

Winning in the classroom

LMC says its athletes cut academic mustard, and then some

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — If fall grades are an indication, Lake Michigan College athletes' competitive successes are carrying over to the classroom.

LMC board members paused from Tuesday's agenda to recognize the Red Hawk basketball teams, whose members did well on and off the court.

The men's and women's basketball teams posted 2.98 and 3.29 overall grade point averages, respectively, for LMC's fall 2014 semester — and that's just one indicator of how LMC's athletes are faring academically, Clinton Gabbard, vice president of student services, told the board.

"Two groups of students performed in the classroom like they meant it, like they were here to get an education, and enjoy basketball. It's always fun when that happens, and we have athletic success," he said.

Both teams experienced major successes this year under head coaches Jason Cooper and Doug Schaffer.

Under Cooper, the Red Hawks made it to the national tournament appearance this year, but lost their first two games and were eliminated.

Cooper is fifth on the tournament's all-time list of appearances and wins.

"They've had 13 wins under his leadership, which is all time for that group of folks," Gabbard said.

Schaffer guided the men's team to its first conference championship in 30 years, "and made a great showing, and fall just short of a national trip," he said.

The men's basketball team earned its overall GPA by passing 320 of the 347 credit hours they attempted, resulting in 842 total points and 283 GPA hours, according to a chart released by the college.

Overall figures compiled for

the women's basketball team showed the players passing 361 out of 370 hours attempted, which was good for 1,072 total points and 326 GPA hours.

Sixty percent of the male players are on track to graduate with an associate's degree this spring, Gabbard said. He didn't have graduation rates for the female players, but recalled them being slightly higher.

"When you have that combination of great skills and performance on the court, as well as talent in the classroom, you just want to celebrate," Gabbard said. "What you're seeing is incredible performance for all of our teams, not just these two."

Overall GPA results for LMC's other teams for fall 2014 finished up as follows: men's soccer, 2.54; women's soccer, 2.94; baseball, 2.99; volleyball, 3.21; and softball, 3.22, the college's chart showed.

As a group, the teams passed 3,182 out of 3,417 total hours attempted, resulting in 8,729 total points and 2,914 GPA hours — which was good for a 3.0 overall GPA.

"This really does read well on what our faculty and staff are doing," LMC President Bob Harrison said. "Our coaches are doing a great job."

Cooper and Schaffer said that they've seen plenty of hard athletic and academic work from their players.

"We've (been to the tournament) five out of the last six years, (including) four years in a row. It starts from the top down. We're a family. We do everything together," Cooper said.

"It's a blessing and a privilege. Many times that goes in a different order when it comes to athletics. We are blessed and privileged that we are allowed to represent this college winter long, and it's an honor to do so," Schaffer said.

To honor this year's successes, the board distributed small silver necklaces to each female player — and dog tags to each male player — with LMC's initials on them