

Justin Escarciga:

Senior season didn't go like he hoped, but there plenty of good memories

By Bruce Smith
MatchupUT.com

Justin Escarciga came into the 2009-10 basketball season with high hopes.

Last year, he starred on the junior varsity team and was among the team's leading scorers. He played varsity, but mostly in a backup role to leading scorer Markus Duran.

During the offseason, however, he blossomed into a fine player. He was a force in pickup games and various tournaments, shooting three-pointers and helping his team to victory.

"I was making the threes and the assists came easy," Escarciga said. "I had the confidence."

A lot of that disappeared after the first few weeks of the season. Escarciga started the season well, scoring his season high of 16 points in the team's second game, a 70-43 win over East. He reached double figures in four non-region games, but lost his shooting touch.

"This season was a lot different than I expected," said Escarciga, who ended up the team's fourth-leading scorer at 5.2 points per game and second-leading assist man.

"I thought I was coming into something special, but I didn't really play to my ability."

With 6-foot-7 center **David Collette** the dominant scorer inside, coach **Jason Workman** wanted some outside shooters to provide balance. Unfortunately, the Spartans were inconsistent from the perimeter. Escarciga ended up shooting 25 percent from three-point land. As a team, the Spartans were 28.8 percent.

"The three-point shot is necessary for teams and good teams have to be efficient," Workman said.

That happened only on rare occasions for Murray. Without much confidence in his jumper,



Justin Escarciga was one of Murray's best players, but then had to find different ways to help the team.

Escarciga changed his game. He tried to play tougher on defense. His teammates also stepped up. **Cade Bullough** became the team's top three-point shooter (35 percent) and **Riley Grandinetti** came off the bench on several occasions and lit it up.

When they were on, Murray had success. When they weren't, opponents could drop off the perimeter more and focus on Collette.

"I tried to get the ball to David a lot. He was a monster down there," Escarciga said. "He has great post moves. I haven't seen a guy like that ... ever."

Escarciga said his best game – by far – was

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against East.

“We all got into it,” he said. “Me and David had fun the whole game. Even the younger guys played well and we kicked their butt.”

Escarciga’s most memorable game also came early in the season, when Murray defeated Spanish Fork.

“I played the worst first half ever,” he recalled. “I had seven turnovers, but I scored 11 points in the third quarter and I made a big steal at the end.”

The Murray statistics book confirmed that fact, but the best part came after Escarciga made the steal. He drove the floor for a layup and was fouled hard.

“David (Collette) came along and pushed the other kid and I said, ‘yeah!’ It was a good feeling.

“I thought there was going to be a fight. Everyone was freaking out.”

Escarciga made both free throws. That was one of the key plays as the Spartans rallied from a two-point deficit to win, 60-53.

During the latter part of the season, Workman tried to find ways for Escarciga to help, changing the lineup so he could start of provide a spark coming off the bench. Escarciga’s best game was a nine-point effort against Cottonwood (including 3 of 4 free throws in the fourth quarter in the 44-40 win).

“I was just looking to pass by the end of the season,” he said. “I wasn’t a real threat out there.”

As luck would have it, as soon as the basketball season ended, Escarciga found his shot again and was trying to play as many pickup games as possible in hopes of continuing his basketball career at the collegiate level.



TOP LEFT: Justin Escarciga defends a shot against Riverton.

TOP RIGHT: Justin listens to a teammate during pre-game ceremonies on “Senior Night.”

LOWER RIGHT: Justin and Mitch Tate congratulate their opponent after a game.