

Oly's season was special because of its players

By Bruce Smith
MatchupUT.com

The 2009-10 basketball season was something special for Olympus High School. Not just because the team finished with an 18-4 record.

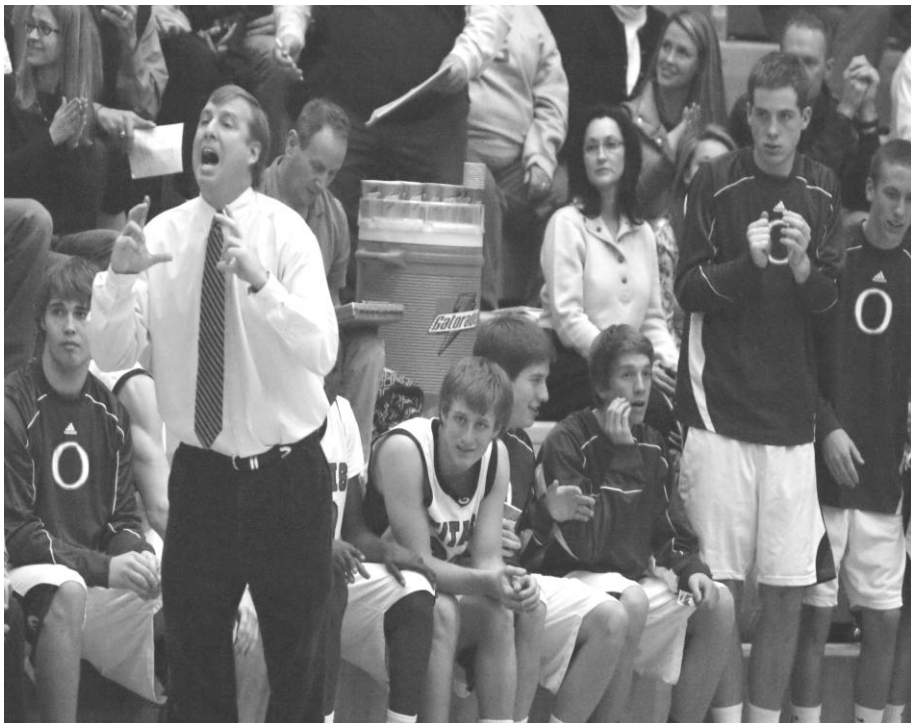
It wasn't just the fact the Titans opened the season ranked No. 1 among 4A schools by the Deseret News. They also beat 5A powers Bingham and West Jordan, and whipped neighborhood rival Skyline.

It was who made up the team that did it.

The Olympus Titans were a team of an amazing 12 seniors, several whom had been playing at the varsity level for three years, where they've been part of 50 wins.

"This was a special group of guys," said Oly coach **Matt Barnes**. "They were part of two region championships and they had a great year this year."

This season didn't feature a region title, and that proved costly. The Titans lost to eventual champion Bountiful twice. The second defeat forced them to accept a No. 2 seed in the 4A state tournament. And, in this year's tourney format, Oly had to travel to play Sky View, and lost a tough battle in the opening round.



Olympus coach Matt Barnes noted several of the 12 seniors on this year's team have played a role in the Titans' 50 victories over the last three years.

"This group of kids had a lot of pressure on them," said Barnes, an Oly grad himself who finished his 10th year as head coach. "We had a tremendous season. You kind of have a sour taste the way the season ended."

But if the season ended sour, it's only because most of it was so sweet.

The Titans had a talented group, led by a three-pronged tandem of scorers that included **Nicholas Paulos**, **Connor Brady** and **Will Watkins**. They also had role players and plenty of depth.

After losing in the state

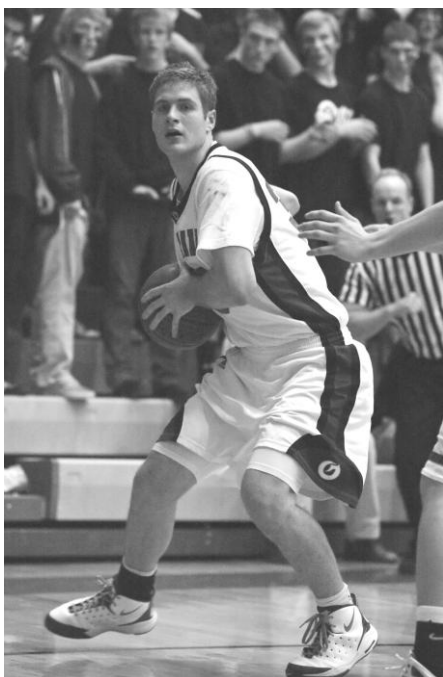
tournament semifinals last year, Oly was the likely favorite to win it all this season.

Oly was headed in that direction, but late-season injuries to **Spencer Harris** (ACL) and **Joe Bourne** (ankle) made a big difference. Harris was lost for the season, while Bourne was out for only a few games. He tried to return at point guard, but was never 100 percent.

"We try not to complain because every team has to deal with injuries," Barnes said. "But we lost Harris and Bourne and

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OLYMPUS BASKETBALL: 2009-10 season recap



Connor Brady (left), Nicholas Paulos (center) and Will Watkins were Oly's most-experienced players and its senior leaders.

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still had a shot to win it. Injuries are part of the game."

Oly was 13-1 before Harris and Bourne were hurt. Junior **Sam Williams** replaced Bourne, and had several good games, including 15 points against lowly Tooele that helped prevent an upset. Williams had dominated most junior varsity games. He also gained valuable experience for next year, and Barnes praised him thoroughly.

"Sam gave us stability," Barnes said. "He was steady. He controlled things and led us."

Before that happened, though, the Titans had been on a roll. Paulos had 22 points when Oly defeated Bingham, whom most thought was the best high school team in Utah. Paulos was the team's leading scorer, averaging just under 16 points per game and was one of the best three-point shooters around.

"Bingham was our best preseason game," said Barnes. "That was a high for us. They had beaten us pretty good before."

Paulos had 25 points, including a

thunderous dunk, when Oly went to West Jordan and beat the defending 5A state champs.

When Paulos wasn't on, Brady stepped up. He had a game-high 16 when Oly embarrassed Skyline, and had his highest-scoring games at Stansbury and Tooele that helped avoid upsets.

Watkins was a frequent scorer and gritty defender. His hard-nosed style meant he drew difficult defensive tasks. But he also averaged 8.3 ppg and had dozens of assists and steals.

Barnes called Paulos and Brady the team's most valuable players, but noted that Oly needed them both to be successful. He said center **Ben Sonntag** was easily the most improved.

"He came in and had a huge middle part of the season for us," Barnes said.

With 12 seniors gone, you would think Oly would be down next year. The JV team, however, finished unbeaten (20-0) and the sophomores had a 17-3 record. While the new players might not have as much varsity experience, Oly has become a traditional power.

They don't rebuild. They reload, and aim for another special season.