Jokes lighten the mood through tough stretch

Have you heard the one about the blonde, the brunette and the red-head all stuck on a desert island together?

Members of the Swede girls basketball team are probably able to provide the punch line.

Jokes, including some poking fun at blondes, were a ritual before games and at halftime this season.

It was one way that coach Chris Lecher could keep the mood light, especially through the first half of the year when wins were few and far between.

But Lecher wasn't the only comedian. The girls had their fair share of practical jokes, and never struggled for laughs.

"Basketball is a long season," Lecher said. "If you're not having fun, it can be hard to keep going."

The Swede girls had a rough start. They won only three of their first 11 games. Five of the losses came against state-qualifying teams.

"I knew we were going to struggle early," Lecher said. "It was a new system, a new coach and

tough opponents."

When things finally clicked against a solid Centura team right after the holiday break, the girls learned what taking care of business felt like.

And they liked it.

The nine-game winning streak that followed included a season highlight win over perennial powerhouse Minden in the Southwest Conference tournament.

"Nobody wanted to play us during that stretch," Lecher said. "It was an exciting time for girls basketball here."

Nothing came easy, though. Lecher credits his girls for their hard work and perseverance.

"And we had good leaders who each brought something special to the team," he said.

Three seniors led the way. Once Taylor Wolf recovered from an injury she suffered during softball season, she became a force on the court both offensively and defensively.

"You could always count on Taylor to be in there fighting for the ball," Lecher said.

Jacey Wiggins found a new comfort zone as a senior, learning that her height allowed her to post up and score inside.

“She really developed in that position as the year went on,” the coach said.

And point guard Brittyn Munster left her mark on the girls basketball program, notching five spots in the all-time Top 10.

“Brittyn is one of those kids who plays hard all of the time,” Lecher said. “She is a strong three-point shooter and she often sparked a run for us.”

Add to the seniors a stand-out junior who led the team in scoring, rebounding and blocked shots.

Regan Geiken found herself in the middle of everything this season.

“Regan forced some bad matchups,” Lecher said. “Because of her height teams would use a big girl to defend her and her quickness made them pay.”

Geiken achieved three spots on the all-time list, including two career categories as a junior.

“We hope she’s a force to be reckoned with next year,” Lecher said.

In addition to the individual marks on the Top 10, the team also set four new records.

The Swede girls tied the best field goal percentage in a game by hitting 66% against Minden in the SWC tournament semi-finals.

The team also made 307 free throws this season to improve the previous mark of 293 set in the 2001-02 season.

The overall free throw percentage of 65% is also a best-ever. The previous record was 62.7% set in 2001-02.

“We had several games that hinged on free throws,” the coach said. “There were times we couldn’t get a field goal to fall but we could make our free throws.”

Three games in particular—Ogallala, Cozad and Centura—came down to charity shots at the end of the game.

And finally, Gothenburg tied the fewest turnovers in a game record at six against Love Christian during the Cabela’s Holiday Shootout in Sidney.

Besides beating Minden in the SWC tournament, Lecher said getting to the district final game by winning the sub-district made a statement that Gothenburg girls basketball is back on the map.

“The girls came a long way this year and I think it’s safe to say that those coming back aren’t satisfied. They’re going to want more next year.”

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