

The kid without an ounce of quit

By Andy Parker, The Oregonian
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Only eight minutes into the game, the injury riddled Trail Blazers had fallen behind the Utah Jazz 24-7. As the first wave of boos started to rain down from the nosebleed seats where I share a season ticket, my mind jumped back to memories of a skinny kid from Canby I hadn't seen in over five years.

And I'm thinking: JC Cook would not be giving up now. JC Cook would revel in this moment. I happened upon Cook back in 2004 while watching the slender Canby High point guard play in the annual Les Schwab holiday tournament against L.A.'s Westchester Comets, perennially one of the nation's powerhouse teams.

With its national-level talent and suffocating full-court press Westchester should have won by 30. But fighting through wall after wall of fatigue, Cook simply refused to buy into the idea of Canby losing.

One second he'd be doubled over gasping for air. The next he'd be streaking down the court and slicing through a double team to make an improbable basket or perfect pass. In the end, Westchester would win by 9. But it was Cook who reminded me of why I can never shake my love of competitive sports.

I'd heard that after high school Cook headed off to play hoops at Western Oregon University. But I could find no record of him ever playing there.

"The week before the first game I broke my ankle," said Cook. "Never played a single game for them."

Cook said he and the Western coach didn't see eye-to-eye, so he transferred to **Clackamas Community College**, where, over the past two seasons, he averaged more than 20 points a game and helped the team to a 29-3 record and league championship last season.

After offers from more than 30 schools, including Division I teams such as Portland State, Santa Clara and Hawaii, Cook decided on Central Washington University.

Thursday night, he had 11 points and 5 rebounds in a win over Montana State Billings.

One of the dates he had circled was Jan. 7, when Western Oregon traveled to Ellensburg. But after scoring 14 points, Cook tripped and hyper-extended a knee, keeping him out of four straight games.

The games were the first he'd missed in a hoops career reaching back to ninth grade, when his family moved from Sutherlin to Canby. "At first, I hated Canby," recalled Cook. Then he ran into Dane Walker, the first-year coach at Canby High, and everything changed.

"I was this little 5-9, 150-pound freshman, but he saw what I could do. The next year, he handed me the ball and said, 'It's your team. Take it where you want.'" Walker, now in his eighth year at Canby, said Cook is "relentless."

"The score doesn't matter to him. The kid doesn't have an ounce of quit in him. He just never gives in." It's a trait Cook says he gets from his father, John, a former semi-pro football player. "From T-ball on, he always pushed me to never give up, no matter what the circumstances.

Cook says some days, he just wanted his father "to shut up for a while." But his mother, Andrea, did a good job of helping him to keep a balanced perspective.

"My father pushed, but he also told me to have fun. We get along great. We talk every single day."

Cook says his own drive to get better often left him as the only basketball player in the weight room at **Clackamas Community College**.

He's studying exercise science and thinking about a career as an athletic trainer, conditioning coach, or maybe basketball coach. But regardless of whether he ends up in the field of athletics, he's sure athletics will serve him well. "With my work ethic, I think I'll be successful. I don't ever want people looking down on me saying 'He could've done better.'"