



COUGAR TEN



Collin College Scores When It Comes to Sports

by Kirk DICKEY

The thumps of the basketball and squeaks of sneakers on polished wood mix with shouts of instruction and encouragement as sophomore guard Taylor Jackson brings the ball up the court. It's early December and the Collin College Lady Cougars are warming up for a run that will claim back-to-back North Texas Junior College Athletic Conference championships.

A quick scan of the court reveals a gap under the basket and Jackson goes for it, darting into the paint past a couple of defenders and elevating for the bucket. Two points.

A smile of satisfaction flashes on her face, but not for long. Even with a big lead over visiting Murray State, Jackson and the rest of the Lady Cougars know they have more work to do.

Of all the things that Collin College is known for, athletics may be one of its most underappreciated aspects—at least locally. However, one only has to look at the college's athletic record to appreciate its accomplishments.

The Lady Cougars finished their 2015-16 season with a school record 26 wins and ranked 12th in the nation by National Junior College Athletic Association. Jackson earned All-Conference Most Valuable Player and was selected as an NJCAA All-American Honorable Mention, making her the second All-American for the team in two



years. Lady Cougars Coach Jeff Allen was a finalist for the Women's Basketball Coaching Association Junior College Coach of the Year.

The men's basketball program has won four conference championships and has been ranked in the Top 20 nationally 12 times, including a No. 2 ranking in 2003-04. The team has featured six All-Americans and six Academic All-Americans. Cougar Basketball Coach Jim Sigona has taken home four NJCAC Coach of the Year awards.

The college's tennis program has produced more than 70 NJCAA All-Americans and has tallied nine national tennis titles (five men's titles; four women's titles). This year's men's and women's programs finished in the top 10 nationally, in addition to having all-conference and all-academic selections. Coach Marty Berryman has earned nine Coach of the Year titles in divisions I and II athletics and been inducted to the NJCAA men's and women's tennis halls of fame. And Collin College has hosted the NJCAA Men's Tennis Nationals for 15 years in a row.

"I think our athletics program is one of our college's best-kept secrets," said Dr. Sherry Schumann, senior vice president for academic, workforce and enrollment services and Collin College's athletic director since 2011. "There are so many athletic programs in the area, between the high schools and the colleges, that it can be a little tough to get recognition. Nationally, though, we are very well recognized for all of our programs."

Collin College is a recruiting hotbed for colleges and universities around the country. Division I universities from California, Utah, Virginia, Colorado and a dozen other states have signed athletes from Cougar athletic programs.

Jackson has accepted a full scholarship to Stephen F. Austin and plans to pursue a physical therapy degree while playing as a Ladyjack. She believes Collin College has helped her develop as both an athlete and as a student.

"Our coaches reinforced that our grades were the most important thing, coming before even basketball," Jackson said. "We had study sessions and tutorials. Those things really helped me prepare to go on to a university."

Taylor said she had heard Collin was a good school and it didn't hurt that it was close to her family home in Frisco. She said that having the opportunity to play competitive basketball at a school near her family helped ease her transition into college.

Other athletes make a big move just to come to Collin. Current rosters list home states like Nevada, Missouri and New York—a testament to the college's reputation and reach. The college's tennis teams have student athletes from Ecuador, Columbia, Australia and South Africa.

"They are coming here for the quality of the program and for the quality of our academics because they can get a strong foundation here which allows them to succeed," Dr. Schumann said.





The programs do more than help student athletes get an education, though. They also provide a social function for the college, allowing students to come together and root

for their teams as a communal activity.

The college is looking to foster that environment further with intramural sports, creating an even more well-rounded college experience. The college has created a new director of intramural activity position to oversee its implementation and students will soon be polled to determine which sports they would like offered.

"I think most people think of intramural sports as the same old football and basketball, but there are a number of activities available," said Dr. Albert Tezeno, vice president of student and enrollment services. "We want to know

what the students are looking for and we will use the resources we have available at each campus to provide those opportunities."

Dr. Tezeno will step into the athletic director position in the fall and will oversee the director of intramural activities. He said that offering intramural activities will provide a richer communal experience for students who might otherwise come to the campuses for classes only.

"Since we are mainly commuter campuses, I think that intramurals will be a great service to our students and will get them more engaged in student activities," Dr. Tezeno said. "I think that engagement is the key."

A well-rounded college experience for all students is the goal and Collin College athletics and intramural sports are driving for it. When they reach it, there will no doubt be smiles of satisfaction. Don't expect them to last too long, though. There is always more work to do and Collin is set to do it. ♦

Kirk Dickey is a public relations writer for Collin College.

Tennis photos by Nick Young, Collin College photographer.

Basketball photo by Kirk Dickey.