

Press Clippings 02/08/2019

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ECC holds discussion about life on campus

By: Rafael Guerrero

A group of Elgin Community College students and staff on Thursday discussed faculty diversity, achievement and opportunity gaps, and life on campus as a person of color.

The discussion was held as part of the college's Black History Month events.

Three African-American students, T.J. Glass, Brianna Paulino, and Keyvon Kyles, said they have had positive interactions with fellow ECC students, but they still question some of the stares they get walking on campus. ECC's enrollment is less than 10 percent African-American. The students said they have established connections with ECC professors or staff of color, but a lack of diversity persists.

Paulino, 20, recalled the culture shock being the only black student in her honors program back when she started at ECC. Two years in, Paulino said she is still the only black student in some of her classes.

"I see people tense up when they walk by us," said Glass, 18, who attended a predominantly white school before attending ECC.

Like Paulino, Kyles, 21, attended **Larkin High School**, where the student diversity was greater than at ECC. It took adjustment and involvement with student clubs and groups for Kyles to fit in, he said.

Kyles said connecting with one of ECC's black professors was the "spark" he needed. Kyles said he rarely had educators of color to mentor him growing up. According to ECC data, 22 percent of faculty identify as non-white, yet minority students make up a majority of the student body.

Kyles is thankful he found an instructor who could relate to his personal experiences.

"I can see him walking through the halls, the way faculty treats him with so much respect," Kyles said. "His demeanor, the way he carries himself is very encouraging."

Addressing achievement and opportunity gaps among demographics, including ECC's black population, is part of the college's long-term strategic plan — however, there is no quick solution to addressing any achievement gaps, both told the small group on Thursday.

Brittany Barber, a student life coordinator for targeted populations, and Phil Garber, the college's planning and institutional effectiveness executive director, are looking to address some of those issues.

"We should all care about the gap," Garber said. "If we're not, then we're not really fulfilling our mission."

ECC leaders must continue looking into boosting student and community participation at ECC, such as through orientation events and college/job fairs, Barber said.

Instructors and professors must expand beyond the practice of teaching and instructing, she added. Not all dips in grades can be easily explained.

“One of the things that I kept running into last year and this year is we have students of color that don’t think that they’re smart,” Barber said.

“If you’re ignoring their experiences (inside and outside the classrooms), their perspectives...you are further validating their invisibility,” she said. “What does that do for academic performance?”

SPORTS

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Next one in line at Larkin

Ron Planz 4th head football coach hired in less than a year

By: Paul Johnson



- Ron Planz has been named the head football coach at Larkin. He was the head coach at Elmhurst College the past five seasons.

While searching for a new football coach, Larkin athletic director Ethan Karolczak received a tip from an old friend.

Dragan Teonic, who left Larkin to be the coach at South Elgin, recommended Ron Planz. He was coming off a five-year run as Elmhurst College’s head coach.

“Dragan reached out to me and said a friend of his just left Elmhurst and wants to get back to his roots and do what he went to school for — coaching and teaching at the high school level,” Karolczak said. “By the time I got off the phone with Dragan, I had an email from Ron.”

With Jason Aubry leaving to become the head coach at Concordia Chicago, Larkin had an opening for both football coach and in the physical education department. After applying and interviewing for both positions, Planz was hired by Larkin.

“He was our No. 1 choice,” Karolczak said of Planz. “It was a no-brainer. We’re just really excited to have him here. He started teaching on Monday and is already building relationships with the students.”

Planz, 39, always expected he would teach and coach at the high school level after graduating from Carthage.

He wound up coaching in college first, however. He was an assistant at Wisconsin Eau Claire, Manchester and Minnesota State Mankato before landing at Elmhurst.

With a wife and two children, Planz turned down other college offers to take the Larkin job.

“My path took me to college, but I came full circle now,” Planz said. “I think there is a lot of untapped potential there. The Upstate Eight has changed the past few years, and I think that positions Larkin well to compete.”

Planz is Larkin’s fourth coach in less than a year. When he arrived at Elmhurst, he was the Bluejays’ third coach in as many seasons.

“He’s uniquely qualified for this situation,” Karolczak said. “It’s a nice benefit. We’re just looking forward to seeing the program grow ... and build something special.”

Picking up slack

Larkin learns to play without Pierre Black before receiving boost from his return

By: Paul Johnson



- Larkin’s Victor Perez (5) puts up a shot during the third quarter against Elgin on Feb. 1.



- Larkin’s Jashon Johnson-Neals drives to the basket against the defense of Elgin’s Jeffery Lomax.

Coming into this season, Larkin wanted to rely heavily on senior guard Pierre Black, the leading returning scorer from its team that placed fourth in Class 4A.

Although the Royals went 1-5 in their first six games, Black remained the focal point.

But in that sixth game Dec. 1 at Lake Park, Black left with an injured labrum. The previous plan for Larkin went out the window as Black missed the next 15 games.

“It was just a process where I had to be mentally tough,” Black said. “Even though I felt physically ready, I just had to be patient about it.”

There was an unintended benefit, however, to Black’s absence.

The rest of the team had to grow up quickly, and coach Deryn Carter believes that will help Larkin (10-14, 7-7) down the stretch.

“Sometimes injured guys are gone so short a time that no other guys develop,” Carter said. “He was gone a significant enough time.”

“It was unfortunate for him, but it probably helped our team. At the beginning of the season, we were so reliant on him.”

Fellow senior guard Victor Perez, a role player last season, was forced into a leadership role. Perez averages a team-high 11.3 points. Jashon Johnson-Neals, a junior forward who was brought up to varsity for the playoffs last season, was pushed into the starting lineup.

Freshman point guard Damari Wheeler-Thomas also moved into the spotlight with Black out of the lineup.

When Black returned to practice, he saw the team’s growth.

“Yeah, for sure, I noticed the difference a lot,” Black said. “We had a lot of players that had to step up. Damari stepped up a lot. Our leaders, Victor and Jashon, stepped up and also our bench.

“We have a deeper bench because I was out. It just developed them even more. I feel like it is an advantage because they got to play more so they know what the varsity speed is. It helps us in March.”

Tough defense: St. Edward’s David Hill didn’t have much experience entering the season, but the senior guard has turned into the Elgin area’s leader in steals. He also leads the Green Wave in scoring.

Hill has 90 steals and averages 12.7 points for St. Edward (12-13, 3-6).

“He assumed a leadership role early on, making the Westminster Christian all-tournament team, and he never looked back after that,” St. Edward coach Andy Zielinski said of Hill. “He’s come a long way in a short period of time this season.”

Hill’s contributions were needed. Schaumburg transfer Gio Gonnella was averaging 12 points before tearing a ligament in his thumb four games ago, ending his season.

Danny Parks, the top returnee for St. Edward, is rounding into form after suffering an ACL injury in April.

“When we are on, we’re a tough team to play against,” Zielinski said. “Inconsistency and poor shooting have been our issues all year, but the kids always play hard.”

Shootout schedules: The Indian Creek Shootout is coming up Saturday, and a pair of local teams will be in attendance.

Burlington Central (16-6) will get another tough test before the postseason, facing off at 3 p.m. against Carmel. Westminster Christian (7-10) plays at noon against Leland.

South Elgin (18-6) will play on Saturday, Feb. 16 in the DuPage Valley/Upstate Eight Shootout at East Aurora. The Storm will play at 2 p.m. against Neuqua Valley.

Paul Johnson is a freelance reporter for The Courier-News.

Boys Basketball Top 5

With records through Thursday and previous rankings in parentheses.

1. South Elgin 18-6 (1)
2. Dundee-Crown 16-6 (2)
3. Burlington Central 16-6 (3)
4. Hampshire 15-11 (4)
5. Harvest Christian 14-6 (NR)

Player of the Week: Senior forward Keenon Cole led Streamwood to a 73-66 Upstate Eight win Wednesday over Bartlett. The Northern Illinois recruit had 27 points and 15 rebounds.