



Volcanoes hope to build on good practice

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BY BRIAN T. SMITH

Vancouver Volcanoes coach John Phillips isn't looking ahead.

But then again, he is.

The Volcanoes take on the Lewis County Raptors at 7:15 p.m. tonight at Mountain View High School.

Vancouver (2-8) gained its first win of the 2007 International Basketball League season against the Raptors (2-7) in a 106-100 home victory on April 13.

And after a promising practice session Tuesday, Phillips hopes the Volcanoes are able to repeat the outcome tonight.

"We definitely need to get a win," Phillips said. "Our roster is straightened out and most of our guys are healthy, so we really don't have any excuses. We match up well against them and I think we're a much better team now than when we beat them the first time."

But as soon as the game is over, Phillips said the Volcanoes are focusing their attention on a little rest and recreation. Specifically: Seaside.

The Volcanoes will take a two-day vacation as a team to the Oregon coast in the hopes of "getting away from everything."

"It's going to be like a retreat for us," Phillips said. "We'll spend some time together and get to know each other. Since I took over, there's been a lot of new faces coming and going. I think it'll help us feel more comfortable together on the court."

Following a chaotic early-season run that saw Vancouver drop its first five games by an average of 21.8 points, and a bevy of roster changes brought on by injuries and a lack of team chemistry, Phillips pushed and pulled and then pushed some more in an effort to get the Volcanoes to shape up.

The results have been mixed. Vancouver is 2-3 in its last five games.

And while the Volcanoes have looked good at times - Phillips pointed to their 108-99 win over the Tacoma Jazz on April 21 as an example - they've also looked downright bad.

After playing perhaps their best half of basketball this season in the first two periods against the Portland Chinooks on April 29, the Volcanoes fell apart in the final quarter and were blown out 133-110.

"That score's misleading," Phillips said. "Going into halftime, I was real proud of us. But we lost it in the fourth."

In the hopes of preventing another late-game letdown, Phillips said the Volcanoes will move to a smaller starting unit against the Raptors.

Phillips thinks the strategy will pay off by saving the legs of Vancouver's big men for the second half.

The most noticeable change will be the movement of forward Abdou Sane, a 6-foot-9 product of the University of San Diego, to center.

Vancouver will also lean on guard Darren Cooper, a University of Portland product, who's averaged 27.3 points in his last three games.