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## College basketball: Lady Wranglers look skyward

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November 02, 2009 7:41 PM

BY WILLIE BANS

For Ara Baten, perception may exist, but he cannot see it. Can't see that if one was drawing a graph showing the momentum of the Odessa College women's basketball team, a line would be clearly ascending.

In Baten's first season, following the team's national championship, OC went 7-21 overall, 3-11 in conference play. Last year, the team finished 22-10 overall, 9-5 in conference after a late-season tear and pulled off an upset of a junior college power, Midland College, in the NJCAA Region V Tournament.

Baten's understanding of the program's projection and the worth of the win over Midland College — which ended its season at 30-2 — comes from his eyes only, and they do not open wide with thoughts of last season.

The eyes widen a bit with the fact that it was a big victory, but they are focused on this season.

"For us it was big because, let's be honest, it was Midland," Baten said. "It was the semifinal of the tournament. From a significance standpoint, it's a postseason victory and it's our biggest rival."

And that's it — not his words. His eyes.

Yet, among his most important players, there lies a willingness to look at what last year's record and the victory over Midland College mean.

Their eyes, they brighten a little more. Confidence may be what's allowing it.

"It was a big win," sophomore small forward Tammie Thornton said. "We've grown from it. We've taken that over into the season. We're just working harder so we can improve."

"It makes it like we something to live up to."

Before and after the game against Midland College, which had defeated the Lady Wranglers twice before, Baten said OC had nothing to lose. The pressure was on the Lady Chaps.

Now, with improvement from Year One to Year Two of the Baten era, it appears the Lady Wranglers have much to lose: the program's momentum.

It is a situation the team earned, but one Baten won't use as the theme throughout the year. For him, it is a process, and early losses will not equal an inability to ride a wave.

"We're still searching for an identity," Baten said a week before the season opener at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday against visiting Ranger College. "What we are is probably not what we'll be in January or February. It takes time for us to develop that. I don't know that I

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Kevin Buehler|Odessa American Odessa point guard Shon Redmond (5) gets a shot off over Frank Phillips guard Chana Jones (25) Thursday night, Feb. 12, 2009, during the first half of their Western Junior College Athletic Conference basketball game at the OC Sports Center in Odessa, Texas.

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me having no idea who's going to play, who's not going to play; who would start, who would not start; who would finish the game, who would not finish the game. I don't know. It is really close at most positions.

"I think I would give a slight edge to returning players because they've been there before."

Those who helped produce the notches on the program's graph. Upward. With room to go.

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