

# 1998-99 BEHREND BASKETBALL WRAP-UP

## Lions' basketball teams bring Behrend two championships

### ECAC Champion Lions set new school record for wins in a season

by Matt Buser  
staff writer

The Behrend Lions men's basketball team enjoyed unprecedented success during their 1998-99 campaign. They won the Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference (AMCC) regular season title and won the school's first-ever Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) Championship. Their 21 wins set a school record, and during the season the men earned the school's first-ever national ranking at #17, while being ranked as high as #2 in the NCAA Division III East Region.

A late season skid prevented the Lions from reaching their most elusive goal - a bid to the NCAA Division III National Championship Tournament.

"We controlled our own destiny in the last weeks of the season and we just didn't play well, and because of the type of team we had, I think it bothered us a bit," head coach Dave Niland commented.

The Lions stood at 18-3 heading into the final regular season games of the season, but were beaten by Waynesburg, Allegheny, and LaRoche twice to deny the team a bid the big dance.

"We did have a chance to go to the ECAC Tournament, which is very competitive. You could take a handful of the teams from that tournament and they would go deep into the NCAA's," Coach Niland continued. "I feel fortunate we were able to redeem ourselves and win our last three, and play the way we did. We got back to playing the way we were back in the middle of January."

The team finished with an overall record of 21-7, and a conference record of 8-2. The men had winning streaks of two, three, four, five, and seven during the season.

Four seniors who made immense contributions to the Lions ended their careers this season. Guards Brock Bovaird, Jason Paloskey, and Matt Plizga, and forward Brian Emick are graduating seniors.

Coach Niland spoke highly of his departing seniors. "We won't be able to replace those guys. They brought something special to our team as far as guard play. And I don't know if we'll ever have another guy like [Emick]. He's 6'1" and he's got over 500 career rebounds. He plays with heart and he's absolutely fearless. You just don't replace guys like that."

Bovaird played for two seasons at Behrend and left his mark. He won AMCC Newcomer of the Year last season and made the All-Conference First Team. This season, he was named AMCC Player of the Year and repeated his First Team All-Conference selection. He leaves Behrend as the school's all-time leader in three-point percentage, at 45.6%. His 116 career three-pointers ranks him fourth all-time. He ranks ninth in career assists with 228, and stands at second in free throw percentage at 78.5% (143/182).

Paloskey finished his career with consecutive AMCC All-Conference Second Team selections. He became the tenth player in school history to amass 1,000 career points, and he ranks seventh with 1,203 points. He made 159 career three-pointers, good for third all-time, and his 458 career field goals are eighth all-time. He ranks seventh all time in three-point percentage at 39.5% (159/402).

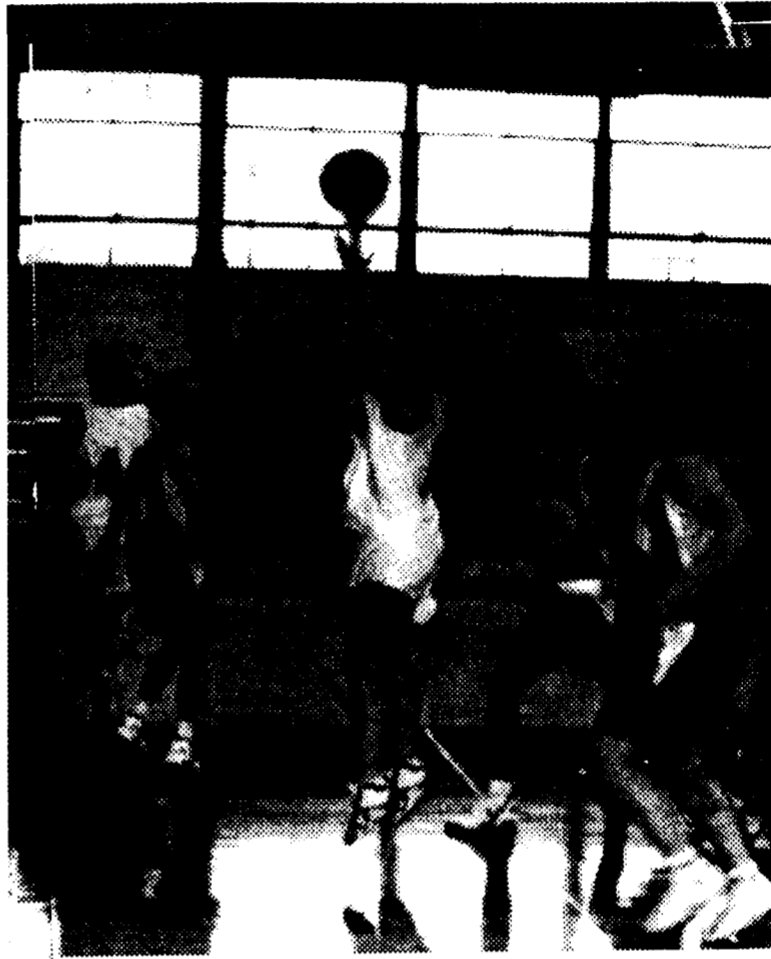
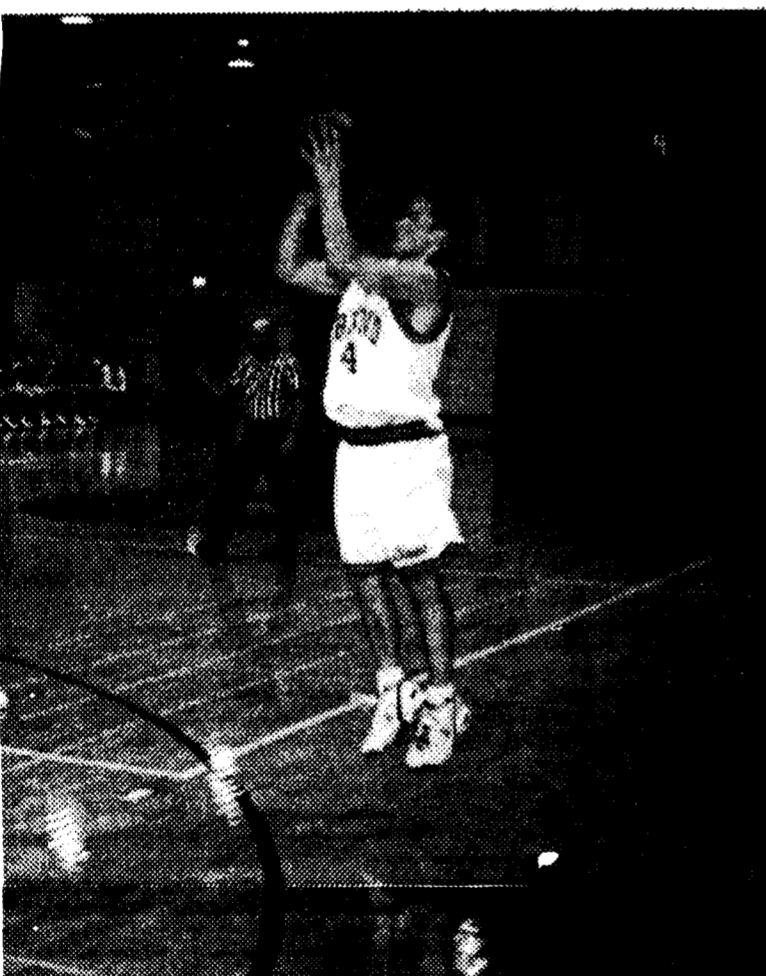
Plizga finishes his career at Behrend having provided excellent play off the bench for the Lions. He appeared in 81 games and made 35% (18/52) of his career three-pointers. He saw playing time at

both guard positions and provided steady play, leadership, and experience.

Emick finished his career as the school's ninth leading rebounder, with 518 in his career. He also made 75 career three-pointers, good for seventh all-time. He enjoyed the finest season

away, because I think we have a lot of talent here already."

Coach Niland also commented on this season's fan support. "I thought the support was great. I know our players appreciated it, and our staff appreciated it. Mr. (Brian) Streeter also



Top left: Emick finished his career ninth on all-time rebounding list. Bottom left: Bovaird was named AMCC Player of the Year his senior season. Top right: Nestor's all-around play sparked the Lady Lions. Bottom right: Phillips gives the Lady Lions a bright future.

of his career as a junior, when he garnered Second Team All-Conference status, as well as Third Team All-ECAC South Region honors.

The Behrend Lions will return a group of talented players next year to follow up this year's success. Center Chris Hughes, center Nate Willson, forward Andy Lawrence, and forward John Park are all juniors and will be back next season. Sophomore Chris May, freshman Andy Berchtold, and freshman Andy Stritzinger should all see their roles increase next season.

Sophomore Ashley Orris, freshman Lamar Jefferson, and freshman Matt Kieth will anchor the backcourt next season.

"I like the group we have coming back," Coach Niland said. "We'll be a different team next year, because we'll be playing different guys with different strengths and weaknesses."

"We're also working hard to bring in more quality players," Niland continued. "We won't be able to find someone to be an impact player right

did a great job of generating interest through the different promotions, and he had a big hand in it."

Coach Niland led his team to their fifth consecutive winning season in his five years of coaching, something never accomplished at the school previously. He earned his second consecutive AMCC Coach of the Year award.

"It's nice to be recognized, but that award goes to my team, and it's a staff award. I never made a basket here or did anything to win a game," Niland said.

Even though the team accomplished many great things this year, Coach Niland and the players are not about to rest on their laurels, and look to use this year's success as a springboard to even better things next season.

"I think we're at the point where we expect to do well, but you can only expect to do well if you work hard in the off-season. If we don't do those things we won't be successful. I think we have a group of guys coming back that expect to do well, but they know it only comes from hard work."

after a 6-6 start. They went 8-2 in conference play which enabled them to host the AMCC Tournament in Eric Hall.

The Lady Lions fell short in their bid to make the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) tournament. Head coach Rosalyn Fornari said, "we ended our season on a well enough note to make it. I was assuming because of the losses that we had during the season, that we played ourselves out of it."

The Behrend women entered the season with hopes of avenging their heartbreaking loss to the Pitt-Bradford Panthers in the AMCC Championship last season. With that in mind, the AMCC Championship weekend was made that much sweeter as the Lions defeated the Panthers in the championship game. Fornari said of the championship game, "it was nice to see our players pull through at the end. All the games we played, our players pulled through." She added, "the players

got a reward for their hard work."

The season was also highlighted with a trip to Las Vegas over Christmas break. Coach Fornari said, "I think that Las Vegas was a great experience for this group. They grew up. That was just a really important part of our year for this group. I think that helped bring them together. I think that helped with our

chemistry. Our chemistry was the best part of our year. It just got them to work together well. I think that won us a championship."

In this championship season, the Lady Lions won seven straight to move them well above .500 to propel them to the top of the AMCC standings. With a regular season win over Pitt-Bradford, the Behrend women clinched the regular season AMCC title.

The Lions outscored their opponents by an average of 63-55 on the year. Behrend shot 42% from the field, topping their opponents' 37%. As a team, the Lions shot 26% from three-point land and 68% from the free throw line. Led by junior guard Carrie Nestor, the Lions finished with 363 assists to rival their opponents' 260, a difference of four per game.

The Lady Lions prided themselves on their visible concept of "team." But the Lions did have many strong individual performers this season. Nestor provided the Lions with all-around strong play through her hustle and consistency. She finished the season with 222 points (8.5 ppg), 131 rebounds (5 rpg), 144 assists (5.5 apg), and 83 steals (3.2 spg).

Tiffany Buck broke the all-time career three-point record this season and made 35 on the year. She also averaged 6.4 ppg and 1.2 spg. Lisa Sanders also sparked the Lions' guard play. Fornari commented, "she is the team leader in spirit."

The Lions once again brought a strong post game with starters Jen O'Lare and Erin Phillips. O'Lare and Phillips combined for 25.5 points per game and 13 rebounds per contest.

Despite the strong individual play, Fornari complimented her bench play saying, "I have a ton of confidence in my younger group." She added, "I would always look back on this team and say it was our best 'team'."

Kate Costanzo, Jacqueline Jackson, Katie Weigold, Christine Charnock and Jessica McDivitt also contributed strongly off the bench throughout the season. Most memorably in the AMCC championship, where they enabled the starters to get much rest, that directly contributed to the win.

Nestor, O'Lare and Phillips all received Second Team All-Conference recognition. Phillips was also named Newcomer of the Year and Fornari was named Co-coach of the Year. Fornari commented, "the fact that I really enjoyed coaching this year. I enjoyed my team. It just made it that much more special."

Of the season, Fornari said, "we had a good year as a group. I mean, there were a lot of really good moments for this team this year. A lot!"

The memories have a good chance of growing next season as the Lady Lions will have all of their championship players able to return. "They recognize that the people that are returning next year will be skillful. They have a lot of work to do. But we have a good returning group," said Fornari.

