

Back-To-Back History

Cal Poly Pomona was the home of an NCAA Division II dynasty in the 1980s. Under legendary coach Darlene May, the Broncos won national titles in 1982, 1985 and 1986 and advanced to the championship game six times in an eight-year span that ended in 1989.

Under May, the Broncos compiled an amazing 519-119 record and were an astounding 195-8 in 18 conference seasons. Cal Poly Pomona was 51-1 in five years in the SCAA and 144-7 in 13 years of CCAA competition. Four players – Jackie White, Vickie Mitchell, Debra Larsen and Cathy Gooden – earned national Player of the Year honors in a seven-year span from 1983-89. The Broncos also earned 29 All-America honors during May's 20 years as head coach.

The Broncos, though, had to wait awhile for that elusive fourth national championship. Paul Thomas, an assistant coach for May, was the one who brought the Broncos back to national prominence.

The wait for a fourth national title ended thanks to one of the most memorable journeys in the program's history. The 2000-01 Broncos overcame a couple of early stumbles, captured another CCAA title, advanced out of the West Regional courtesy of a frantic, last-second victory and then ran the table at the Elite Eight in Rochester, Minn. to win the program's first national title in 15 years.

"It meant that Cal Poly Pomona had re-emerged as one of the nation's powerhouses. We had worked very hard to get back to that position," Head Coach Paul Thomas said. "Being around the alumni and being around Coach May and Barb (Fulton) and being on their staff for four years and then to win the first national title in 15 years as a head coach is a feeling I'll never forget."

It took the Broncos a little time to hit their stride. Although four starters returned from a squad that went 26-3, Thomas had to fine-tune a roster that also included six new players. After a couple early losses, the Broncos rolled through their conference schedule. Only a Feb. 23 loss at Chico State stalled an impressive late-season run that earned Cal Poly Pomona the right to host the West Regional.

The Broncos opened the playoffs with a 91-85 payback victory over Western Washington, the team that had eliminated the Broncos on their home floor a year ago. Cal Poly Pomona then battled a talented Seattle Pacific team in a game that produced one of the most thrilling Bronco victories in history. Down by one point and with time running out, Burgundie Porter drove through four Seattle Pacific defenders and into the lane and then calmly banked in a shot with one second remaining to give the Broncos a 63-62 win and a spot in the Elite Eight.

The Broncos began their magical run in Rochester, Minn. with a 74-54 win over Pace University of New York. Tasha Burnett tied an NCAA record by hitting all 11 of her field-goal attempts and finished with a game-high 24 points. In the national semifinal game, the Broncos shifted gears a little bit. Knowing they could not win a fast-paced game with undefeated and No. 1 Columbus State (Ga.), the Broncos slowed down the tempo and recorded an 80-72 victory.

The championship game, televised by ESPN 2, was sensational. North Dakota started the game on a 12-0 run and held leads as large as 16 points in the first half. The Broncos battled back and sent the game into overtime on a basket by Burnett in the final

minute. In overtime, sophomore guard Anna James, who almost broke her nose in a scramble at the end of regulation, hit a clutch 3-pointer to give the Broncos the lead for good and the Broncos were on their way to an 87-80 overtime victory and their fourth national championship.

After winning the first national championship in 15 years and the fourth overall, Cal Poly Pomona's women's basketball team had a different task in the 2001-02 season. As the defending national champs, the Broncos set out to record only the second back-to-back national titles in the program's history.

The Broncos had some key performers coming back and, in fact, four of their five starters and nine players in all were returning from the 2000-01 championship team. Lauri McIntosh, Burgundie Porter, Anna James and Aprile Powell were the returning starters, but the Broncos did have to replace invaluable point guard Tasha Burnett. As it turned out, senior transfer Leah Whatley stepped in and came up with the winning points in two of the Broncos' biggest wins of the season – a basket with 12 seconds left in a 63-62 win at Sonoma State that clinched an 18th CCAA title and two free throws with two seconds remaining that lifted the Broncos past Western Washington, 71-70, in the NCAA Division II West Regional final.

The task of repeating was not an easy one. The Broncos were ranked No. 1 at the beginning of the season and, obviously, they ended there as well. In between, though, there were plenty of bumps and bruises that had to be overcome before the fifth national championship banner was won. Only Whatley started all 32 games for the Broncos.

“Once you've accomplished the goal of winning a national championship, you soon realize, ‘now we have to defend it,’ which was a challenge our team was very happy to accept,” Thomas said.

One final example of how tough it is to repeat: Cal Poly Pomona was the only participant in the 2001-02 Elite Eight who had been there the year before. Armed with the experience, the Broncos rolled past Mars Hill, Glenville State College and Southeastern Oklahoma State – all victories were by double-digit margins – to complete their back-to-back championship quest.

McIntosh completed her fantastic career by being named the NCAA Division II Player of the Year, making her the fifth Bronco to earn that distinction. Cal Poly Pomona concluded a remarkable four-year stretch that included an overall record of 104-16, three CCAA titles and two national championships.