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The Oregonian

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February 21, 2009
Saturday

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Where shooting threes really is the No. 1 goal

By IAN RUDER
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Coming out of Gladstone High, Tyler Yates had a dream.

Like so many other offense-minded basketball players, Yates dreamed of a team where he could shoot three-pointers with impunity. A team where defense took a backseat to shooting from distances that would make an NBA player blush.

For Yates and his 13 teammates, that dream has become a reality on the Multnomah University Lions.

Heading into today's regular-season finale, the small bible college off 82nd Avenue in Northeast Portland is averaging a whopping 58.1 three-point attempts per game, all but abandoning traditional basketball in favor of a simpler slogan:

Shoot it before you turn it over.

And shoot it they have. Seven players have each attempted more than 148 three-point shots this season. More than 70 percent of the field goals the Lions have attempted have been three-pointers. To put the 58.1 attempts per game in context, consider that Virginia Military Institute leads Division I in three-pointers made per game, and is averaging 37 attempts.

The slogan and the unorthodox approach are the brainchild of sixth-year coach Curt Bickley. Bickley's teams had always shot a lot of three-pointers. But after evaluating his personnel before the season, he decided to go all out.

"I thought, 'Why don't we create something here that nobody else is doing,' so we at least have some kind of recruiting foot in the marketplace for smaller kids who may not be getting scholarship offers but really can play (and) really can shoot it," Bickley said.



NATHAN COX

Nicolaas Kamlade (left) is among 14 players on the Multnomah roster who are encouraged to shoot nothing but three-pointers.



NATHAN COX

Multnomah University sophomore Tyler Yates has attempted a team-high 355 three-point shots - more than 12 a game - this season.

The result is a post-less offense in which four guards space themselves around the three-point arc and the fifth player looks to drive to the basket and kick out for three-point shots.

Earlier this season, Bickley may have become the first coach to threaten benching any player who shot anything but three-pointers. At half-time of a November game against Eugene Bible College, Multnomah had 54 points by way of 18 three-pointers, and all 50 of its field goal attempts had been three-pointers. The Lions won 114-98 and finished with 97 field goal attempts, 85 of which were three-pointers.

While the approach has been enthusiastically embraced by the players, the results have been mixed. The Lions have the highest scoring offense among National Christian College Athletic Association Division II teams (averaging 87.3 points as of Monday) but are 11-18 overall and barely shooting 30 percent from three-point range.

Still, Bickley is committed to the new approach and excited about refining it next season. That's good news for Yates, who has taken advantage of the system as much as anyone, launching a team (possibly world) high of 355 three-point attempts so far this season.

"It's perfect because I can't play (defense), for one, and shooting's all I'm good at anyways," he said.

Next up

Eugene Bible College at Multnomah University, 3 p.m., today