Seahawks begin title defense

Youth-laden Cabrillo changes offense earlier, hopes to come together for another banner year

By Andrew Matheson
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Cabrillo senior guard Matt Wilcher (left) and sophomore forward Jordan Frazer (right) helped Cabrillo to a 12-3 record in the California Pacific Conference. The Hawks begin league play on Thursday.

APTOPIX Three games into the season, Tony Marcopulos decided to change the offense.

“You don’t want to do that when you’re coaching,” said the Cabrillo College men’s basketball coach, now in his 15th year at the junior college. “You don’t want to invest in six weeks and then say, ‘OK, we’re not doing that (any more).’

“It’s safe to say Marcopulos’ hand was forced, then. The Se-
hawks, already struggling with depth issues and losing the high-scoring services of 2014 Coast Conference South MVP Warren Joseph for the season, lost the benefit of having 6-foot-7 forward Aron West in the starting lineup during the very first game on Nov. 6. Although West recently returned to the lineup after straining the medial collateral ligament in his knee, Marcopulos in November — less than four days into the season — had to quickly rethink how the next four months might pan out.

Marcopulos plans to rely heavily on returning sopho-

mores Lattrell Wilson, Allen Wilcher and Zavon Jackson in a more guard-oriented attack while also continu-
ing the 2-3 zone defense that Cabrillo has utilized in each of its last four championship seasons.

In what is doubt expected to be a challenging campaign, the ever-
defending Seahawks will begin their quest for a fifth straight CC-S title on Wednesday against visiting Hartnell.

“I just didn’t feel, moving forward though November and December and going into league, that what we were doing was going to have us win the league again,” Marcopulos said in late November. “You’re looking big picture, long term, so I had to make a decision — do you want to change the offense or not change the offense?”

Marcopulos opted with the former, with plans to get the ball more into the hands of Wilson, Wilcher and Jackson, who so far have answered the call by combining for nearly 75 per-
cent of Cabrillo’s total scoring this season.

Wilson and Wilcher even figure into the top 20 in the state in scoring, with Jack-

son ranked No. 4 in the state in rebounding.

The 6-foot-3 Wilson, a second-team all-confer-
ence selection a year ago, averaging a team-high 17.4 points per game behind nearly three 3-point-

ers, while Jackson, a 6-foot-5 forward out of Salt Lake City, is averaging 13.4 points and a team-high 11.6 rebounds. Wilcher, a first-
team CC-S selection last season, is providing 16.9 points while dishing out 5 assists.

“We just need to be able to score and I think we’ll be all right,” Jackson said earlier this season, feeling the team’s defense will be able to keep them in most games.

“We’re still trying to figure out the offense a little bit, but defensively we feel that we’re pretty strong,” Wilson said following Cabrillo’s 74-55 victory against Butte on Nov. 29. “The defense will come. We’re getting good shots, open shots; we’re just not connecting. But we’re making strides.”

Strides like upset-

ting Lassen, then the No. 3-ranked team in the state, 71-59 on Nov. 30. Strides like downs Foothill 64-

56 on Monday — a team Cabrillo lost to on Nov. 23 by a 65-56 margin.

Still, others will need to step up for Cabrillo if it plans to take home its sev-

enth conference title in nine years. Kean Flowers, a

5-foot-9 guard out of Aus-

tralia, has provided some production in 13 games, av-

eraging 5.5 points and 2.5 assists.

“We’re a young team, only four sophomores,” Wilson said. “So we’ve just got to settle it out and everyone else will follow.”

Marcopulos feels rebounding will also be key in the team’s title de-

fense, and earlier this sea-

son called upon the con-

tinued development of guards Matt Nolan (Reno, Nev.), Seth Warfield (Albu-
querque, N.M.) and Johann Schmidt (Santa Cruz), and 6-foot-5, 260-pound for-

ward Noah Wheeler (Sac-

cata), an all-state offensive lineman while at College of the Redwoods.

The team could also very much benefit from the recent addition of West, a 215-pound transfer from UC Santa Cruz who re-
corded four points, three rebounds and an assist in Monday’s win over Foothill. He recorded eight points off the bench against San Joa-

quin Delta on Dec. 20, just his second game back since returning from injury.

The Seahawks could also have benefited from War-

ren Jackson, who last sea-

son averaged 18.0 points per game and was a first team all-state selection for Ca-

brillo. But after suffering a torn ACL in the spring, the talented guard out of De-
	
															
troit — who was sidelined during the 2012-13 season with a knee injury — signed early with San Francisco State. Although he could still come back and play for the Seahawks, Marcopulos opted against it, not want-

ing him to risk getting in-

jured again trying to come back too soon.

Jackson will have three years of eligibility at SF State.

“Me, Allen and Zavon, we have a lot of the pressure,” Marcopulos said, Wilson, who called Warren Jackson an “enor-

mous part” of last year’s team that won 10-2 in the CC-S and shared the conference title with San Jose City.

While Monterey Penin-

sula College and De Anza will provide good tests in the CC-S this season, the Jaguars appear to be the team to beat in the confer-

ence. At 12-3 entering Su-


erday’s game against San Francisco, SJCC is currently ranked No. 4 in the state by the California Community College Athletic Association.

Cabrillo is ranked just outside the top 15 among teams from Northern Cali-

fornia.

SJC and Cabrillo will meet Friday in Aptos.

“San Jose is really good ... I would say they’re the best team in our league,” said Marcopulos, who never-

theless expects his team to compete against SJCC and others, despite the adversity the team has dealt with already this season.

“We’ll be in the upper half of the league,” he said. “And if we can stay healthy, we can compete with San Jose.”

Contact Andrew Matheson at 831-705-3272.

IF YOU GO
MEN’S BASKETBALL
Who: Hartnell at Cabrillo
What: Coast Conference South Division opener
When: Wednesday, 7 p.m.

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— Tony Marcopulos, Cabrillo coach

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