about it, but he didn’t know how good the quality of play is.”

Lucas says he’s a much different player from the post-up scorer he was as a Beaver.

“I’ve pretty much changed up my game,” he says. “I’m in better shape and thinner” — 240 pounds, from 250 as a senior at OSU — “and I’m using my quickness more. I’m shooting a lot of jumpshots and 3-pointers. I’ve opened up my game and become more of an overall threat.”

Starting small forward Mike Parker — not a moonlighting Oregon State broadcaster, but a 6-7 former player at Evergreen (Wash.) State who had 26 points and seven rebounds in the West title game — “might be my best all-around player,” Dickens says. “Defense, hustle, heart — he gives us everything.”

Shooting guard David Jackson, the former Wilson High and Oregon standout, averaged 23.1 points in the regular season.

“He’s a premier scorer, but he has shown me his defensive side in the playoffs,” Dickens says.

The fifth starter is 6-9 center Bo Colas, a former Florida player “who can jump out of the gym,” Dickens says.

Elkhart, which finished the regular season 22-4, is a perimeter-oriented team led by 6-2 guard Cedric Moodie (23.6 points) and 6-5 forward Coleco Buie (19.0).

“Their coach (Daimon Bethea) is a good friend of mine and runs a very disciplined program,” Dickens says. “They’re a good team. But if we get out and do the things we can do, I think we’ll be all right.”

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