

From timekeeper to assistant coach

By Isaac Molina | Staff Writer

Seated courtside, Iesha Jackson, Blazers basketball assistant coach, overlooks stats and keeps players locked in throughout games.

"I pretty much keep stats ... that way when we are reflecting on the score, we're like, 'Hey,' we got to do this and that. Because stats are saying we're down or we're doing a great job," Jackson said.

Off the court Jackson's role as assistant coach is to help keep the players academics up, run the team's social media and help with recruiting.

Jackson has been with the team since the 2021-2022 season where she worked as a timekeeper under former Blazers head coach Tim McGraw.

At the start of the 2022-2023 season Jackson was offered the assistant coach role by now Blazers head coach Josh Mills, following McGraw's retirement.

Although Jackson is the assistant coach, her journey to the role was not easy.

Jackson is a California native who has been associated with basketball her whole life, she has been all around the court as a player and as a coach. Jackson played guard for William Jessup University as well as having various coaching stints including an assistant coach role at Fol-



Iesha Jackson, assistant men's basketball coach, during NJCAA DIII South Central District Semifinals against Dallas College Mountain View March 3.

News-Register | Joanna Mikolajczak

som Lake College.

But as faith would have it Jackson's husbands' job relocated them to Texas. The relocation was hard for Jackson because she had to get used to being far away from her family.

"It's just us. We have all our family back in Califor-

nia," Jackson said. "It's been difficult not having that support system."

After Jackson settled in the Dallas-FortWorth area, she ran into McGraw at a campus visit while on the lookout for a coaching opening. The run-in was how Jackson got the opportunity

to be the team's timekeeper.

Soon after, Mills offered a position to Jackson as an assistant coach, which she could not refuse. "I'm here already. ... Let's do this, let's go win some games," Jackson said.

Regarding the hire, Mills was excited to have Jackson

as the assistant coach. Mills said with Jackson having previous coaching experience the decision was an easy one.

"[Jackson] has been a coach before at the junior college level so that is very valuable," Mills said. "She has great insight ... and we are happy to have her around

and keep her in our athletics program for a long time."

As Jackson committed to help coach the team full-time, she gave birth to her now 4-month-old daughter mid-season. This was yet another challenge for Jackson as she had to tend to her maternal duties as well as still support the team.

But as hard as it was, Jackson kept on top of her work. She was now more committed to the team than ever.

One of Jackson's main goals was to keep the team's academics up throughout the season, even if it meant she had to do it remotely.

Mills said thanks to Jackson the team has a 3.23 GPA average which is great for a junior college team.

Blazers guard Randy Woolf said Jackson has helped the team greatly when it came to academics, and that she has pushed him to be the best scholar he possibly can be.

As of now, Jackson's run as the assistant coach has been a successful one even with the minor setbacks.

And with the season coming to an end after a disappointing run in the national championship, Jackson looks forward to helping the team bounce back next season and hope for a shot at glory.

Blazers fails to claim back to back championships

By Isaac Molina
Staff Writer

The North Lake basketball Blazers, whose last loss came in November, fell short on their road to win back-to-back national championships.

The Blazers looked unstoppable throughout the regular season, they dominated teams with their physical defense and flashy offense, and beat all their opponents, to ultimately punch a ticket to the national championship.

Those same Blazers also lost the majority of their starting lineup due to injuries or illness during and before their first game in round two of the national championship.

Players such as Da'Ryan Williams, who had a stomach virus; Darion Jones who acquired a bruised hip during game one; and Ryan Pondant, who was in the emergency room the morning of game one due to an allergic reaction.

These setbacks had all three playing limited minutes in the tournament.

Blazers head coach Josh Mills said that losing key players like this threw off the team's rhythm as reserve

players now had to fill in the gaps and pull the weight of the missing starters.

The Blazers played the Rochester Community and Technical College Yellowjackets in their first game in round two of the national junior championship tournament on March 16, where the Yellowjackets won 73-63.

The game was a back-and-forth battle for the lead with both teams giving it all they had. Ultimately midway through the second half, the Yellowjackets took the lead and never looked back.

"Team morale was very down because we are obviously not used to losing ... and it was really tough for us," said guard Randy Woolf on how it felt losing the first game of the tournament.

The loss took away any chance of the Blazers winning back-to-back national championships. But there was still hope of a fifth-place position if the Blazers won their next couple of games.

In their second game of the tournament in round three, Blazers played against the College of DuPage Chapparals on March 17.

The Blazers started hot

even holding a 20-point lead at the start of the second half.

But a complete meltdown from the Blazers gave the Chapparals enough time to come back and win the game 53-51, thus ending the Blazers tournament.

"Everybody felt it, the hotel was quiet, and then to lose after having a 20-point lead it was even worse," said Blazers forward Ring Deng on the teams' mood after losing the second game.

But even in dark times like this, there was still some light in the way. Freshman forward Ring Deng had a 15-point game against DuPage and freshman guard Jakob Zenon scored double digits in both games.

Players like this make up a winning team, even if luck was not on their side this time.

"I plan on coming back, having a better year and come back stronger, faster and better," Zenon said. The future is what the Blazers are looking forward to as they close this chapter of disappointment.

Mills said he has no concerns for next year, as the team's roster will have minor loses, but he assured the team will be back and will compete again for the most prestigious award in Junior college basketball, the national championships.



Da'Ryan Williams (23) and Darion Jones (5) put in a defensive effort against Rochester.

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Ring Deng (21) dribbles down the court during a game against DuPage.

News-Register | Courtesy of NJCAA