

Defense holds key to success

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
Nov. 15, 2007

It looked as if the Northwest women's basketball team would wear the glass slipper. Entering the contest, the Bearcats were the No. 7 regional seed, squaring off against the 28-4, No. 2 seed West Texas A&M.

On paper, it seemed Buffalo standout Emily Brister would torch a Northwest defense allowing 67.5 points per game. But entering halftime, Brister had only six points and her team trailed 33-32.

The second half was something Northwest coach Gene Steinmeyer had seen before and wants fixed for this season. Brister busted out with 14 second half points and West Texas A&M outscored Northwest 55-39 en route to an 87-72 victory.

"We need to improve on defense," Steinmeyer said. "Some teams we could play straight up man and get away with it, and some teams we couldn't control their best shooter. Then we would have to do gimmick stuff. I would rather be able to play straight up man and control their best player."

Guiding a team that had the sixth best scoring defense in the MIAA, Steinmeyer said he wants to make teams feel their pressure at all times.

"I would love for us to make teams play 94 feet," Steinmeyer said. "Whether that is through pressure or something, I want them to feel our presence. I don't know if we can accomplish that, because we haven't done a good job these first few weeks."

Returning to this year's line-up is all-MIAA defensive team member Lauren Williams. Williams generally drew the opposing team's best weapon, and ranked seventh in the MIAA with 2.17 steals per game.

Senior co-captain Kelli Nelson finished second in the MIAA with 2.4 steals per game.

"We've been working on our communication and specific drills with defense," Nelson said. "We need to have intensity and go hard at all times on the defensive end."

Communication and rebounding were two defensive aspects Steinmeyer and the team pointed to as lacking last year. Steinmeyer said it's not just saying something, but saying something constructive.

"Communication is one thing, but the right and smart communication is another," Steinmeyer said. "I'd rather have a player yelling something important than have one just making noise."

"We need to communicate rather than just make noise."

The 'Cats ranked eighth rebounding in the MIAA, but was only outrebounded by four against Illinois State during an exhibition game this season. However, Northwest's post players, Andrea Dill and Mandi Schumacher, combined for five of the team's 37 rebounds.

One area where Northwest excelled defensively was in turnover margin. The 'Cats ranked second in the MIAA with a plus 2.47 average, forcing 20 turnovers a game.

Increased depth could also play a factor in the 'Cats pursuit of another NCAA tournament bid. Senior co-captain April Miller said the depth not only helps during games, but also adds an extra element to preparation.

"A lot of our defense comes from our scouts," Miller said. "They run their offense, so we know what to expect during games. We rely on our teammates to give us the best look, so we can focus on our rotating and communication."

Leadership could provide surprise Expectations high as top 4 scorers return

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
Nov. 15, 2007

Northwest women's basketball coach Gene Steinmeyer knew expectations would rise.

Even before his team took the floor last season, Steinmeyer envisioned what this year's squad could achieve.

"This is the year we've been pointing towards," Steinmeyer said. "When we went into last year, I thought if we could get this team into the tournament, then we'd see what we could do next year.

"Well we got into the tournament and now we'll see."

With the team's top four scorers returning from a squad that made the NCAA tournament last year, it's no wonder the team has higher expectations.

"We have higher expectations as a team," senior co-captain April Miller said. "This has been the most physical and competitive offseason I've ever had."

Mandi Schumacher, Meghan Brue, Kelli Nelson and Lauren Williams return after leading last year's team in scoring. Brue, a junior, registered 12.7 points per game last season.

Brue was named the team's MVP and joined Schumacher and Williams as the team's lone representatives on the MIAA all-conference list. Williams nabbed a spot on the MIAA all-defensive team, while Schumacher and Brue attained honorable mention all-conference honors.

"Well I hope the teams in the conference haven't caught on to what Meghan's all about," Steinmeyer said. "She's a fooler. She gets her shots in unusual ways, she's a deceptive rebounder and she has an uncanny ability to get to the (free throw) line."

That uncanny ability helped her set a Northwest record for free throws made in a season with 130, breaking the old mark of 116.

"(Brue's) not afraid of anything," Steinmeyer said. "The thing is she looks more confident and stronger than she was last year, too. Hopefully that equates into a bigger year for her."

Brue and company are predicted to finish third in the MIAA behind Emporia State and Washburn. The 'Cats finished fourth last year and eventually lost to West Texas A&M in the NCAA tournament's first round.

"The whole key to our league is to win the games you should, and then win a couple you shouldn't," Steinmeyer said. "Last year we won every game we should have, with one exception."

That one exception was a loss against Pittsburg State at home. However, Northwest returned the favor when they defeated the Gorillas on the road later in the season.

To compete for a conference title this year, though, the women must fare better against nationally ranked opponents. Last year, Northwest finished 0-10 against teams ranked nationally.

With all but one starter returning and seven newcomers added, the 'Cats seem poised for another NCAA tournament run. Katie O'Grady is the lone starter missing off last year's 18-12 team. O'Grady

averaged 9.5 points per game, while nailing 55 3-pointers. Steinmeyer said Jessica Burton will take the vacated starting spot, while Brue, Williams and Miller will hold the other positions. North Florida transfer Andrea Dill and Mandi Schumacher will battle for the starting post position.

Schumacher is 91 points shy of breaking 1,000 points for her career.

"What hurt Mandi last year was her inconsistency," Steinmeyer said. "Some games she was really good and some she didn't shoot well."

"Andrea Dill is versatile. She can go inside and outside. She adds a real piece to the puzzle offensively. She just needs to pick up on the defensive end."

Point guard Alicia Bell and shooting guard Nelson will also vie for starting time, Steinmeyer said. Nelson is moving to shooting guard full time after spending last year playing multiple guard positions.

"Last year, without as many people, there wasn't as much competition as there is this year," Nelson said. "Everyone is competing for a spot and playing time. The competition makes you better when facing other teams."

Northwest opens the season at 5:30 p.m., Friday, against Evangel during the Winstead-Reeves Classic at Bearcat Arena. The 'Cats return to action at 5:30 p.m., Saturday, against Avila at Bearcat Arena.

Omaha Westside's Martin chooses Bearcats

Omaha World-Herald
Sept. 25, 2007

Omaha Westside's Shelly Martin has made a commitment to play basketball and softball at Northwest Missouri State.

Martin is a two-time All-Metro and honorable mention All-Nebraska basketball player and an honorable mention All-Nebraska softball player.

She played two years for the Pinnacle Nebraska and Omaha Crusaders basketball teams and is also a member of the Omaha Quakes Gold summer team.

Martin turned down offers from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Wayne State. Westside coach Scott Persigehl said Northwest Missouri State is a good fit.

"I think she's a great, great shooter, and I think Northwest Missouri State understands that," he said. "I think they play a style that fits her game real well."

'Cats Topple No. 4 Washburn

Charlie Slenker, Maryville Daily Forum
Jan. 13, 2008

Any day a slump ends for an athlete is a good day.

Meghan Brue's resurgent game against Washburn (Kan.) was a little bit sweeter than most.

Brue, a junior guard, led the Northwest Missouri State women's basketball team to a 50-45 upset victory against the No. 4 Ichabods. Brue led all scorers with 19 points in the win, which left the Bearcats (9-4, 4-0 MIAA) as the only team left undefeated in conference play. In the three previous conference games, Brue averaged 4.7 points per game.

"It definitely helps me get a little bit of confidence back if anything," Brue said. "I just came into this game knowing that it couldn't really get any worse. I knew this was a big game. I just wanted to come in, not think about anything and just play as hard as I could.

"I'm so happy we won."

To get that win, Northwest had to overcome a 29-19 halftime deficit. Having shot a paltry 26.7 percent in the first half, things looked grim. The Bearcats didn't improve their shooting percentage (22.2 percent in the second half) but found a way holding the Lady Blues to 16 points in the second period.

Northwest coach Gene Steinmeyer said no one in the locker room at halftime felt like the game was out of hand. Just the opposite was true. Steinmeyer said for maybe the first time all game the Bearcats felt like they had a shot to win it.

"At halftime all of a sudden the kids realized 'We may not be as inferior to Washburn as we thought when we came into the game.'" Steinmeyer said. "It was just like that realization came over them. They did it themselves. Coaches can't talk them into something like that.

"They talked themselves into it."

With a renewed vigor, the Bearcats came out and shut down Washburn's offense. More importantly the completely blanked Corkey Stiger who had 11 in the first half.

"(Stiger) can go off at any time if you don't guard her," Brue said. "We always knew where she was and tried to clog up the inside."

Steinmeyer said he didn't think the upset was all the Bearcats' doing. For a team to shoot 24.6 percent and still knock off the No. 4 team in the nation, it's likely their opponent isn't playing up to par.

"If Washburn was going to get upset, it was going to be tonight," Steinmeyer said. "They just had a huge win against a rival on the road with only two days to get ready. It was a

recipe for an upset.

"I'd like to sit here and pat my back but they had a huge letdown and probably were a little tired from that big win. We just took advantage of it."

However, they got the win doesn't matter. The Bearcats are still No. 1 in the conference right now. They still remain the team to beat. Brue said before the game, they knew it was going to be a special night. It was a moment so rare that the last time the Bearcats knocked off a top-10 team was March 7, 2004 when they beat the then No. 4 Emporia (Kan.) State.

"The whole team had that feeling today ... that it was just our day," Brue said. "We weren't going to let it slip away. We hung around and they let us hang around. We took advantage of it."

The victory also signifies a monumental turnaround from the beginning of the season for Northwest.

"I think it means so much considering we came into the conference with the worst record," Brue said. "We were tied for last when we came into the conference. Now we're the only undefeated team. It means a lot to us."

Transfer Dill gives Northwest women a boost

Rick Dunaway, St. Joseph News-Press
Jan. 15, 2008

MARYVILLE, Mo. — Andrea Dill has seen sunny Florida. She's seen snowy northwestern Colorado, too.

Happily, the 5-foot-11 Leavenworth, Kan., native has found her way back home as a forward for Northwest Missouri State's women's basketball team.

The senior is making the most of her final year as a collegiate player, having gained a greater appreciation for the sport.

Burned out of basketball and not happy with the cultural differences and faster pace of the eastern United States, the former Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College standout was ready to hang up her jersey for good. But she wasn't so sure she wanted to be away from the game completely.

No matter that, she started 21 of 28 games and averaged 21.5 minutes for North Florida. No matter that, she led team with 33 blocks, which tied her for the all-time, single-season mark at the school.

Clearly, Dill was ready for a break.

That led her to Northwestern Colorado Community College, where she served as an assistant coach during the 2006-07 season.

"It was very difficult for me," Dill said. "It's hard because the girls were the same age as me. It's hard to have authority over somebody that's basically the same age as you. I liked it, but at the same time I had a really tough time with it."

It didn't take Dill long to regain her desire to play. In fact, she confided that she was ready to step on the court by the time Northwestern Colorado played its first game last season.

So with the help of her boss, who was familiar with the MIAA, Dill was pointed in the direction of Maryville, Mo.

"I think he talked to Gene (coach Gene Steinmeyer), and he thought this would be the best fit for me," Dill said. "He was right."

Dill complains that the layoff provided a physical challenge. She believes she's still in the process of getting back into shape. In addition, she has a chronic back condition that has her playing through pain every day.

But Dill made an immediate impact for the Bearcats, being named most valuable player of the season-opening Winstead Reeves Classic. She is averaging 11 points per game, playing nearly 19 minutes per outing.

And she feels at home, having fit in with the rest of the players from the outset.

"Our team just meshes so well," Dill said. "We can all hang out together and gets along so well together that they don't have to be so (cliquish)."

Steinmeyer said Dill has been quick to pass on the goodwill and hospitality to others. A new player, who will be eligible the second semester of next season, arrived on campus last week and needed a roommate. Dill quickly obliged.

Steinmeyer said that new recruit came into his office Tuesday and told him she had called a former teammate to

tell her that the atmosphere was like "night and day" from their past experience.

"My roommate is terrific," Steinmeyer quoted the prospective player as saying. "She's taken to me to class, and she's showed me where buildings are at."

Added Steinmeyer, "Not only were our players easy to accept Andrea Dill into the program, but now Andrea Dill is making it easy for someone else to come into our program."

Whether Dill makes her one-year coaching experiment a more permanent part of her life has yet to be determined. She's a corporate recreation major with a minor in coaching, but she hinted she might not follow either career path.

"It changes weekly with me," Dill said about her career plans, stifling a chuckle. "One day I want to be a teacher, one day I want to coach and one day I want to do law enforcement."

If Dill decides to coach, however, she's already gotten a positive entry on her resume.

"If you know where Northwest Colorado is, anybody that can survive a year there can coach anywhere," Steinmeyer said. "It's on the other side of the pass, and you've got to cross cattle gates to get to it. I've been there."

Transferring Impact

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
Jan. 17, 2008

As fall faded into winter, two transfers tackled two opposite outlooks on the upcoming Northwest women's basketball season.

For senior transfer Andrea Dill, this season promised a new beginning. For junior transfer Amber Vandevender, this season seemed likely to lessen her impact on an established NCAA tournament squad.

But as teams' focus shift to conference season, there's little doubt in Northwest coach Gene Steinmeyer's mind how valuable these newcomers have been.

"I feel good about both of these girls," Steinmeyer said. "Without Amber, I don't know where this team would be ... and Dill is such a clutch player."

Dill and Vandevender's impact helped Northwest grab the top spot in the MIAA conference. The Bearcats hold a 4-0 conference record, helped by Dill's 11 points per game and Vandevender's relentless defensive attack.

However, their roles on a team featuring five players who started on a NCAA tournament qualifying team a year ago couldn't have been more opposite.

Dill, a 5-11, offensive-minded, outside-shooting forward, entered the season projected to see quality minutes and eventually start. Vandevender, on the other hand, didn't have the same expectation.

During an exhibition game against Illinois State on Nov. 3, Vandevender saw three minutes of action, while Dill started and registered nine points.

"It was really tough at first," Vandevender said. "I played a lot at my JUCO (junior college). When I came here, I knew I had to just prove myself. I kept working hard every day."

Vandevender transferred from North Central College in Trenton, Mo., where she also played high school basketball. The 5-6 junior, shooting guard, landed on the first team all-state team as a senior at Trenton High School, before leading North Central College in scoring her freshman year.

During her sophomore season, Vandevender helped the Lady Pirates to a 30-6 record and a sixth-place finish at the NJCAA National Championship.

"I always wanted to go to Northwest," Vandevender said. "But I knew right out of high school I wouldn't be ready for it. The JUCO helped me a lot. It helped me with fundamentals and the experience was great."

Vandevender has come a long way since her first exhibition experience. During the 'Cats recent four-game conference winning streak, she's averaged 31.5 minutes per game.

"I had to get used to the physical play in D-II (Division II)," Vandevender said. "I needed to toughen up. I wasn't used to the contact. But I've gotten a lot stronger and I'm more physical."

Dill didn't have to overcome the physical aspect Division II brings. She had plenty of experience battling seasoned veterans at Coffeyville Community College and Division I University of North Florida.

Instead, the senior transfer had to overcome rust, something that accumulated over her year's hiatus from the game.

"I went the JUCO route because I wanted to go D-I," Dill said. "I was getting recruited out of JUCO and went to North Florida on a visit. I fell in love with it. The people were really nice, but the East Coast is not for me at all."

"I decided I didn't want to play at all, but I didn't want to get out of it either. I didn't know if I was burnt out, or just sick of playing there (North Florida)"

Dill packed up her basketball gear, despite starting 21 of 28 games in 2005-06 for the Ospreys, and moved to Colorado where she briefly coached for Colorado Northwestern Community College.

"I missed playing a lot," Dill said. "It's completely different when you're not playing because you don't know how much you're going to miss it."

The head coach knew coaches in this area, and directed Dill to Northwest where she joined Vandevender as a newcomer.

"This is a tight group of girls, and I was very intimidated when I got here," Dill said. "I didn't know them, and I didn't know how they would respond."

"I felt like more of a freshman than I ever had before."

But the feeling soon wore off for both of them, as they had to learn a different coach's philosophies and how to deal with new teammates.

Steinmeyer said learning those essential aspects takes time for transfers, but their experience helps them catch on faster than incoming freshmen.

"There's freshmen, transfers and experienced players," Steinmeyer said. "Transfers catch on quicker than freshmen, but it just takes some time."

For these two transfers, it seems as if the catching on process is over, and they're ready to take a squad poised for the NCAA tournament to the next level.

"When I signed with Northwest, people said it doesn't matter how good of a team you are, you won't beat Washburn or Emporia," Dill said. "I'm not saying we're the best in the conference right now, but maybe we can be on the pedestal."

"Maybe we are the team to beat, and everybody's going to play their best against you every night so when you win, it won't be a fluke."

Bearcat Bell Now Faces Big Challenge

Benton grad scheduled for surgery on Wednesday

Rick Dunaway, St. Joseph News-Press
Jan. 21, 2008

MARYVILLE, Mo. — Just three days after she crumpled to the floor during a game in against Chaminade in the Hoops 'N' Surf Classic in Hawaii, Alicia Bell was walking up Diamondhead with her Northwest Missouri State teammates.

Not bad for a young woman with a torn ACL.

"I was playing defense and planted on my left foot," Bell recalled. "I did the splits, and my left leg turned in."

With no swelling and the pain gone after two days, neither Bell nor the Bearcats' trainer believed hers was a serious knee injury.

They were wrong.

"I didn't think nothing of it," Bell said, explaining that she passed all the field tests that would indicate a tear.

In fact, "Bear," as she is known to her coaches and teammates, fooled two trainers who examined the left knee.

"Her legs are so strong that the knee didn't appear to be loose or weak," Northwest coach Gene Steinmeyer said.

After the Hawaii trip, Bell was cleared for the first practice in Maryville, Mo., two days after Christmas. Five minutes into that workout, she fell on it again.

The second trainer, Kelly Quinlan, examined the knee. Again, the joint didn't appear to be loose. At the most, Quinlan believed, this was a meniscus problem that would heal relatively quickly.

"To find out just the extent of the meniscus problem, they scheduled an MRI and found a 90 percent tear of the ACL," Steinmeyer said.

Now, instead of providing the Bearcats with a spark off the bench the former Benton High School standout can only cheer on her teammates from the bench as she awaits surgery on Wednesday.

"That sucks really badly," Bell said.

The loss of Bell was a big blow to the Bearcats, who were getting an increasing number of minutes from the guard.

"She had a huge role to play on the team, and the better she got the more she played," Steinmeyer said, adding that her best game was against Nebraska-Omaha. "We need constant pressure on the point guard.... Bear started doing that for us at

UNO and really played great defense. She was learning every day on what we expected of her."

Now, however, Bell must learn the pain and dedication that goes with rehabilitating a blown-out knee.

She also must deal with the frustration of knowing she has lost most of a year of eligibility. Bell had played in eight games when she wend down with injury. That's two more than allowed for a medical redshirt.

"At first, I was like, the whole year is down the drain. That's how I felt," Bell said.

Added Steinmeyer, "That's a tough one to take, but there's nothing you can do about it."

Bell said she gained some strength from her mother, who told her that everything in life happens for a reason. She figures that reason must be to gain additional strength.

"A lot of people say when you tear your ACL the rehab makes it stronger, so I'm hoping I'm going to come back quicker and stronger," she said. "This summer I'm just going to have to work really, really hard."

That wouldn't surprise her high school coach, Brett Goodwin.

"Obviously, it's a situation for any young kid to go through that's going to be difficult, but Bear's a pretty strong-willed girl," Goodwin said. "I'm sure she'll work hard to get through it. This girl is just freakishly strong. Her lower body strength is just unbelievable."

Bell hopes that along with increased physical strength, her mental game will be heightened as well.

"I'm going to be way more motivated," Bell predicted. "I'm going to have a lot to feed off of, not being able to play for a whole year."

Northwest's Williams Develops Into a Leader

Rick Dunaway, St. Joseph News-Press
Jan. 25, 2008

MARYVILLE, Mo. — Lauren Williams has sometimes been unselfish to a fault.

Perhaps it was her background, attending St. Joseph Christian High School, where she was content to pass up the open shot to give one of her teammates the scoring opportunity.

It was a trait that hasn't always served her well. As an underclassman at Northwest Missouri State, her coach, Gene Steinmeyer sometimes complained that she was not aggressive enough.

But in her fourth year of college basketball, Williams isn't a wallflower any more.

As a high schooler, Williams was the third cog in a wheel of college-bound seniors that included post Melanie Stokes and point guard Holly Heintz. Together, they took the Lions to the Class 1 state title.

But while Stokes and Heintz have dropped off the collegiate basketball map, Williams is contributing 22 minutes a game and valuable defense to the 10-5 Bearcats team.

That, Steinmeyer believes, is the biggest evidence of Williams' growth.

"There were three kids at that high school that got honors — three kids that went to college," Steinmeyer said. "Lauren received the fewest of the honors. She didn't even make the all-star game here; the other two kids did. And she's the only kid still playing."

Williams has always been interested in defense, and that's what she brought to the Maryville, Mo., campus. But she also has shown sparks of offense.

She has scored in double figures six times this season, most recently on Saturday at Pittsburg State, when she tallied 15 in 16 minutes of play.

Against Truman State last season, Williams scored her career high of 26 points.

"I'm not sure how I did that," Williams recalls now. "They just left me open, to be honest with you. But I hope to do that again. I'd love it."

Williams has gotten tougher

as a Bearcat, playing for a coach who likes tough players. What had seemed an unlikely fit four years ago has become a good one.

"There are a lot of players you recruit because of potential," Steinmeyer said, recalling the days when she was overshadowed by Stokes and Heintz. "If she would have had the mindset in high school that she has now, she'd have dominated that team."

Williams agrees that she's changed. She chalks it up to increased confidence.

"I was always confident in my defense, but just offensively having the confidence that I can be a threat has done wonders," Williams said.

Steinmeyer Confident About Team's Current Injury Status

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
Jan. 31, 2008

Northwest women's coach Gene Steinmeyer is optimistic about his team's injury situation.

During last Saturday's contest against Central Missouri, senior center Andrea Dill, sat out with a back injury, joining Alicia Bell and Melissa Nyquist as players currently injured.

Steinmeyer said Dill was expected to return Wednesday against Emporia State.

Dill said she's ready to get back on the court.

"I feel better than I have in the past week," Dill said. "I know I will probably be a little out of shape when I come back, but I'm really excited to play, so the adrenaline should make up for that."

Without Dill in the lineup, Steinmeyer uses Lauren Williams and Jessica Burton as defensive stalwarts down low, especially if starting center Mandi Schumacher is out of the game.

Despite smaller statures, Steinmeyer isn't worried about his interior defense.

"We played last year with five guards and we were successful doing it," Steinmeyer said. "Everybody thinks you need a banger in there, but outside of weight, we're not undersized.

"Sometimes it's better to be quick than it is to have size. I'm not worried about that, because the great thing about this team is that we have lots of depth."

In addition to Dill's return, Steinmeyer said Nyquist should return within the week.

Squad Seeks Strong MIAA Finish

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
Jan. 31, 2008

To some of the Northwest women's players, it's a lack of killer instinct. To head coach Gene Steinmeyer, it's not that complicated.

"They just need blinders," Steinmeyer said about the team's inability to sustain large leads.

In the team's previous four games, Northwest, ranked 10th regionally, held at least an eight-point lead during the first half. Against Truman State and Missouri Southern, the 'Cats were unable to sustain the leads, resulting in their only conference losses.

Even in last Saturday's victory against Central Missouri, Northwest entered the halftime break leading by 28 points. During the second half, though, Central Missouri cut the deficit to nine points with more than four minutes remaining before Northwest eventually won 98-84.

"It's really up to the individual to work on," senior forward Lauren Williams said. "For most of us, it's our senior year, so we shouldn't have any reason why we can't go in and pull away from teams."

Despite those instances, Northwest has reason to be upbeat. With 10 conference games remaining (as of Jan. 29), the 'Cats share the MIAA's top spot with Washburn. Northwest owns the tiebreaker as it defeated the Ichabods 50-45 on Jan. 12.

Up next for the MIAA's top team are two games that could provide more breathing room at the top, or jam more teams into conference title discussion.

Northwest travels to Southwest Baptist Saturday. The 'Cats downed Southwest Baptist 101-97 during their Jan. 2 meeting.

Williams said don't expect the same offensive output from Southwest Baptist.

"We didn't play much defense last time," Williams said. "But you can mark my words, our defense will not let them score that many again."

Southwest Baptist guards Erika Souza and Courtney Creed netted 25 points apiece during the last meeting. Cortney Shewmaker, Rachel Graves and Katelin Cutbirth, also totaled double figures.

For Northwest, senior Mandi Schumacher registered a double-double with 23 points and 12 rebounds against Southwest Baptist. Kelli Nelson added 22 points, sinking six 3-pointers.

Wednesday, Northwest travels to Emporia State, to square off against the No. 24 team in the country. The 'Cats contest against Emporia State last Wednesday was not available at press time (check nwmissourinews.com for a complete recap).

Defense Holds Key to Success

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
Feb. 7, 2008

Northwest women's coach Gene Steinmeyer knows his team's affliction. Now, all he has to do is fix it.

The women are on a two-game skid and Steinmeyer said defense is the team's biggest obstacle.

"The sad thing is that job we have to accomplish is in front of us," Steinmeyer said. "We can score on almost any team, but we haven't stopped anybody. We have to find a way to play team defense."

Northwest held Washburn to 45 points Jan. 12. Since then, teams are averaging 78.8 points per game, and the Bearcats are 2-4.

"We just can't get down and hang our heads," guard Meghan Brue said. "It's mainly our defense. We score 80 points and still lose. We need to come out with more intensity and change that."

In their four conference losses, the 'Cats lost by a combined 22 points, including a 14-point loss against Emporia State.

However, Northwest is still tied for second place (6-4), and a win against Emporia tonight would put them in a first place tie. Currently, six teams are .500 or better in the conference, with no team holding a mark better than 7-3.

"The traditionally best teams have gone down a little and the middle ones have come up and met in the middle," Steinmeyer said. "Somebody will get hot at the end and win this thing."

Northwest has experience on its side to make a final conference title push. The 'Cats feature 10 upperclassmen, with three senior starters.

The task won't be easy. Northwest travels to Emporia tonight and Central Missouri Saturday, a place it hasn't won at since the 2003-04 season. Then, Northwest hosts Truman State, a team that defeated Northwest 84-82 Jan. 23.

"We need to be positive and intense during practice to get back on track," senior Kelli Nelson said. "Everyone needs to pick it up and not dwell on the losses."

Nelson and Brue pointed out the second-half defensive performances as being problems during the previous six games. During the team's last contests with Central Missouri and Truman State, Northwest surrendered 108 combined second-half points.

"It's more subconscious for us," Brue said. "We relax a little. We need to come out with more intensity. Everyone on this team has the ability to step up on this team. Hopefully soon, we can play better in the second half, and win some of these close games."

Northwest plays at 5:30 p.m., tonight, at Emporia State, before squaring off against Central Missouri at 1:30 p.m., Saturday, in Warrensburg.

Northwest Fans Deliver A Message to Visiting Fans

Rick Dunaway, St. Joseph News-Press
Feb. 17, 2008

MARYVILLE, Mo. — With a few gallons of paint and a little enthusiasm, a group of Northwest Missouri State students has put a little extra excitement into Bearcat Arena.

The “Shirtless Bearcats” have become a fixture at Northwest athletic events, and their exuberance has become so appreciated that one coach has even bought their dinner.

Scarlett Casey, a student from Independence, Mo., is the co-founder and president of the second-year organization that she founded along with Brad Whitsell.

“We thought about starting to paint people’s chests, so we did,” Whitsell said of his conversation with Casey last year. “We were just trying to create a positive, just trying to get the crowd involved.”

This season, as a “refined” graduate student, Whitsell doesn’t take part in the antics. However, he is usually nearby, cheering with his friends.

At every game, this collection of students shows up, the men bare-chested and the women in small, white, spaghetti-strap midriff tops. Each is covered in paint from the collarbone to just above the top of the jeans. The individual letters painted on the chests always provide a message as they line up on the west side bleachers.

Officially, the organization boasts 12 members. That’s just the right number for now, said Casey, who says they can spell out “G-O B-E-A-R-C-A-T-S,” with a pawprint between the words for good measure.

But Casey, who does most of the painting, likes to keep it fresh, using a different font or theme for every game. A megaphone, a heart for Valentine’s Day or a basketball might appear on their chests under the letter, or in the case of Central Missouri’s “pink out” game to note breast cancer awareness, the basic Bearcat green was replaced with pink.

The whole process takes Casey and her fellow chest painters about 90 minutes to complete on most game days.

“Sometimes when we do fancier fonts — like once we did a Celtic font — oh, my, that took hours,” Casey said as she painted a big “B” on the chest of a fellow Shirtless Bearcat. “This one’s taking us an hour or an hour and a half. We’ve done Old English fonts and stuff like that, too.”

The group has gone through gallons of paint this season, Casey estimated.

“It’s just basic craft paint,” she said. “It’s pretty inexpensive as far as paint goes. There are better ones out there, but we do what we can with what we’ve got.”

But the group is doing what it can to improve its financial picture. The Shirtless Bearcats have begun offering face painting to fans for \$1 per person between games of home MIAA men’s and women’s doubleheaders. In addition, they have added a “sponsored by” line to their banner to encourage potential benefactors.

“We actually started that because some people were willing to give money, and we wanted to show them our gratitude,” Casey said. “We replace the names, depending on who has been able to help us during that time period.”

And at least one of the sponsors came from an unlikely source. Prior to Northwest’s game against Emporia State, a man came up to them to ask about the sponsorship line. He was from the Emporia Gazette, on hand to cover the opponent.

Northwest women’s coach Gene Steinmeyer was another benefactor. He called a local restaurant to deliver pizzas to the group during halftime of the men’s game.

And even Steinmeyer’s coaching opponents have noticed this group, according to Howie Ball, one of the leaders of the organization.

Recently Missouri Southern women’s coach Maryann Mitts confronted the group.

“We gave her some guff last year,” Ball said, “so she came over and was talking to us while we were painting when they were in Maryville this year. She asked us when we were graduating, because we had so much spirit that she wanted us gone.

“She was a really good sport,” Ball added, “and she’s become kind of a fan of ours.”

Got Ink

Western, Northwest players make statement with tattoos

R.J. Cooper, St. Joseph News-Press
Feb. 26, 2008

Forty years ago, a tiny B+ inked into Tom Smith's back earned him quite a distinction that today wouldn't be worth noting.

When Smith was in second grade, Gary, Indiana, experimented with tattooing kids with their blood types. Thus, when Smith played college basketball for Valparaiso, he was the only Crusader with a tattoo.

A quick perusal of Valpo's media guide shows Smith would be far from alone on this year's team. In the past two decades as the men's basketball coach at Missouri Western, Smith has seen body art go from rare to routine. Lamont Turner — Western's last All-American in 2001-02 — might be the Griffons' most-inked athlete, sporting more than 30 tattoos. Smith remembers the reception the rest of the league initially gave his guard.

"So many coaches for years and years were anti-tattoos," Smith said. "He received no votes after his junior year for all-conference first-team, second team or honorable mention. After his senior year, he received every single vote, and his stats were similar.

"People had to look beyond the tattoos to realize he really is a great kid. I wanted to say he was a great kid the year before and nobody bothered to see that."

Just six years later it seems like a non-issue — even on the women's side of the sport. Western guard Chemia Woods remembers in high school when her point guard went and got a tattoo.

"We thought it was a big deal," she said.

But last year, Woods and teammates Tiffany Davis and Ashleigh Curry went out and got inked over Christmas break.

"I would say definitely for women and men, tattoos are more of a fashion statement," Woods said.

Western forward Mike Sylvara, who has 10 tattoos and plans for more, added that tattoos have become a part of his generation's social fabric.

"It's starting to become part of the culture. Athletes and younger men get tattoos," he said. "I take pride in my tattoos. I designed them myself. It's not something I just picked out because I thought it looked cool."

And whether the Griffons and the Northwest Missouri State Bearcats are trying to make fashion statements, philosophical

statements or just statements about their blood-donor status when the two schools meet tonight in Maryville, there will be plenty of ink on display. Here is a look at six players' body art and the stories behind their pictures.

Chemia Woods

"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"

During Christmas break last year, the Western guard and two teammates were looking for something to do; they settled on tattoos. Woods, now a senior, initially went as a spectator but left with her zodiac sign, Aries, inked on her left calf. One month later she went back and had 'Faith, Hebrews 11:1' inscribed on the other calf.

"I love them. I believe they are addictive," Woods said. "I haven't got anymore just for money reasons, but I probably want two more."

Woods would like to honor her mother, Vanessa, with those next two pieces of art. She plans to get a butterfly with her mother's name tattooed just below her left collarbone (Vanessa means butterfly).

"She is going to leave one day, so I'll get some dates on there as well," she added.

Lauren Nolke "Love and basketball"

The Western freshman guard only has one regret about her heart art with basketball lines in it.

"I wish it was somewhere where it won't show when I get married, but I can cover it up with makeup, so it's not a big deal," she said of the tattoo on her right shoulder blade.

Nolke inked her shoulder the Friday before coming to Missouri Western — to her parents' chagrin — and doesn't plan on getting anymore tattoos.

Alicia Bell "Tinker Bell"

Northwest freshman guard Alicia Bell's first tattoo was a Christmas gift from her boyfriend during her senior year of high school.

It also lets everyone know who she is ... not that anyone will forget once they meet the Bearcats' point guard of the future.

The cartoon character Tinker Bell rests on the right side of her stomach, with the words “Miss Bell” accompanying it. Initially, her mother thought she was joking.

“I kept telling her I wanted one. When I went home, she was upset; then she said she kind of liked it,” Bell recalls.

Bell makes no bones about it — there was pain when needle met skin. It was a detailed tattoo that involved more discomfort than many. In fact, Bell didn’t last through the entire session.

“It still needs some coloring, because I was like, ‘I’m through; I’m done for this session,’” she said.

But the pain didn’t discourage her from getting another — a smaller, less-detailed friendship tattoo on her back that she got with her best friend. It involves her astrological sign of Taurus linked with her friend’s symbol of Aries.

All that keeps Bell from getting more ink is her lack of finances.

“It’s probably a good thing I have no money, because I’d go crazy with them,” she said.

Mike Sylvara “The Aristotle of body ink”

The Missouri Western junior forward hesitates for about half of a second before answering who has the best tattoos on the men’s team.

“Me,” Sylvara said.

The Belton, Mo., native currently has 10 tattoos and grand plans for a fiery inferno on his left forearm and pristine heaven on his left shoulder to surround his first piece of skin art — an ABA basketball over praying hands. Sylvara got it in Cancun, Mexico, right after graduating high school.

“It means that basketball has given me a lot of stuff in my life. I put basketball very highly,” he said. “The ABA ball is the red, white and blue for America.”

He also had ‘Loyalty and betrayal’ done on his back — a reminder even the closest friends stumble sometimes — and ‘see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil’ inked on his chest with various accompanying sinister, caricatures. To round out the skin art, Sylvara has ‘survival of the fittest’ on his right arm.

“A lot of people feel like they need to express themselves,” Sylvara said. “For me it’s more of self philosophies and stuff I believe got me where I am and keep me true to myself.”

Elijah Allen “By his brother, for his brother”

The Bearcats’ freshman guard has one tattoo on each arm, each with a saying.

Both tattoos are the work of Allen’s brother, who moonlights as an artist out of his home.

“The one on my left arm is ‘I praise loudly, I blame softly,’” Allen explained. “It’s a crown with a ball under it and wings coming around it.”

Allen said that one is a tribute to his brother, who taught him a lot, including about how to improve his workouts.

His right arm bears a tattoo with a religious theme — “I will fear no evil for you are with me.”

Allen got both of his designs this year, and his family had no qualms about the permanent adornments.

“I got stuff that really meant something to me, so they were happy about that,” Allen said.

Kelvin Cayruth “Artistic tendencies”

The Northwest senior forward always liked to draw. In fact, he drew the design for his first piece of skin art at the age of 14.

“I used to draw a lot; it used to get me in trouble,” Cayruth said, admitting that he would scribble on his notebook in class back in North Carolina. “Drawing kept me away from my classwork and homework.”

But Cayruth took his first design — his last name in stylized letters — to his uncle. And his uncle, who owns a tattoo shop, turned the sketch into body art on his left biceps.

Cayruth has three tattoos in all, including his initials on the backs of his arms. His most meaningful one, however, was added to his right arm during his junior-college days in Hutchinson, Kan.

“It has angel wings with a halo, and my grandmother’s name across the top of it,” Cayruth said. “She passed away when I was in junior college. That one means the most to me.”

More tattoos might be in Cayruth’s future, though he plans to be selective.

“I might get a couple more just to make everything fill out, but tattoos can get addictive,” he said.

Tournament bid on the line

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
Feb. 28, 2008

The Northwest women's basketball team doesn't have much time left to impress the NCAA selection committee.

In fact, the Bearcats have one week to add to their resume. Northwest women's coach Gene Steinmeyer said there's still time to impress the regional committee.

"Before the region even discusses us, we need 18 wins," Steinmeyer said. "That got us in last year, and it all starts (this week)."

Last year, the 'Cats were 18-11 after the MIAA tournament and entered the regional tournament as a seventh seed. This year, Northwest owns a 14-11 (as of press time, check nwmissourinews.com for Wednesday's result) overall record.

"Last year, we weren't sure we were in, but we were pretty confident," senior guard Lauren Williams said. "This year, we have no clue. That puts a lot of pressure on us right now."

If the 'Cats were to reach the 18-win plateau, they would have to advance to the MIAA tournament finals.

"We're trying not to think that far in advance to making the conference championship," senior guard April Miller said. "We're taking it one game at a time right now and know we just have to keep on track."

Beating the conference's elite competition has not been the 'Cats problem this year. Northwest has wins against regionally ranked teams such as Southwest Baptist, Missouri Southern and Washburn. Last year's tournament team didn't have one win against a ranked team.

The 'Cats obstacle this year has been inconsistency, Steinmeyer said. Northwest owns two four-game winning streaks. The 'Cats have also endured a four and three-game losing streak.

"We've shown we're better than last year's team at some points and not as good at some points," Steinmeyer said. "We have been consistent during our last four games, though."

After a 96-52 setback against Central Missouri, Northwest has rattled off three wins in the last four contests.

"The Central game was our low point of the season," Miller said. "Hopefully that was the down moment, and now we're peaking."

In order to reach the MIAA finals, the 'Cats must win five consecutive games. That's something Northwest hasn't done since November 2004.

"We've been consistent at being inconsistent," Steinmeyer said. "We started out 4-0, and then we lost some games, and

then went on another winning streak, and lost some games. How long can we keep this going? I'd like to see us continue what we've done over these past four games."

Northwest's regional tournament trek continues at 5:30 p.m., Saturday, at Fort Hays State, a team the 'Cats defeated 67-50 Jan. 5. Fort Hays currently sits tied with Missouri Western for the eighth MIAA spot.

The Lady Tigers face a must-win to keep pace with Missouri Western for that eighth and final MIAA tournament spot.

"We're facing two desperate teams this week," Steinmeyer said. "They have to beat us. We have six seniors, and it's their last regular season. If that's not enough to motivate them, I don't know what would."

Northwest Missouri women upset Washburn in MIAA women's tournament

Jim Pedley, Kansas City Star
March 8, 2008

A week ago, after a game at Fort Hays State, Northwest Missouri State coach Gene Steinmeyer had seen about all he could take.

His well-seasoned women's team had lost by 10 to a team that it should have easily disposed of. The loss to Fort Hays State had come off of a similarly disappointing loss to Missouri Western on the Bearcats' home court a couple days before that, and enough was enough.

Steinmeyer gathered his team, looked the players in the eyes, "And I called them a bunch of underachievers."

But he told them they become overachievers with a good run in the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association tournament. "I told them they could turn the 'U' into an 'O'."

"Os" the Bearcats are now, after upsetting 20th-ranked and top-seeded Washburn 59-56 in the semifinals Saturday afternoon at Municipal Auditorium. And they did it in a style that definitely said enough was enough.

"We were physical," said Northwest Missouri center Mandi Schumacher, who had a team-high 14 points and 11 rebounds. "Washburn doesn't like to be pushed around. And we don't play well when we play soft."

The Bearcats, 16-13, were tough all over the floor but toughest near the basket Saturday. They outrebounded the Lady Blues 43-35, and every Bearcat who took the floor got at least one rebound.

And they were extremely tough against Washburn guard Corkey Stiger in the second half. Stiger had 16 points in the first 20 minutes, but just three after that.

"Give them credit," Washburn coach Ron McHenry said. "They've got some nice players."

Women win MIAA tournament championship

Schumacher named MVP as Bearcats earn automatic bid to NCAA Division II tournament

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
March 6, 2008

KANSAS CITY, Mo -- One week ago, Northwest women's basketball coach Gene Steinmeyer didn't think the season would end like this.

Last week, Northwest ended the regular season and its regional tournament hopes with its second straight loss to a sub-.500 conference team. After entering 2008 with high hopes, Northwest entered the MIAA tournament with its coach calling them underachievers.

Even against Missouri Southern in Thursday's first round, it looked like Northwest's season would end. The Bearcats trailed by nine points with eight minutes remaining.

But ever since that point, the 'Cats haven't looked like the same team that dropped eight of its last 12 games. Instead, Northwest came back and defeated Missouri Southern in overtime, and then edged the three-time MIAA defending tournament champion Washburn.

During today's MIAA championship against Southwest Baptist, the 'Cats hit on all cylinders cruising past No. 3 Southwest Baptist 82-58, and locking up an automatic regional tournament berth. This is Northwest's second MIAA championship since 2004.

"I can't explain it," Steinmeyer said. "Three weeks ago when we lost to Central by 44 points, things could've gone the wrong way. I felt the same way at Hays, too.

"Halfway through the Southern game, something came on. We played great defense all week. We've been soft on defense all year and Southern really brought us out of that."

Cortney Shewmaker's layup put Northwest down 2-0 in the opening minute. Southwest Baptist would not lead again.

Northwest then went on a 12-2 run, and didn't allow Southwest Baptist to get within two possessions until the 9:50 mark. After Northwest increased its lead to 26-18, the purple Bearcats didn't get within two possessions for the rest of the game.

"Honestly the players realized what they could do this week," Steinmeyer said. "I hate to use this word, but it seemed like our seniors were bored with the regular season. I can't explain it."

Northwest's bench paced the scoring as they recorded 44 points. Micaela Uriell knocked down two treys as she tallied 10 first half points and Andrea Dill mustered a team-high 18 points.

When Rachel Graves drained a 3-pointer with 13:49 remaining to cut the deficit to 10 points, the 'Cats outscored

the purple 'Cats 11-3 during the next two minutes. Dill had a hand in every point as she scored nine consecutive points, and dished out an assist to Jessica Burton during the run.

"I couldn't tell you," Dill said about her scoring spree. "Maybe I thought it was time to start playing better and get a spark."

The 'Cats also held a 45-26 rebounding advantage. Northwest hauled in 17 offensive rebounds, the same amount as Southwest Baptist grabbed on the defensive end.

"We had it going the whole time after we played Southern," senior center Mandi Schumacher said. "We really made things happen. We decided we were going to set the pace for this tournament."

Five players scored in double figures for Northwest. Meghan Brue chipped in 11 points and nine rebounds, while Kelli Nelson and Burton totaled 14 points apiece. Leading scorer and tournament MVP Schumacher netted nine points.

"By far this doesn't compare to anything else that I've done," Nelson said. "We played awesome and everybody contributed."

The defense, which allowed 97 and 85 points against Southwest Baptist in each meeting this season, held the purple 'Cats to 38.6 percent shooting and 6-of-21 shooting from beyond the arc.

"This feels amazing," Schumacher said. "Coming in, we didn't want to go out like that. We realized we could reach our potential. We just didn't want the season to be over."

Northwest (17-13) now moves on to the South Central Regional tournament Friday. Likely, the 'Cats will travel to West Texas A&M. This is Northwest's second straight trip to the regional tournament, and if the 'Cats are the No. 8 seed, they would likely face West Texas A&M.

That would be a rematch of last year's first round regional matchup, where the Buffaloes won 87-72.

Watch the selection show at 9:30 p.m. on Cstv, or log on to nwmissourianews.com later for information on who Northwest will face and where the tournament will take place.

Texas 2 Step

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
March 13, 2008

Northwest women's coach Gene Steinmeyer can't quite pinpoint it. The players can't explain it either.

No one seems to have an answer for what happened between the regular season finale loss to Fort Hays State and the MIAA championship win last weekend in Kansas City.

None of the Bearcat seniors could isolate a single characteristic that changed their future from watching the regional tournament from home to their first round South Central Regional Tournament rematch with West Texas A&M.

Although there was no definite answer, each senior repeated the same message about an attitude change.

"We just got on the same page as a team," MIAA tournament MVP Mandi Schumacher said. "We just have a different attitude. We watched film, and it was like watching a completely different team out there."

After losing to Fort Hays in the regular season finale, the 'Cats had to win the MIAA tournament for a regional tournament berth. Northwest even trailed by nine points with less than eight minutes remaining during the tournament's first round matchup with Missouri Southern.

From there, though, the 'Cats outscored the Lions 27-10, and didn't look back as they upset No. 1-seed Washburn, and then cruised past No. 3-seed Southwest Baptist.

"Really we have to credit Southern," Steinmeyer said. "They hit us in the mouth, and we said we had enough of that. If we play a finesse team in the first round, then we don't have the same results."

Physical play dictated the pace of all three contests in Kansas City. The 'Cats stymied the Ichabods, allowing 56 points and holding leading scorer Corkey Stiger to three second-half points.

During the championship game against Southwest Baptist, Northwest allowed 58 points. During two regular season meetings against Southwest Baptist, Northwest allowed 97 and 85 points.

"We're a much better physical team, than finesse," senior Andrea Dill said. "We don't want to be pushed around. Our offense may go through some ups and downs, but our defense needs to be a constant. We're not the same team that we were in the regular season."

Rebounding statistics also showed Northwest's increased physical play. The 'Cats owned a 130-94 rebounding advantage during the weekend. Northwest grabbed 21 offensive rebounds against Missouri Southern, and amassed 17 offensive boards against Southwest Baptist. The purple Bearcats managed 17 defensive rebounds.

It wasn't just Schumacher who provided the rebounding edge, either. Schumacher totaled a team-high 26 rebounds, but guards Meghan Brue and Lauren Williams had 21 and 18 rebounds,

respectively. Even point guard April Miller got into the rebounding act, hauling in 19 rebounds.

"We went into the Southern game and they were used to being physical," Miller said. "We were able to be physical back to them, and then did the same to Washburn and Southwest Baptist. A lot of teams don't like to be physical. It will be interesting to see how we respond to different referees."

When Northwest travels to Canyon, Texas to square off against West Texas A&M, it won't be like last weekend's MIAA tournament or like the last time these teams faced each other. One of those differences could pose a potential problem for Northwest's redesigned game plan.

"I was watching film of a tournament game with West Texas, and both teams were in the bonus with 10 minutes left in the first half," Steinmeyer said. "We don't know how the committee is going to appoint officials, but if they're calling it close, we're going to have to adjust."

In last year's first round regional tournament contest against the Buffaloes, foul trouble plagued the 'Cats. Williams, Jessica Burton and Miller fouled out, while Brue had three fouls. If it happens again this year, Williams said the bench is capable of producing quality minutes.

"I don't know if I've felt like this all year, but right now, I feel that anyone that comes in for me can do as much as I can and more," Williams said.

That statement came to fruition in the MIAA championship game. Micaela Uriell entered the contest averaging 2.6 points per game, but came off the bench and led the team with 10 first half points. Dill came off the bench and chipped in a team-high 18 points, including a stretch where she recorded nine consecutive points.

"They're a guard-oriented team, and basically one player compiles all their stats," Williams said. "I think if we shut her down we'll have a good chance. They have to stop 12 of our players, and I don't think they can stop all 12."

Guard Emily Brister leads the Buffaloes in almost every statistical category. Brister averages a team-best 21.6 points per game and 7.7 rebounds per game. The junior guard also leads the team in assists, blocks, steals and minutes.

Brister mustered 20 points during last year's meeting, while junior guard Courtney Lee produced 23 points.

"We can't get too excited before the game," senior Kelli Nelson said. "During the last two games of the (MIAA) tournament, we were relaxed and comfortable. If we stay within our same routine, we should be able to play with any team."

The 'Cats first round matchup starts at 8 p.m. against West Texas A&M. The winner moves on to the second round to face either Emporia State or Southwest Baptist.

Northwest Missouri women play in quarterfinals today

David Boyce, Kansas City Star
March 13, 2008

Northwest Missouri's women's basketball team faces a daunting task tonight in its quarterfinal game at the NCAA Division II South Central regional.

Seeded eighth, the Bearcats, 17-13, take on No. 1 seed West Texas A&M, 27-4, at 8 p.m. on their opponents' home floor.

And the Bearcats are taking on the same team that beat them 87-72 last season in the South Central quarterfinals.

But those obstacles pale in comparison to what Northwest Missouri had to overcome just to reach the regional.

The Bearcats could have thrown in the towel on their season Feb. 9 when they suffered a humiliating 96-52 loss at Central Missouri.

"That Central game was the lowest we've ever been," Northwest Missouri senior guard Kelli Nelson said. "We had to regroup and get our focus back."

Then, after an up-and-down season in which the Bearcats lost their last two regular-season games, the team had to win three games in the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association postseason tournament just to keep its season going.

Simply put, Northwest Missouri's five seniors, four of whom start, refused to let their careers end on a sour note.

Yes, West Texas A&M poses a stiff challenge for the Bearcats, but they now know how to deal with what's in front of them.

"That's what got us (seniors) in trouble. ... We were looking too far ahead," senior center Mandi Schumacher. "We were looking at winning the conference and other stuff instead of the next game."

"Playing your last game is always in the back of your mind, but you focus on the game at hand."

One thing that Northwest Missouri did well in the conference tournament was to involve everybody in the scoring. The Bearcats became very hard to defend because all five players on the court were a threat to score.

"It gave us a lot of confidence knowing so many players were capable of scoring," Nelson said. "Having a team effort like that will help us go a lot further than having one star or two stars."

Mostly, though, the Bearcats want to stay on an even keel.

"It takes a toll on a team when you are up so high and then you go down so low," Schumacher said. "It has been an extreme for us. Right now, I'm hoping we can keep our cool in the regionals."

Northwest Missouri's miracle shot knocks out WTAMU

Les Giles, Morris News Service
March 16, 2008

CANYON - Talk about miracle finishes.

Northwest Missouri State's Meghan Brue hit a desperation 3-pointer from more than 40-feet with less than one second showing on the clock in overtime to give the Bearcats an improbable 72-71 victory against West Texas A&M in front of 2,754 stunned fans Friday night at the First United Bank Center.

This one had just about everything, and ended in such dramatic fashion that game officials had to view a video replay at courtside before signalling that Brue's final shot did indeed beat the buzzer.

What transpired in the final seconds of overtime would fill a journal.

"The way it ended, we don't have an answer," said Lady Buffs head coach Krista Gerlich, a member of Texas Tech's national championship team in 1993. "We defended it well. Joni (Unruh) was in the position she needed to be. I'd give that girl that shot 100 times and bank on her missing it every time.

"But she didn't. It's something she will always remember. When a game ends like that you're left speechless. We didn't even talk about it in the locker room afterward."

The emotional ending left the Lady Buffs shaking their heads, wondering what happened, and the Bearcats thinking to a semifinal on Saturday against fellow MIAA member Emporia State.

The startling ending that this one provided sent the winning Bearcats off the court on a tremendous high, while the Lady Buffs could only feel a great sense of disappointment from such a stinging loss.

In the final minutes of regulation and the final seconds of overtime, so many incredible events transpired.

The Lady Buffs, who saw their 45-game home win streak end, blew a 16-point lead early in the second half and had to fight for their lives down the stretch as the Bearcats clawed their way back in the game and eventually pulled ahead late in regulation.

WT was leading 61-57 with 1:44 to play in regulation only to have the Bearcats score the final two baskets on layups by Mandi Schumacher and Jessica Burton, the latter with 23.8 seconds remaining, to send the game into overtime.

Brue knocked down back-to-back treys in overtime to give NW Missouri a 67-61 lead with 3:32 to play.

But the Lady Buffs scored eight unanswered points to pull in front 69-67 with 26.2 seconds remaining.

After Burton tied it at 69-69 with two free throws with 15.8 seconds to play, WT took the lead when Courtney Lee rebounded a missed Emily Brister shot near the baseline and knocked down the shot with two seconds to play to put WT back in front, 71-69.

But after calling time out, NW Missouri got the ball into Brue, and after she positioned herself, she launched the game-winner.

Half-court shot defines unlikely tournament run

Scott Levine, Northwest Missourian
March 20, 2008

When looking at the 2007-08 Northwest women's basketball team, coach Gene Steinmeyer said one image will always stick out - an image that only until two weeks ago seemed possible.

"This team will always be defined by Meghan's (Brue) shot," Steinmeyer said. "They'll also always be defined by this postseason run."

Brue's half-court shot with two seconds remaining to defeat No. 1-seed West Texas A&M, 72-71, highlighted a historical South Central Regional Tournament last weekend. The game-winning 40-footer delivered the Lady Buffs their first home loss in more than three years.

"That's a play we run in practice," Steinmeyer said. "It really depends on how they choose to cover it. They doubled Mandi (Schumacher) down low, and played behind Meghan. I tell them you have a dribble per second, so we thought Meghan could get within 30-feet and get a good look. But she dropped it at half-court, so she only had one dribble.

"It was a shot no one will ever forget."

The Bearcats, who trailed by as many as 16 points in the second half, notched their second postseason victory of all-time. Northwest hadn't won a regional tournament game since 1984.

But after winning four must-win tournament games, dating back to the MIAA tournament championship run, Northwest (18-13) finally fell to Emporia State 83-71. The loss marked the season's third loss to Emporia.

"Two things happened," Steinmeyer said. "We got in bad foul trouble. We were way too aggressive, but we were still in control until Meghan got hurt. She was taking it to Michelle Stueve, but after getting hurt, she just wasn't the same.

"We did the best we could, but after Meghan got hurt, it never really felt right."

When Brue went down with the hip injury, Northwest held an 8-point lead, and the junior guard had 10 points. The hip injury limited Brue to 27 minutes of playing time, and four points after the 8:51 mark in the first half.

Despite Andrea Dill, Jessica Burton and April Miller each having three fouls, the 'Cats never trailed in the first half and went into halftime up 41-36. That lead evaporated in the first three minutes of the second half, when the Hornets used a 10-3 run to gain their first lead, 46-44.

Consecutive 3-pointers by Kelli Nelson and Lauren Williams elevated Northwest to a 4-point lead two minutes later. With 11:25 remaining, Micaela Uriell's trey extended Northwest's lead to six points, before Emporia State ended the contest on a

27-10 run.

"Our offense had some issues in the second half," Schumacher said. "We just weren't getting the defensive stops we needed to get. It's hard to go through droughts when facing a team like Emporia."

Washburn defeated Emporia last Monday, 73-58, to earn an Elite Eight berth.

Steinmeyer said the last two weeks helped erase memories of an overall inconsistent season.

"I'm not going to lie, this was not the easiest team to coach," Steinmeyer said. "It was a hard team to figure out. We had good kids who all got along, but we just couldn't find the right groove during the season. I didn't do a very good job of motivating. It took the postseason to get them motivated."

Seven games into the season, Northwest sat atop the MIAA conference. At the end of the season, the 'Cats had dropped seven of its last 10 games en route to a fifth-place finish.

"I've never been on a team with so many low points and some good high points," Nelson said. "We pretty much hit all the extremes."

But a MIAA tournament championship and a regional tournament victory, helped alter the legacy left by the five seniors.

"I'm really proud of this team," Schumacher said. "We went above and beyond what everyone thought. We had an average season and made it a great season. People will remember the great things, than the average record we had.

"We surprised and shocked everyone. Every game was like our last breath. If we lost, then our careers were over. This ending was a good way to end my career."

Although, Steinmeyer must say goodbye to five seniors, including second team all-MIAA center, Schumacher, and honorable mention all-MIAA guard, Nelson, the 'Cats return guards Amber Vandevender and Alicia Bell from injury next year. Proven scorers Brue and Burton also return, including talented newcomers, Steinmeyer said.

"We'll be pretty talented next year," Steinmeyer said. "We may even be more talented than this year's group. I don't know if we'll be a better team, but we'll have talent."