



# 'We love Sioux Falls'

A commemorative look back at the  
2017-18 Central Missouri women's  
basketball national championship





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2017-18 Central Missouri schedule

Date	Opponent	Result	Score
November 10, 2017	vs Mary (S.D.)	W	69-58
November 11, 2017	vs Northern State	W	82-65
November 18, 2017	WILLIAM JEWELL	W	66-56
November 19, 2017	ARKANSAS-FORT SMITH	L	76-77
November 21, 2017	EVANGEL	W	81-30
November 28, 2017	HARRIS-STOWE	W	78-43
December 10, 2017	NORTHWEST MISSOURI	W	77-40
December 14, 2017	MISSOURI WESTERN	W	70-48
December 16, 2017	at Southwest Baptist	W	80-75
December 19, 2017	ROCKHURST	W	79-53
January 4, 2018	FORT HAYS STATE	W	71-51
January 6, 2018	NEBRASKA-KEARNEY	W	81-46
January 13, 2018	at Missouri Western	W (OT)	80-76
January 15, 2018	at Northwest Missouri	W	74-58
January 18, 2018	LINCOLN	W	71-53
January 20, 2018	LINDENWOOD	W	80-73
January 24, 2018	at Emporia State	W	78-61
January 27, 2018	at Washburn	W	72-63
February 1, 2018	CENTRAL OKLAHOMA	W	64-58
February 3, 2018	NORTHEASTERN STATE	W	69-53
February 7, 2018	PITTSBURG STATE	L	63-68
February 10, 2018	at Missouri Southern	W	80-63
February 15, 2018	at Lincoln	W	80-55
February 17, 2018	at Lindenwood	W	73-60
February 22, 2018	MISSOURI SOUTHERN	W	64-41
February 24, 2018	at Pittsburg State	W	60-56
March 1, 2018	vs Lindenwood	L	66-75
March 9, 2018	vs MSU Moorhead	W	66-49
March 10, 2018	vs Fort Hays State	W	66-59
March 12, 2018	at Augustana	W	81-42
March 19, 2018	vs Lubbock Christian	W	72-62
March 21, 2018	vs Union	W	70-57
March 23, 2018	vs Ashland	W	66-52

Final Division II National Poll

1. Central Missouri (20)	30-3	14. Montana State Billings	25-12
2. Ashland (3)	34-1	15. Univ. of the Sciences	30-4
3. Indiana (PA)	30-4	16. Virginia Union	28-3
4. Union (TN)	32-4	17. West Texas A&M	29-5
5. Carson-Newman	32-3	18. Southern Indiana	26-5
6. Lubbock Christian	31-2	19. Wingate	26-6
7. Drury	31-3	20. Southwestern Oklahoma	26-5
8. Stonehill	29-4	21. UC San Diego	28-5
9. Augustana (SD)	29-4	22. Azusa Pacific	27-5
10. Glenville State	31-2	23. North Georgia	29-5
11. Alaska Anchorage	27-5	24. Grand Valley State	26-7
12. Bentley	28-4	25. Hawaii Pacific	26-4
13. Edinboro	27-4		

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# Building a national championship team

**JOE WARREN**  
Publisher

Like most great things, there isn't one event or person or place that can be isolated as The Moment that turned the 2017-18 UCM Jennies basketball team into a national champion. But there might be one date that turned the tide. At least as it relates to how this team was put together.

UCM assistant coach Mike Nicholson is head coach Dave Slifer's recruiting guru.

"More of Coach Nick and less of me makes for good recruiting," Slifer said. "I've never seen someone who hits it as hard as he does."

Nicholson, also known as "Coach Nick," said one day sticks out more than any other when it comes to the national championship roster.

"April 29, 2016," Nicholson said off the top of his head, "It was a great day for us in recruiting."

That fateful day in April was a turning point for the UCM program. Much of the core of the championship team was in place, but two key pieces would come into play.

A player on the radar of every school in the area would make her decision. And another just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It was one of several unique stories that brought the championship team to Central Missouri.

## The fateful day

Morgan Fleming was a player at Liberty High School.

Legitimately 6-feet tall with the ability to play inside or outside, Fleming is a prototype for women's college basketball.

That's why she was recruited by major Division I programs like Arkansas, Indiana and Nebraska, among others.

She scored more than 1,600 points in high school, twice earning Class 5 all-state honors and to top it off was even valedictorian of her class. In other words, Fleming was a college coach's dream recruit.

Under some circumstances, a recruit like Fleming might not even consider playing at the D-II level. Luckily for the Jennies, there were two connections that helped open the door.

For one, Fleming's older sister Kara played under Slifer from 2007-

11. And it didn't hurt that Morgan's long-time boyfriend was already attending school at UCM – and was even a practice player for the Jennies.

But Nicholson said that what really helped convince Fleming to attend Central Missouri was the ability to play for a title.

"She wanted to be the first Fleming to win a national championship," he said. "Her brothers and sisters had won state titles, but she wanted to have the ultimate bragging rights in the family."

Nicholson recruited Fleming hard. Over 2 ½ years Nicholson was at every game and event he could possibly attend. He even became a frequent customer at Sheridan's in Liberty. That's where Fleming worked when she wasn't playing basketball or studying.

"Ask Coach Nick how many custards he ate while recruiting Morgan," Slifer said.

"I went there during March and April," Nicholson said of the legal recruiting contact period. "I had a lot of frozen custard."

Even with the extreme caloric input, Nicholson said that at some point it looked like the Jennies would miss out.

After canceling an official visit to Warrensburg in the fall of 2015 to instead make one at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Fleming had been offered by Jimmy Dykes and looked

poised to play in the SEC.

But she didn't sign.

"That was my first major offer," Fleming said. "I couldn't describe it, but I just didn't feel it."

After a few more months of recruiting, it was a surprise visit that made it official. As Slifer recalls, Kara had called to see if it would be ok to stop by for a visit.

Not unusual for a player to visit her former coach, Slifer didn't think too much of it. That same day Nicholson was actually hosting Johnson County Community College post player Kayonna Lee for an official visit.

"Coach Nick was pretty persistent," Lee said. "He's also a character outside of basketball and that helped a lot."

Lee said that the gym – with a Division I feel – was one of the factors that helped sway her during her recruitment. She said it was down to UCM and Missouri Western, but that she felt a connection with the players that was unique.

Nicholson was actually showing Lee around the Multipurpose Arena when the Fleming family walked in the door decked out in UCM gear – Morgan included.

That was Fleming's way of committing to the Jennies, and Lee happened to be in the same place at the same time.

"I didn't really know Morgan, but she was persistent also," Lee said. "She was trying to influence me to come here. I thought 'she already likes

it, so maybe I will, too?'"

Fleming said the decision to attend UCM was a combination of comfort with her future teammates, fit with the program and the way she was recruited.

"Coach Nick didn't miss more than two games my senior year," she said. "He recruited me like no one else did."

Fleming and Lee were both starters and difference makers for the Jennies this season. Fleming was a second-team All-MIAA selection and Lee was the conference's defensive player of the year.

## Skaggs squared

The Skaggs sisters have their own story.

Sydney was a freshman playing at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Slifer's son D.J. was an assistant coach there. Megan and Sydney Skaggs' older brother Drew was playing on the men's team.

Nicholson was more than aware of the caliber a player Megan was becoming in high school, but didn't want to get in the middle of two different family dynamics at play.

He didn't want to recruit Megan if it was going to create any tension between Dave and his son D.J. – who was already recruiting the Park Hills native. With Park Hills 90 minutes from UMSL and the two siblings already on campus, Nicholson also didn't want to create any issues with the Skaggs parental units.

"I wanted to get the go-ahead from both families before I started really pitching to her," Nicholson said.

Megan said she was planning to go to UMSL when her mom pointed out to her that UCM had a strong Public Relations program.

"I reached out to them first," Megan said. "After I went on the visit, I liked the girls and loved the environment."

Once he had the go-ahead, Nicholson went to work. It didn't hurt that Megan wanted to major in Public Relations and UMSL didn't offer the same caliber of program.

On her way home from a visit that included a Mules football game, Megan called and gave the verbal commitment in the fall of 2015.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION  
BY RANDY SPEER |  
Star-Journal



Sydney wanted a chance at more playing time – and to potentially play alongside her sister – so she transferred after that freshman season.

Megan said she and her sister both keep up with D.J. Slifer, who is now an assistant with Texas A&M Kingsville. She said that Sydney and D.J. are particularly close, having spent that year together at UMSL.

Both Skaggs sisters play meaningful minutes for the Jennies, with Megan starting and earning all-tournament team honors during the Central Region tournament.

## The Arkansas 4

Recruited by former assistant and current Indiana State recruiting specialist Josh Keister, Sydney Crockett, Emilie Jobst, Paige Redmond and Peyton Taylor played on the same AAU team in northwest Arkansas.

Slifer said that Redmond has been the epitome of a late bloomer.

“We knew we had to recruit Paige to get Emilie,” Slifer said. “I don’t think anybody saw Paige developing the way she has.”

Redmond puts it a little more bluntly.

“I was just a throw-in,” she said.

Redmond said that she and Jobst had made it clear during recruiting that they wanted to stick together. UCM was one of two schools that offered all four players – with the other being Henderson State in Arkadelphia, Arkansas.

Redmond said all four of the players wanted the chance to play together and that it was definitely a factor in how they became Jennies.

Slifer called it “weird” to have four players from the same AAU program playing together at the collegiate level.

“We knew right away when we got here that this was where we needed to be,” Redmond said.

Slifer credited current Arkansas State women’s head coach Brian Boyer with turning his staff on to the players from the Arkansas Hawks (now the Wings).

Boyer and Slifer have a connection that dates back to Missouri Western. Boyer was an assistant on the men’s and women’s staffs there and crossed paths with Slifer, who coached at Mo. Western from 1995-2004.

“(Boyer) is the one that first told us about Paige,” Slifer said.

Redmond would become the conference player of the year and most outstanding player in the Elite Eight



this season.

The rest of the Arkansas 4 provided key depth and work ethic for the Jennies – having been on the squad (along with senior Kendra Gladbach) longer than the rest of the players.

Redmond said that as each additional player was being recruited, there was constant communication between the coaches, Gladbach and the Arkansas 4 on how they would fit in.

“Coach Nick would always ask if that was someone who would fit,” Redmond said.

She said it was apparent that Skaggs, Lee and Fleming fit well – as long as they could get Fleming to look past the offers from bigger schools.

“She is going to be so good,” Redmond said. “She’s just getting started.”

## More traditional routes

The other two major on-court contributors to the 2017-18 championship were senior Kelsey Williams and junior Jolene Shipp.

Their recruitment was more straight-forward.

Williams was playing for conference foe Lincoln, where she was an honorable mention All-MIAA selection in

2016. When her coach – former Slifer Mo. Western recruit Nicole Collier – was let go by the school, Williams transferred to UCM. Since she had already graduated as a redshirt sophomore, Williams didn’t have to sit out a year with the move.

Williams would become a key component to the championship run. Running the point and handling the vaunted Ashland pressure during the title game, Williams was named to the Elite Eight all-tournament team along with Redmond.

Williams was also the elder-statesman of sorts for the team.

“There was no guarantee that she would be healthy,” Slifer said of his senior leader. He said that she had been battling numerous ailments throughout her career, but that her making it through the season was a driving force in the team’s success.

Shipp is from Stockton, Mo., and played two years at North Arkansas College before transferring to UCM. A two-time NJCAA All-America, Shipp had offers to play at D-I schools, before finding the right fit in Warrensburg.

Shipp was the first inside option off the bench, providing key minutes as an inside presence as the Jennies

were undersized as a team in many of their postseason games.

Two redshirts – Madison Sandor and Meghan Allen – and two freshmen who saw a little bit of playing time – Gigi McAtee and Abby Gann – round out the squad.

For Slifer and Nicholson, the pitch has always been about getting players to compete for a national championship. Now they have one and the idea is to keep it moving forward from here.

The Jennies will lose two starters in Williams and Lee, but the rest of the core is coming back and two players have inked for 2018-19.

Then it will be up to Coach Nick. But the pitch will become “Help us win another national championship.”

“I’d like to think that this will open doors for us,” Slifer said.

Nicholson said the title can do nothing but help.

“The people we’ve offered in the 2019 and 2020 class who also have D-I offers can see that we play at the highest level,” Nicholas said. “And kids will see how much fun we had. Kids can see that in social media and the Snapchats.”





RANDY SPEER | Star-Journal

The Central Missouri bench reacts to a made 3-pointer in the second half of the Jennies' 66-52 win over No. 1 Ashland in the Division II NCAA Tournament Friday at the Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

# The ride of a lifetime

**SYDNEY SKAGGS**  
Central Missouri womens basketball

*Sydney Skaggs is a junior on the Central Missouri women's basketball team and the older sister of sophomore Megan Skaggs.*

There's nothing like being a college athlete in the midst of March. Spending weeks on the road, competing against the best of the best teams, and on top of all of this maintaining excellent grades and staying healthy. With this comes a lot of pressure to be extraordinary and to always rise to the occasion. Which is something that we, the Jennies, had absolutely no problem doing.

A full basketball season including preseason is approximately 8-9 months long and it is the biggest emotional rollercoaster of your life. We truly experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, but we experienced it togeth-

er. We didn't always have success and we didn't always get along with each other but one thing that was always consistent was the love and trust we had from the first workout of the year in August until the National Championship in March.

One of the first successes of the year was winning the regular season MIAA title, this is when we experienced the first of our "highest of highs." I remember being at Lindenwood and coach bringing in the trophy telling us that our future is bright and this is just the start of it.

Little did we know that we would lose first round in the conference tournament to Lindenwood, the team that we beat to get that first trophy. I'll never forget the feeling after that loss. We all sat in the locker room, no one saying a word, lots of tears and an overwhelming



RANDY SPEER | Star-Journal

Central Missouri junior Sydney Skaggs addresses the crowd at the Jennies prep rally Monday at the Multi.



feeling of disappointment and defeat — talk about the lowest of lows. Any other team would have thought to themselves, how can we move on to win a regional or National Championship if we can't even win first round of the conference tournament?

But that never crossed our minds.

What people don't realize is how strong our conference, the MIAA, really is. We played tough teams twice a week for months to prepare us for the big fight in March. I truly believe that our first round loss to Lindenwood won us a National Championship. And you would believe it too if you were at the practice just a couple days after. Coach said that every single one of us had a look in our eyes and it wasn't defeat, I think it was more of a fire. We knew that the feeling we had after that game was something we didn't want to experience again.

I can't put into words the feeling of playing towards the end of March, when every game could possibly be your last, and as a senior, your last game forever. There's a lot of suspense, nerves, uncertainty and lots of pressure, but coach always reminded us to soak it all in.

I tried to truly enjoy every moment of it from the team meals and hotel sleepovers to the practices and our coaches pre-game talks. I took a little extra time in the locker room to get dressed, lace up the shoes and when we ran out I took a moment to just look in stands and soak in the feeling of seeing my family wearing the same stuff they wear to every game (we are very superstitious), I took time to listen to the band playing our fight song and just treated every moment like it could very well be my last.

Fast-forwarding to right before the National Championship game, I remember seeing so much about

Ashland on social media. It was stuff like "David plays Goliath in the championship" or "Central Missouri is playing the 'unbeatable' Ashland." We didn't have a 73-0 record, or already have a national championship under our belts but something we had over Ashland was a feeling of loss and a feeling of disappointment. Which doesn't seem like a positive thing to "have over" Ashland, but once you experience the level of disappointment we had in the locker room in Kansas City, you do everything in your power to never have that feeling again.

After the big win, I stormed the court finding the nearest Jennie to tackle and somehow ended up on the bottom of the dog pile (which is actually kind of scary), but the feeling was absolutely incredible. It's all kind of a blur looking back at it, but I remember thinking to myself that it was the best day of my life and that it couldn't get any better than this. But then arriving back at school with people lining the streets cheering for us, I realized that somehow it got even better.

Having the whole community being the first ones to congratulate us at the gym was such a humbling feeling and it's something I will forever be grateful for.

I've only been at UCM and a part of the Jennies for a couple years, but I've been around the organization long enough to know that it's in really good hands. It's led by smart people who care about the athletes and has a lot of young talent that I think will bring a new wave of success and I can't wait to see what the future holds for this team.

Warrensburg will always have a special place in all of our hearts and after making history here, we will always have an excuse to come back and show our love to the town that has loved and supported our team for so long.



DEREK BRIZENDINE | Star-Journal

Jennies forward Sydney Skaggs leans in for two points as she draws a foul during a contest against Missouri Western in 2017.

*Sydney Skaggs*

**Sydney Skagg, No. 24**  
**Central Missouri womens basketball junior**

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# A look back on Central Missouri's postseason run

**RANDY SPEER**  
Sports Editor

Central Missouri roared through the regular season, claiming a 24-2 record, which included a 17-game win streak and a 17-1 conference mark giving the Jennies sole claim of the regular season MIAA crown.

One loss in the MIAA tournament catapulted UCM to six-straight wins and a national title. Below is excerpts from the coverage of the program's postseason run from Daily Star-Journal sports editor Randy Speer.

## Jennies exit early from MIAA tournament

KANSAS CITY — Welcome to March, the month where madness sweeps through the college basketball ranks and no one is safe from an upset. The top-seeded Jennies lost 75-66 to ninth-seeded Lindenwood Thursday in the quarterfinals of the MIAA tournament.

"I was scared to death going into this game because Lindenwood last year came in and beat Pitt State and so we knew they had a possibility and both games we played, they were right there with us and we found ways to make winning plays and it's about the opposite tonight," Central Missouri coach Dave Slifer said. "The fourth quarter we made winning plays both times and this time we did not."

UCM pulled together an 80-73 win over the Lady Lions at home on Jan. 20, then took down Lindenwood 73-60 in St. Charles.

"Really wanted that win tonight, even though it is really hard to beat a team three times," Central Missouri sophomore Megan Skaggs said. "They made winning plays in the last six minutes and we did not."

The Jennies, ranked sixth nationally, opened up a nine-point edge to start the second half only for Lindenwood to whittle it down to one point, 39-38 with five minutes, 51 seconds left in the third quarter, using a pair of lay-ups from sophomore Gabby Walker, who finished with 20 points for the Lady Lions.



**RANDY SPEER | Star-Journal**

Central Missouri sophomore Megan Skaggs puts up a shot in the first quarter of the Jennies 66-49 win over Minnesota State-Moorhead in the opening round of the Central Region tournament Thursday at the Elmen Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

UCM answered with a 10-3 run, capped by a Megan Skaggs 3-pointer, one of her six on the night, that put the Jennies on top 49-41 and prompted a Lindenwood timeout.

Central Missouri maintained its lead through the final 2:59 of the third quarter to lead 54-49 headed into the final frame.

A Morgan Fleming lay-up was the only points the Jennies could muster in the first 4:04 of the fourth quarter and Lindenwood turned a five-point deficit into a four-point lead at 60-56 with 5:56 remaining.

Fleming, who finished with 18 points, provided the answer the Jennies needed, tying the game at

63-63 with 2:43 left.

Lindenwood put together a flurry of scoring over the next 68 seconds, swinging the game fully in their favor 70-63.

Fleming added a 3-pointer with 39 seconds left, but the damage was done.

## Jennies slay Dragons

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – It took nearly a week for Central Missouri to finally watch the game film from its MIAA quarterfinals loss to Lindenwood.

"We always watch the video right after the game," Central Missouri coach Dave Slifer said. "For some reason, I couldn't stomach it. ...

it was just three minutes of clips and we all got to have this sinking feeling and say you know what, we don't want to have this again."

The Jennies watched the highlights, or more specifically the lowlights, of the loss Wednesday.

"You take a gamble because it could go either way," Slifer said. They could say oh boy we aren't very good or they could say they are pretty darn good, we did not play well that day, lets clean this up."

The Jennies responded with a 66-49 beat down of Minnesota State – Moorhead in the opening round of the Central Region tournament Thursday at the Elmen Center.

"We haven't played in a week and Moorhead hasn't played in two weeks," Slifer said. "I thought it was going to be a little bit worse for us offensively and we were tremendous those first two quarters."

The Jennies broke open the game with a 9-0 run, taking a 4-4 tie at the seven minute, 30 second mark to a 13-4 lead in two minutes.

Sophomore Megan Skaggs was the culprit of the scoring spike, scoring seven straight points for UCM with a 3-pointer and a pair of lay-ups.

The Park Hills, Missouri native wasn't finished scoring, adding a pair of 3-pointers for 13 points on 5 of 5 shooting as the Jennies opened up a 26-12 lead by the end of the first quarter.

The Jennies offense didn't slow down in the second quarter. The Dragons opened on a 5-0 run to trim the deficit to 26-17. UCM answered with a 9-0 run.

Sophomore Morgan Fleming closed the half on a personal run of four points to send the Jennies into the break leading 44-25.

Paige Redmond added five points in the fourth quarter to finish the night with a team-high 19 points on 7 of 15 shooting.

After her hot start, "First-half Meg" as Slifer called Skaggs, was held to just a bucket in the third quarter and a lay-up with 41 seconds left in the fourth quarter, finishing with 17 points.

"We played her in the second half even though she couldn't make a shot because she guards very well," Slifer said in jest.



## Jennies take down Fort Hays State

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — A day shy of the one-year mark of last season's loss in the Central Region semifinals to Harding, the Jennies finally snapped a 28-year drought.

Central Missouri women's basketball is returning to the Central Region title game for the first time in 28 years after holding off Fort Hays State 66-59 in the semifinals Saturday.

Saturday night's game was nothing like the 71-51 win the Jennies pulled off at home on Jan. 4.

Neither team could extend its lead past four points for the majority of the contest, as each team found an answer for the other's baskets.

The Jennies finally broke the game open with a 3-pointer by sophomore Morgan Fleming at the six-minute mark in the fourth quarter to make it 56-49 and prompting a Tigers timeout.

"I thought Morgan Fleming's first three was the dagger," Slifer said. "We'll take the second one also, but that first one was exciting."

Sophomore Megan Skaggs followed the trey with a lay-up, pushing the lead to nine, then the largest of the night on either side, with 4:05 left.

The second Fleming 3-pointer of the quarter came 4:46 after her first, sealing the game away. Senior Kelsey Williams found Fleming in the corner on an out of bounds play with three seconds left on the shot clock. Fleming's quick release found the bottom of the net to give the Jennies their lone double-figures lead at 63-53.

Senior guard Paige Redmond paced the Jennies out of the gate, scoring the first eight points with a lay-up and a pair of 3-pointers as UCM got out to an 8-5 lead.

The Jennies led for most of the second quarter, but Fort Hays ended the quarter on a 7-2 run over final 4:16 to lead 34-33 headed into halftime.

Central Missouri faced its largest deficit of the second half as Fort Hays junior Tatyana Legette opened the third quarter with a lay-up.

The Jennies answered with a 6-0 swing to take a 39-36 lead. Skaggs' lay-up at the 7:22 in the third quarter gave UCM the lead for good.

Redmond finished with 16 points as the Jennies leading scorer. Kayonna Lee cashed in her seventh double-double of the year with 12 points and 11 rebounds.



RANDY SPEER | Star-Journal

Central Missouri sophomore Morgan Fleming's pump fake sends Lubbock Christian's Caitlyn Cunyus (2) and Tess Bruffey (54) into the air in the first quarter of the Jennies' 72-62 win over the Lady Chaps in the quarterfinals of the NCAA Tournament Monday in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

## Jennies claim Central Region crown

SIOUX FALLS, SD — If Monday night's Central Region title game was a boxing match, then the Jennies opened with a haymaker to the jaw of Augustana. Central Missouri dominated in an 81-42 blowout of the top-seeded Vikings on their home floor in front of a crowd of 1,274.

"I feel like we really hit them hard there in the first five minutes and they were really never able to recover from

that," Central Missouri sophomore Megan Skaggs said. "Us starting off strong really helped us throughout the game."

The Jennies never trailed in the wire-to-wire win, starting the game on a 9-0 run backed by a pair of 3-pointers by junior Paige Redmond and Skaggs.

"The first punch is the most important and we definitely hit them right on the mouth," Redmond said.

Skaggs, a First-Team All-Central Region selection, kept pouring it in

from three, knocking down two more treys to make it a 17-2 lead by the four-minute, 56-second mark of the first quarter.

After 10 minutes of action, the Jennies led 24-7.

"I think that is exactly how we need to come out to every game, no matter who it is," Redmond said.

Central Missouri was able to stake out a large lead in part because of its ability to handle the Augustana press.

"We really tried to stay composed," Redmond said. "We got pressed the other night and it was kind of a little too much for us right off the bat and so we kind of worked on it yesterday to try and make sure we got the skip pass to work."

The Vikings came in forcing 20 turnovers a game. The Jennies coughed the ball up just 11 times Monday night.

"We always say trust in each other, trust in what you are doing and everybody else around you and everything will flow," Central Missouri senior guard Kelsey Williams said. "I thought we handled it really well, we were composed and calm the whole time."

UCM didn't let off the throttle in the second quarter, starting the frame with an 8-0 run capped by a 3-pointer by Skaggs, who finished with a game-high 23 points, to make it 29-7 with 6:26 left in the first half.

Skaggs put the finishing touches on the dominant first half with five seconds left with a jumper to make it 42-17 at halftime.

Central Missouri pushed its lead to 30 on a free throw by Skaggs at the 3:54 mark in the third quarter, eventually leading 61-26 by the quarter's end.

Redmond finished with 22 points and was named the Central Region tournament Most Valuable Player.

The Central Region title is the program's seventh regional championship and first since the 1989-90 season. The win also gives Central Missouri head coach Dave Slifer his first regional title in his 23-year career.

"This is my 23rd year in Division II and finally, finally, we get a regional championship and it's because we have great coaches and great players who really have a bond," Slifer said.

Central Missouri earned a return trip to the largest city in South Dakota as the final site of the Division II tournament at the Sanford Pentagon.

"We came up to Sioux Falls and you know what, we like Sioux Falls," Slifer said. "Sioux Falls is a great place."



## Central Missouri fends off Lubbock Christian

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — When tournament time rolls around, it is not how a team wins, but the mere fact they live to see another day. No. 6 seed Central Missouri did just that, gutting out a 72-62 win over No. 3 seed Lubbock Christian in the quarterfinals of the NCAA Tournament to advance to the program's fifth national semifinal appearance.

The Jennies took a gut punch to open the game as the Lady Chaps opened up a 12-4 lead in the first four minutes of the contest.

"I thought our kids held their composure after getting drubbed early," Central Missouri coach Dave Slifer said. "We weren't even close to guarding them man-to-man and then our zone was, I am going to say, screwy at best. I don't know if any of us knew what we were doing, but it slowed them down."

Central Missouri sophomore Morgan Fleming took over the offensive load midway through the first quarter, scoring seven straight points to make it a 14-11 game with four minutes, nine seconds remaining in the quarter.

During the stretch, Fleming's attacks on the basket resulted in two fouls for the Lady Chaps' 6-4 senior post Tess Bruffey, who came in leading the team in points, assists and blocks.

The Jennies rallied to take a 20-19 lead by the end of the quarter. A 3-pointer by Sydney Crockett gave UCM its first lead of the day at 18-16.

Senior Kayonna Lee opened the second quarter with a lay-up, but that was the only offense the Jennies could muster for the next 5:07 as Lubbock Christian went on a 6-0 run to take a 24-22 lead.

Redmond provided the counter-attack, scoring five straight points herself to give the Jennies the lead at 27-24 with 3:46 remaining in the half.

Central Missouri took a 34-31 edge into the locker room.

The Jennies weathered a 4-0 run by Lubbock Christian to start the second half with the Lady Chaps taking a 35-34 lead at the 7:44 mark, the last time UCM would trail on the day.

Lee put the Jennies back on top for good with a lay-up 51 seconds later.

Central Missouri closed the third



RANDY SPEER | Star-Journal

No. 6 Central Missouri sophomore Megan Skaggs shoots a 3-pointer in the second half of the Jennies' 70-57 win over No. 7 Union in the semifinals of the NCAA tournament Wednesday at the Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

quarter with a 50-45 lead.

Lubbock Christian clawed back within two three times over the first five minutes of the final frame, but each time the Jennies found an answer.

Lee, who finished with 13 points, scored the final point from the field for UCM with 5:12 left to make it 58-54.

The final 14 points for the Jennies came from the charity stripe as the Jennies were held without a field goal for the final 5:12. UCM was 14 of 18 from the free-throw line during the stretch.

Fleming finished as the team's leading scorer with 16 points. Redmond added 14 points and Skaggs chipped in 10. Williams finished with nine points.

## Jennies clinch spot in national title game

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — No. 6 seed Central Missouri advanced to the program's first national championship game since 1985 with a 70-57 victory over No. 7 Union, holding the Lady Bulldogs to their lowest scoring output

of the season.

"I thought these kids tonight played a tremendous game tonight," Central Missouri coach Dave Slifer said.

The opening quarter was tightly contested with neither side able to pull away beyond four points. Sydney Crockett knocked down a 3-pointer with 56 seconds remaining in the frame to send the Jennies into the second quarter leading 17-16.

Senior Kelsey Williams took over in the second quarter, scoring eight of her 13 points in the frame.

"Kelsey, what a great performance tonight," Slifer said. "I thought she controlled the whole game and that's what we expect out of the six-year senior."

A pair of back-to-back buckets extended the Jennies to its then-largest lead of the night at 27-19 at the 5:47 mark in the second quarter.

"I think it was right place right time, the little jump shot has always been my shot, the whole season I haven't been shooting well, but I have all these girls that can shoot the ball tremendously," Williams said.

The five-foot-six guard played all 40

minutes, hauled in seven rebounds and added five assists.

"The adrenaline really gets to you in these types of games," Williams said. "It's do or die now. We are seniors. I just think that naturally, you just kick in everything you've got. You have five people and a whole team behind you that you have to be there for. You have to play that solid defense the entire time."

Williams pushed the lead to double-figures with a pair of free throws at 32-21 with 2:10 remaining in the quarter.

The Eminence, Missouri native added the final points of the quarter with a jumper with 49 seconds remaining to take the Jennies into the locker room leading 34-25.

The Jennies built up a 15-point cushion using a pair of 3-pointers by Williams and Skaggs to make it 46-31 with 6:38 remaining in the quarter.

UCM maintained its double-digits lead until Union got hot, closing the third quarter on a 8-0 run and trimming the Jennies 15-point edge down to seven at 55-48.

"Unfortunately, Union woke up and scored 23 points after we held them to 24 points in two quarters," Slifer said. "I knew they were going to make a run, and we just had to be able to score enough to withstand it."

Crockett, who finished with eight points, added her second 3-pointer of the night to stem the tide in the opening moments of the final frame.

The Lady Bulldogs kept plucking away, shrinking the Jennies lead down to five, 60-55, at just over the halfway mark of the fourth quarter.

Senior Kayonna Lee provided the answer both times the Lady Bulldogs came within five. The 6-foot senior bullied her way to a bucket to give the Jennies a 64-57 edge with 2:01 remaining.

Lee finished the night with her eighth double-double of the season, scoring 14 points and hauling in 11 rebounds.

UCM closed the game on a 8-0 run with six points coming from the free-throw line. Junior Paige Redmond sank a pair and Skaggs added four points from the charity strip.

Skaggs finished the night as the Jennies leading scorer with 15 points. Redmond added 12 points on a tough shooting night (3 of 12) for the MIAA Player of the Year.

Central Missouri returns to the National Championship game for the first time since 1985.



"We are going to the championship game, guys," Slifer said. "Wow, wow."

## Jennies shackle Ashland, claim national title

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. — No. 6 seed Central Missouri snapped No. 1 Ashland's 73-game winning streak with a 66-52 upset to claim the Jennies' first national title since 1984.

"Our kids played it extremely, extremely well and I am stunned," Central Missouri coach Dave Slifer said. "This is surreal to me right now."

With three minutes and 24 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter, the high-powered Ashland offense, which averaged 99.8 points per game, appeared to break the shackles of the Jennies defense, rattling off a 4-0 run bringing themselves within a possession at 55-52 at the 2:21 mark.

Sophomore Megan Skaggs provided the final counter punch in the Jennies' quest for a national title.

"Our mentality throughout the year and throughout the game was refuse to lose and I really think that showed in the final two minutes when I decided to turn it back on," Skaggs said.

Skaggs, who had been held to just four points due to foul trouble, pushed the lead out to five with a lay-up, then drained a corner 3-pointer off an assist by senior Kayonna Lee.

The Park Hills, Missouri native capped the run with a breakaway lay-up off an assist by senior Kelsey Williams.

Skaggs' 70-second outburst turned a one possession game into a 10-point cushion at 62-52 and the national championship.

"It honestly hasn't set in yet," Skaggs said. "It just feels like a dream, someone pinch me."

The opening moments of the title clash provided a different feel as Ashland opened up a 16-8 lead in the first 4:51, converting seven of the team's first eight shots and carving the Jennies' man-to-man defense apart.

"We fooled them early by playing man and letting them score every time they touched the ball," Slifer said.

Coming out of the media timeout, UCM switched to its zone defense. The switch worked as the Jennies rattled off a 7-0 run to bring the game back within one at 16-15 at the 2:16 mark.

"Our message was they got their hit, now it is our turn," Skaggs said. "They threw the first punch, I think we were down 16-8 and we were like

now it is our turn to throw a punch."

Ashland finished the first quarter on 4-0 run to lead 20-15.

Central Missouri turned the ball over seven times in the first quarter leading to the second most turnovers committed this season — 21 — by the Jennies.

"A couple things we had to do is attack their press in a way where when we threw it away they couldn't get wide open lay-ups," Slifer said.

Ashland turned the first seven turnovers into 11 points. The final 14 turnovers only cost the Jennies 13 points.

The primary victim of the full-court Lady Eagles harassment was senior point guard Kelsey Williams.

"Tonight, I just got frustrated a little bit in the first, but coach and my team had my back," Williams said.

Ashland senior Laina Snyder, who finished with 16 points, opened the second quarter with a basket at the 9:40 mark, the final point the Lady Eagles would score for the next 5:38.

UCM embarked on a 12-0 run over the same time frame, turning a 22-15 deficit into a 27-22 lead.

A lay-up by junior Paige Redmond at the 5:37 mark in the second quarter gave the Jennies a 23-22 lead, the lone lead change on the night.

The Jennies' lead reached as large as eight, but a 4-0 run by Ashland in the final 42 seconds sent UCM into the locker room leading just 35-31.

Central Missouri came out swinging in the second half, using a 5-0 run created by a lay-up by sophomore Morgan Fleming and a 3-pointer by Redmond to create a 39-31 lead.

Ashland whittled the Jennies' lead down to three twice and two once at 46-44 with 2:23 left in the third frame, but Redmond's second trey of the quarter sent UCM into the final 10 minutes leading 49-44.

Redmond finished the night with 22 points going 8 of 13 from the field and 4 of 7 from range while playing all 40 minutes of the contest.

Skaggs finished as the team's second-leading scorer with 13 points.

Williams, who also played all 40 minutes, was the final Jennie in double-figures with 11 points and five assists.

Redmond and Williams were both named to the All-Tournament team with Redmond claiming the tournament's Most Valuable Player award.

"It's something incredible," Williams said on being named to the All-Tournament team. "It's amazing.

I feel like I left it all out there and it's been an incredible ride. These two years with these girls have been nothing but everything that I've ever dreamed of. Life couldn't be better right now. To go out like that, it's incredible."

The national title win also marks a repeat of Central Missouri history as the Jennies followed the same path as the 2013-14 Mules, who won the last basketball national title at UCM.

The 2013-14 Mules entered the MIAA tournament as the No. 1 seed and lost 84-82 to Northeastern State, the No. 9 seed in that year's tournament before winning six straight.

The Jennies, too, were bounced by No. 9 seed Lindenwood in the conference tournament, leading to the program's second national championship.

"We lost first round of the conference tournament and I think we needed to, so that is the best thing that could have happened to us," Slifer said.

For Slifer, the national championship marks a first for him in 23 years in Division II. Entering the NCAA tournament, the Jennies had a 3-7 mark under his reign in the national tournament and his record now

stands at 9-7.

"I've been in Division II twenty-three years and the word is jealous," Slifer said. "I have been jealous of a lot of other people and it just feels good that we have kids that work at it like they have and did it in a great way."



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Mike Nicholson  
Assistant Coach



Tammy Slifer  
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Kenzie Williams  
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# Final observations from the Jennies national title

**RANDY SPEER**  
Sports Editor

The defining moment of the Central Missouri national championship run didn't come under the bright lights of the Sanford Pentagon or the Augusta gym.

It came quietly on a Sunday at the Multi, away from the cameras and bright lights

"We came back to practice that Sunday, rested and ready to go," Central Missouri coach Dave Slifer said. "We took two days off, we knew that the regional would be coming up and that we'd be in it."

Two days after UCM fell to Lindenwood in the MIAA tournament, the Jennies were on the court again, tuning up for a regional berth.

"I was down in the dumps," Slifer said. "I thought this was a team that would finally (win a conference tournament). We've won a couple conference tournaments, but never down in Kansas City and so ever since it's gone to Kansas City, we've come up a little short."

The practice wasn't long, a meager

hour and fifteen minutes of drills and shooting, but it accomplished its goal.

"My head was down and we started practice and our kids were so vibrant that everybody's mood was instantly increased," Slifer said. "We didn't go for a real long time, but we had an hour and fifteen minutes of inspiring practice."

One practice turned into two additional weeks of games and practices and two large pieces of hardware for the trophy case.

"Instead of feeling sorry for himself, they just got to work," Slifer said.

## A family affair

Slifer along with his wife and assistant coach Tammy Slifer have watched their coaching tree grow up right before his eyes, quite literally.

All three Slifer children — Brittany, DJ and Maggie — all hold a basketball coaching position.

Brittany is an assistant coach for the Lee's Summit West High School girls basketball team. DJ is an assistant coach at the collegiate level with Texas A&M — Kingsville. Maggie is



RANDY SPEER | Star-Journal

Central Missouri head coach Dave Slifer holds up the remainder of the net following the Jennies' 64-41 win over Missouri Southern to clinch the outright MIAA title Thursday night in Warrensburg.

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the girls C-team head coach at Warrensburg High School.

“They have grown up watching film, going to practices and they know how long we’ve toiled to get this done,” Dave Slifer said.

All three along with Dave’s parents — Dale and Yvonne — and brother made the seven hour trip north to see the Jennies championship.

“To have mom and dad, my brother, all my kids there, it’s still surreal that it all happened and we were all able to stay together and do this,” Dave Slifer said.

The Slifer clan made sure to snap as many pictures as possible of the moment.

“(Dale and Yvonne) posed for as many photos as they possibly could. We have a lot of pics with and without the trophy. I think my favorite pic is all five of us, the three kids, Tammy and I are almost in like a huddle. Maggie’s face is the only one you can see, but they put it in black and white and it’s just really cool. It’s one we are going to for sure get framed.”

Jennie ball

Nearly an hour after the confetti fell on the Jennies after their national title, nearly all of the Central Missouri faithful who had made the trip north were still milling about on the court.

A chant broke out within the fan base as the UCM players began filtering back into the locker room for one



RANDY SPEER | Star-Journal

No. 2 seed Central Missouri sophomore Megan Skaggs celebrates a basket in the second half of the Jennies 81-42 win over No. 1 Augustana in the Central Region. Skaggs scores a team-high 23 points and is named to the All-Central Region team. Senior Paige Redmond scores 22 points and is named the Central Region Player of the Year.

final postgame speech.

“Jennie ball, Jennie ball.”

The cheer had taken on a life of its own in the second half, part plea from the fans for another defensive stop, part exhilaration from every made basket.

Jennie ball became synonymous

with the Central Missouri style of play — gritty defensive efforts and unselfish offense — but also the culture within the team.

“We knew we were going to be really good this year,” Slifer said. “We knew we had the talent and bottom line is we thought we had the right

culture. Culture makes a difference because when the chips are down, if you have great culture, you persevere through it, if you don’t you quit on it.”

Cultivating the Central Missouri culture has been a 14 year project and it now bears the ultimate fruit.

“It hasn’t all soaked in yet,” Slifer said. “I am still in a little bit of disbelief. It’s what you aspire to every year when you start the year and I think I’ve said this a hundred times, but I have figured out that was our sixteenth, my sixteenth regional between Missouri Western and Central Missouri and that’s the first time we’ve won a regional.

“We went right from never winning a regional to national championship. We are ecstatic.”

Final MIAA Standings

1.	Central Missouri	18-1
2.	Pittsburg State	15-4
3.	Fort Hays State	14-5
4.	Central Oklahoma	13-6
5.	Nebraska Kearney	13-6
6.	Washburn	11-8
7.	Emporia State	11-8
8.	Lindenwood	8-11
9.	Missouri Southern	8-11
10.	Southwest Baptist	7-12
11.	Northeastern State	6-13
12.	Missouri Western	4-15
13.	Northwest Missouri	4-15
14.	Lincoln	1-18

2017-18 Central Missouri Season Statistics

No.	Player	GP	GS	FG	FGA	Pct	3FG	FGA	Pct	FT	FTA	Pct	Reb	A	TO	Blk	Stl	Pts	Avg
0	Paige Redmond	33	33	185	411	0.45	68	180	0.378	101	118	0.856	105	125	79	3	37	539	16.3
22	Morgan Fleming	33	33	140	309	0.453	38	103	0.369	89	121	0.736	136	72	66	8	32	407	12.3
20	Megan Skaggs	33	33	145	275	0.527	40	102	0.392	61	79	0.772	146	51	38	16	37	391	11.8
3	Kayonna Lee	33	33	111	230	0.483	0	2	0	64	86	0.744	280	60	58	47	50	286	8.7
13	Kelsey Williams	33	27	86	172	0.5	23	71	0.324	36	46	0.783	110	115	52	5	40	231	7
2	Sydney Crockett	33	0	60	151	0.397	36	101	0.356	27	34	0.794	56	15	17	3	15	183	5.5
23	Jolene Shipp	33	6	69	169	0.408	7	28	0.25	27	38	0.711	126	20	42	12	9	172	5.2
24	Sydney Skaggs	32	0	36	73	0.493	1	13	0.077	16	22	0.727	46	4	10	13	10	89	2.8
21	Peyton Taylor	22	0	19	32	0.594	4	9	0.444	6	8	0.75	33	7	6	0	6	48	2.2
10	Kendra Gladbach	16	0	9	23	0.391	4	15	0.267	0	1	0	9	3	5	1	5	22	1.4
14	Emilie Jobst	13	0	3	16	0.188	3	12	0.25	3	6	0.5	5	4	6	0	3	12	0.9
1	Gigi McAtee	24	0	8	28	0.286	5	18	0.278	0	0	0	15	8	4	0	5	21	0.9
12	Abby Gann	12	0	1	4	0.25	0	2	0	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	4	0.3
	Total.....	33		872	1893	0.461	229	656	0.349	432	561	0.77	1181	485	397	108	249	2405	72.9
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# Jennies get their fairy-tale ending



**JOE WARREN**  
Publisher

Central Missouri head coach Dave Slifer was interviewed seconds after winning the national championship game on March 23 and he used a line from the cult classic Dumb and Dumber: "So you're saying there's a chance!"

Slifer's Jennies made the most of their chance, but their run through the postseason wasn't all that likely. In fact, it had the makings of UCM's very own fairy tale.

They were a top-20 program most of the year. They lost only three games – two in the entire regular season.

Their dominant regular season championship in the MIAA should have been enough to secure the top seed in the Central Region and a top-10 ranking going into the national tournament.

It wasn't, but that's ok. It only magnifies the impressive run UCM would put together.

So how unlikely were the UCM Jennies to win the 2018 Division II National Championship?

One way to look at it is to review who the Jennies beat along the way.

It took four straight wins over teams ranked No. 1 in their respective regions.

It started with a 39-point drubbing of Central Region No. 1 Augustana on its home floor to take that crown and advance to the Elite Eight.

It continued in the national quarterfinal round when the Jennies – seeded sixth of the final eight teams – bounced Lubbock Christian. Lubbock Christian was a very, very good team.

With all due respect to the actual national player of the year (we'll get to that in a second), LCU had probably the best player in the country. Senior 6-4 forward Tess Bruffey is a matchup nightmare. Tremendous size

combined with a deft touch on the perimeter and surprising athleticism from such a tall frame. I haven't seen a single player at this level of basketball as physically impressive.

And LCU was more than a one-player show. The Chitsey sisters are both 6-1. Guard Delaney Gaddis is a senior steadying force. Sophomore Catlyn Cunyus and junior Olivia Robertson are terrifically talented ball-handlers who can score.

Lubbock Christian won the national championship in 2016. They had a combination of dynamic players and postseason experience. They had only one loss all season – against 2017 national champion Ashland.

They beat opponents by an average of 18 points a game.

LCU was the No. 2 team in the country at the end of the regular season in both polls.

UCM then toppled the best team from the South Region in the national semifinals, Union (Tennessee). Union wasn't quite as impressive a club as LCU, but the Lady Bulldogs did feature one of the best scorers in the country in Chelsey Shumpert. Averaging nearly 24 points a game, the Jens held Shumpert to 14 and they controlled the game throughout, securing a spot in the championship contest.

That's where this fairy tale really takes off.

Ashland University was the defending national champion. The Eagles had won an NCAA Division II women's record 73 consecutive games. Head coach Robyn Fralick was in her third year as head coach and had a record of 104-2. Yes, two losses total in three seasons.

And the impressive stats didn't stop there.

Ashland had two players on the roster – Laina Snyder and Andi Daugherty – who each scored more than 2,000 points in their careers. Meanwhile, UCM's all-time leading scorer is Tammy Wilson. She scored 2,104 points from 1985-89.

That's not to mention Ashland featured the national player of the year in sophomore guard Jodi Johnson.

Ashland could put four players on the court with more than 1,000 career points apiece. UCM's leading career scorer was Paige Redmond with 1,221 points. Their second-leading career scorer was Megan Skaggs with 692



**Randy Speer | Star-Journal**

Central Missouri senior Kayonna Lee walks in with the national championship trophy Monday the pep rally hosted in the Multi.

points.

Moreover, the Jennies have never scored more than 116 points in one game. That's the school record. Ashland topped that mark four times this season alone. Heck, Ashland averaged 100 points a game.

The Eagles beat opponents this season by an average of 35 points. UCM had five total wins this season by that large of a margin.

This was like you see in the movies. This was Rocky vs. Ivan Drago. The Mighty Ducks vs. the Hawks. USA vs. the Soviet Union in the 1980 Winter Olympics (yes, real life, but like a

fairy tale).

The Jens were supposed to be simply outclassed.

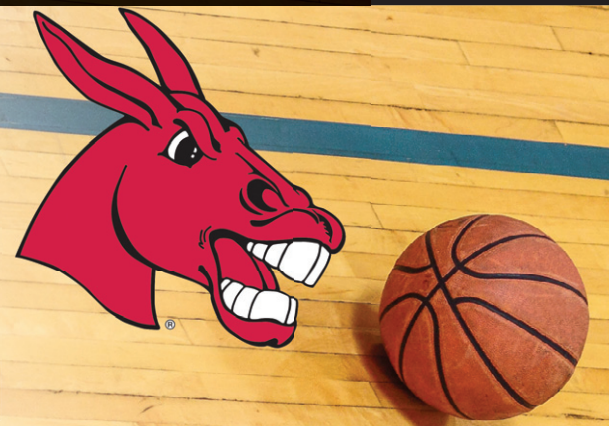
But instead, UCM held Ashland to 52 points. That was 27 points below their previous season low. For more perspective, the Eagles played Connecticut – yes, that Connecticut – in a preseason exhibition on Nov. 5 and managed 56 points.

Like Rocky, like the Mighty Ducks, like Team USA, the Jennies provided the fairy-tale ending.

This team took advantage of its chance. Now these Jennies can live happily ever after.



*Cliff Harris'*  
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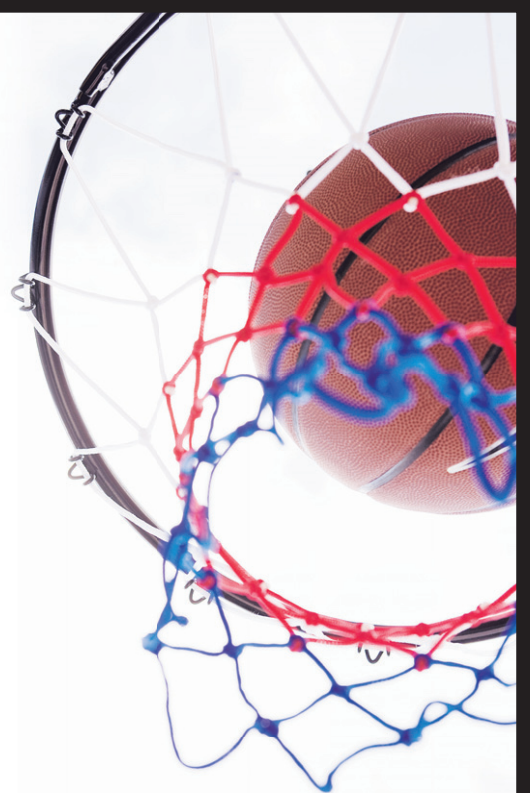
*Cliff Harris*

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