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Bears Climb Stairs to Success

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Western Oklahoma has a reputation for its ability to turn out the best basketball teams in the state — teams such as Leedey, Arnett, Elk City, and Sayre. But, when basketball and Western Oklahoma are mentioned, my mind turns to a group of girls from Cheyenne, Oklahoma, called the Lady Bears.

In March 1985, the Cheyenne Lady Bears took reign as the Class A state champs after defeating Lookeba-Sickles by three points (45-42). It wasn't as easy getting to state and winning the final game as they made it look when they were on the court. It took the girls three long years of hard work and determination to become such a well-balanced team. They practiced long hours and worked tediously on imperfections, to be able to display such precision in their moves on the court. And, precision moves were Jenny Shockey's specialty. Jenny could dribble her way through a brick wall. She dazzled crowds with ball-handling abilities comparable with those of the Globetrotters.

Basketball skills, however, weren't the only things developed by these long hours. The girls gained much self-discipline which they displayed both on and off the court. Bonds of friendship were made among the girls. Most of all, the girls developed self-confidence. They believed they had the ability to get what they wanted, and they went after it. All in all, the Lady Bears gained every quality needed to become winners and most definitely knew how to put them to use.

After the 1984-85 winning season, the team hated to say good-bye to senior Julie Barton who was a big asset to the team. But with five returning starters, the prospects for the Lady Bears returning to state the next year were looking good.

Following a short summer off from regular season — not practice — the girls went back to school and back to the hours of practice under the supervision of Coach David Sanders. Finally their long-awaited first game of the season had arrived, and the Lady Bears were off like a rocket. Their season seemed to flow like river rapids, quickening as they barreled over team after team. They dribbled, shot, and rebounded their way through the season leaving only a few teams with just a taste of victory. Then, when the first day of District play-offs arrived, the

Bears Climb Stairs To Success

By Jo Hagerman



The 1986-87 State-winning Cheyenne Lady Bears.

girls were determined to bring home that gold ball once again. Although some skeptics didn't think the girls could win state without the leadership of Julie Barton, in mid-March they proved those skeptics wrong. The Lady Bears had defended their reign and had once again played an excellent game that led to an easy victory over Amber-Pocasset (class AA state champs in 1984). Final score read Cheyenne 61 and Amber-Pocasset 49.

Once again the Lady Bears said farewell to an outstanding senior, Melinda Cavazos. As starting guard and All-Stater, Melinda had the ability to annoy and intimidate any forward. The Cheyenne team, however, retained five of its six starters, and with Lori Sanders, who always seemed to have more hustle and determination to get a loose ball than anyone on the court replacing Melinda, they were almost assured a ticket to the state tournament in the year 1987.

The 1986-1987 season flew by game after game. From their first game to their last, the girls always played as a team and never as selfish individuals.

They were like a clock; separated, they were just spare parts, but when placed together in the correct way, they were an instrument working toward a purpose. One of those spare parts stands up above the rest, in both abilities and height. Jodi Fisher, 6' 1", was almost unstoppable, and she later went on to play at OSU.

On March 7, 1987, the final game of the season had arrived. The girls had fought their way through District, Regional, and Area. Now, they had reached the time of true triumph and defeat. They had prepared for this game all year. As the team emerged from the locker room, fans of all ages were chanting "Cheyenne (clap, clap) Lady Bears (clap, clap)" over and over. I remember searching through the hundreds of orange and black clothes to try to find my cousins. I had never seen so many people at a high-school ballgame in my life. The question "Can they do it a third time," intensely hung in the air, but was quickly swept away by the Lady Bears' outstanding first-half performance. At the end of the game the girls had upheld their status in an

easy victory over Thomas. The final score was Thomas 42 and Cheyenne, defending state champs, 65. Winning for the third time in a row, the Lady Bears tied the record set by Byng girls in the 1930's for winning three consecutive state tournaments.

At the end of 1987, the team lost some valuable girls. Jodi Fisher, Cindy Smith, Sherry Hillman, Leana Burrows, Penny Sanderford, Dyan Carter, Julie Bowan, and Cindy Hay were the seniors who graduated on to bigger and better things. The team had to say good-bye to Coach Sanders, who moved to Stigler to continue his coaching career.

Although many teams would be content with winning the state tournament once, the Cheyenne girls weren't content until they had won the gold ball at least three times. The Lady Bears, however, did have other accomplishments. For instance, they compiled a record of 88 wins and 4 losses. All of the forwards had outstanding free-throw percentages and scoring averages. They filled the trophy cases at the Cheyenne Gym. They lost only one game on their home court in four ball seasons, and the list goes on and on. They were also winners in the academic field. Cindy Smith, starting forward,

held a 4 point average, and so did many other girls on the team. The biggest and most lasting attainment these girls made, however, was helping instill a "desire to win" into the younger generation of basketball stars to come. ■

JO HAGERMAN of Sweetwater is classified as a Junior at SOSU. She enjoys writing, being with friends, and watching DAYS OF OUR LIVES on TV. She hopes to be a mother and career woman someday with a perfect balance in her life.

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