

LDS athletes celebrate season of achievement

Athletics drawing attention to individuals and the Church

By Jason Swensen Church News staff writer

Several Latter-day Saints and teams from a pair of Church-owned schools enjoyed remarkable success during the U.S. collegiate winter sports season. Their achievements excited fans and gleaned positive attention for the Church across the country.

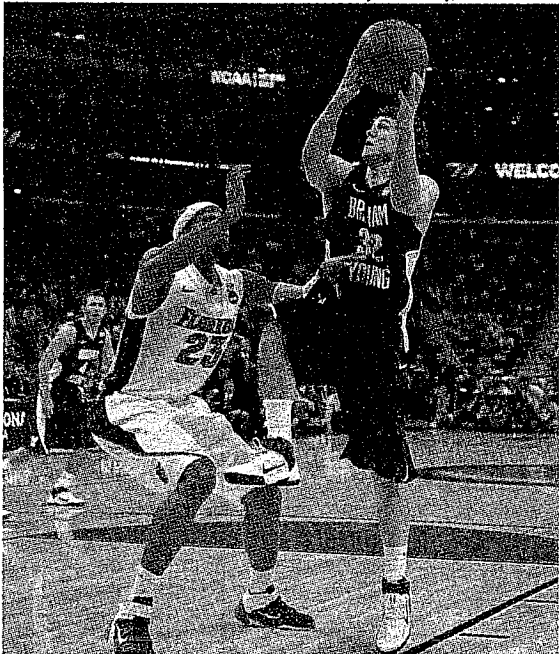
- Brigham Young University's mens' basketball team ended its historic season with a trip to the storied Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament before losing in overtime to Florida 83-74 on March 24 in New Orleans.

The Cougars set a school record with 34 wins against just five losses, claiming the Mountain West Conference regular season title and reaching the field of 16 for the first time in 30 years.

The season "has been everything we wanted to achieve," senior guard Jackson Emery told the *Deseret News*. "A lot of people doubted us and our ability, and (because of the) things we've gone through, they didn't think we could accomplish those things. It shows something about those guys, that we're going to fight hard every day and practice hard."

In this saturated era of message boards, real time highlight reels and YouTube uploads, the Cougars were afforded unprecedented national media attention.

Photo by Mike Terry, Deseret News



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Some reporters and columnists examined BYU's honor code and culture, while many others marveled at the hardwood accomplishments of All-American senior guard Jimmer Fredette.

Jimmer enjoyed a rare athletic "twofer" by appearing on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* on consecutive weeks during the national magazine's coverage of March Madness. He led the country in scoring (averaging 28.9 points per game) while breaking LDS player Danny Ainge's long-standing school career scoring record. The Glens Falls, N.Y., native also received several collegiate Player of the Year awards and spread "Jimmermania" far outside the boundaries of Utah County.

Along with way, the affable ball player answered many questions about his faith and used such opportunities to share his testimony and conversion story. (See *Church News*, Feb. 5, 2011.)

- Just two days after BYU's national tournament run ended in the Sweet 16, its sister school, BYU-Hawaii, played in the final of the NCAA Div. II tournament in Springfield, Mass., losing to Kentucky's Bellarmine University 71-68 before a nationally televised audience. The seventh-seeded Seasiders played the role of tournament Cinderella in reaching the championship game after posting a 22-8 record.

BYU-Hawaii enjoyed its own version of Jimmermania with Seasider guard Jet Chang (Jetter-mania?) being named the tournament's most outstanding player after scoring 35 points in the national final. Jet led the PacWest Conference in scoring during the 2010-2011 campaign with an average of 21.2 points per game.

Like many of the Cougars, several Seasiders found opportunities to share their faith with their fans and others. The team participated in a fireside for members, fans and their friends on the Sunday prior to the final. Four players spoke and the entire team sang "I Am a Child of God." Sophomore guard Junior Ale prefaced the musical number by noting that the team represents seven countries and several religions, but they are all children of God.

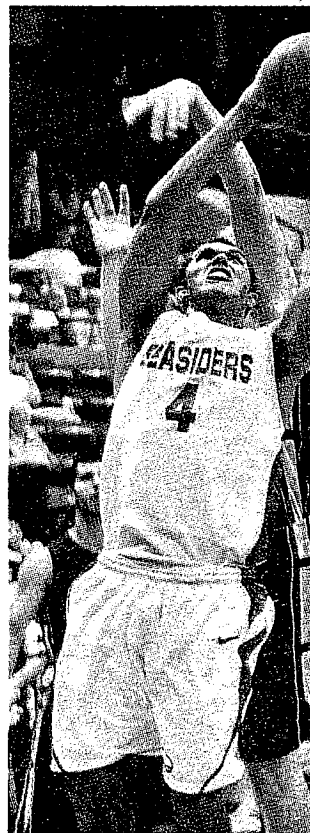
- Wichita State guard Graham Hatch, a returned missionary from Arizona, was an integral member of the Shockers basketball team that reached the final of the 2011 National Invitational Tournament. Graham was named to the Missouri Valley Conference's Most Improved Team and carries a 3.7 grade-point-average in chemistry.

- On March 19, legendary LDS wrestler Cael Sanderson coached the Penn State Nittany Lions grapplers to the 2011 NCAA national title.

A native of Heber City, Utah, and a lifelong Church member, Brother Sanderson won four individual national championships at Iowa State before winning the gold medal for the United States in the 2004 Olympic Games in Greece. He has coached at Penn State since 2009 and was recently named the 2011 Big Ten Coach



Cael Sanderson works with young person at wrestling camp at Wasatch High School in Heber City, Utah.



Seasider senior Marques Whippy, a senior, pulls down a rebound for BYU-Hawaii.

- Several other LDS wrestle NCAA tournament in Philadelphia missionaries — Utah Valley University's Andrew Hochstetler, Boise State's Andrew Hochstetler, and Lofthouse — earned All-American honors in the top eight of their respective divisions. Low Latter-day Saint Jason Church was also named an All-American.

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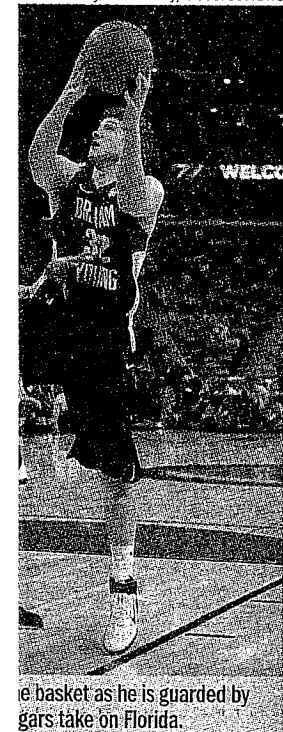
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Photo by Mike Terry, Deseret News



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Brother Sanderson is joined on the Nittany Lions' coaching staff by his brother, Cody Sanderson.



Cael Sanderson works with young participants at his wrestling camp at Wasatch High School in Heber in 2008.

Jason Olson, Deseret News file photo



Seasideer senior Marques Whippy, a talented all-around player, pulls down a rebound for BYU-Hawaii during a game.

Photo courtesy of BYU-Hawaii

• Several other LDS wrestlers excelled at the recent NCAA tournament in Philadelphia, Pa. Three returned missionaries — Utah Valley University's Ben Kjar, Boise State's Andrew Hochstrasser and Iowa's Luke Lofthouse — earned All-American honors by placing in the top eight of their respective weight classes. Fellow Latter-day Saint Jason Chamberlain of Boise State was also named an All-American.

A collection of other returned missionaries qualified for the national championships, including UVU's Flint Ray and Justin Morrill, Colton Salazar of Purdue, Matt Caspersen of Boise State and Columbia University's Kevin Lester.

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