PortlandTribune

David Lucas has fun playing for the Portland Chinooks

Former OSU star dominates IBL foes after a season in Poland

BY CASEY MICHEL

The Portland Tribune, Jun 18, 2008, Updated Jun 18, 2008

CASEY MICHEL / THE PORTLAND TRIBUNE
David Lucas (second from right) enjoys a laugh as he gets ready to go back onto the court Wednesday night in the Portland Chinooks' victory over Central Oregon at Warner Pacific.

David Lucas stands in the classroom-turned-locker room of the Warner Pacific gymnasium, clothed in nothing more than an oversized shirt and athletic shorts. Thirty minutes before the Wednesday night tipoff, the Portland Chinooks' star forward barely looks ready for a jog, let alone a professional basketball game.

The former Oregon State Beaver, all-Pac-10 in 2005 and son of Trail Blazer great Maurice Lucas, is the reigning MVP of the International Basketball League. And he shows no sign of slowing down, even if, at the moment, he doesn't look the part of an all-star.

"Make sure to mention his chicken legs!" coach Terrance Dickens tells a reporter, with a guffaw.

Lucas can't help but smile. Not only at the dig, but also because he is dominating IBL foes again after a season of mixed results in Poland.

Earlier this year, playing for Polonia Warszawa, Lucas smothered his Polish opponents at the outset of the season.

As the year wore on, however, Lucas found his role decreasing.

"I was [the first option] the first five games. Then I went 1 for 6 in the first half and that changed everything," says Lucas, who averaged 12.9 points in 14 games for Polonia. "Coach thought I would never miss, and then I didn't play in the game after that. ... That's how it is overseas."

Lesson learned.

With the Polish season winding down, Lucas set his sights on playing in Puerto Rico. He kept in shape and waited for the call.

Unfortunately, the call came too late.

"They wanted me to come last week ... to finish the playoffs, because they've got 15 games in one round. It's crazy," he says.

So, Lucas turned to a friendly face for his next basketball adventure: Dickens. The second-year coach of the Chinooks, who also is the IBL's director of operations, was more than familiar with

Lucas' basketball talent. But he says the 6-8 Lucas, who also played for the Chinooks in 2007, brings more than scoring, rebounding and an inside presence.

"A lot of people look to him to lead," Dickens says. "He's got a great attitude. He got hurt last year, broke his hand [and missed 13 Chinook games] but was still at every practice and every game."

Lucas knew there was a spot waiting for him. And, having led the Chinooks to a 20-6 record and the 2007 league final, he was looking forward to playing with another highly successful group.

His current teammates are skilled, no doubt — the 2008 squad is 11-12 — but times have changed, and so, too, has the team's makeup.

"We had a squad last year," Lucas says. "We were just stacked. We had pros last year, all guys who had played at a high level in Europe or had been in the NBA. Now, we have all these players I don't even know, but we have a good team still."

Despite being surrounded by a lot of new faces, Lucas has again found his groove. At a mind-boggling 38.3 points per game, the 26-year old might win another MVP award. But such glory is not what Lucas is chasing.

The IBL is still minor-league basketball, after all. With the NBA dream incessantly bouncing around in his head, this year's stop with the Chinooks is little more than a place for Lucas to rest and gather his bearings.

"I tried to come in here and stay in shape a little bit, get ready for the summer," he says. "[Dickens] gives me the green light, so I can just gun all I want, and they go to me a lot, so I have a lot of chances to put the ball up."

Lucas eventually put on his Chinook uniform Wednesday night. Then, scoring what looked to be an easy 45 points, he helped Portland coast to a 152-139 win over the Central Oregon Hotshots. The smile was still there, and it was easy to see why.

"I'm playing basketball, messing with coach and staying in shape," Lucas says. "I'm having fun."