

Pickering College Pumas cap undefeated season with decisive win over Greenwood 61-38 in CISAA Junior Boys' championship



Pickering College basketball coaches Alex Grenier and Cameron Campbell surveyed the home court celebration unfolding at Egan House on Wednesday afternoon and liked what they saw.

After guiding the Pumas to the CISAA Junior Boys' Championship, Coach Grenier expressed his satisfaction regarding his team's emphatic back-to-back wins. A 61-38 victory over Greenwood in the final, preceded by a 70-49 decision over Albert College in the semifinal, showed the young squad's cohesive quality.

“They worked as a team and ran plays well. I thought we had good energy on defense and they worked together. They’ve played hard all season, and it was nice to see them execute all the way to the end. It feels good.”

Coach Campbell celebrated the team culture that was created to cobble together a 10-0 record.

“The boys were holding each other accountable. It was a key to our season. We have second-year players who were leaders.”

Coach Grenier echoed his coaching partner's insights: “They even started setting up our drills before the coaches arrived at practice.”

Grenier and Campbell, both in their third year of coaching basketball together at Pickering College, singled out two players who were keys to their back-to-back wins on Wednesday.

The play of Pumas point guard Aly Jindani and centre William Gojic was highlighted by Coach Campbell: “Aly is a Grade 8 who played up with us this season. He wanted more of a challenge. He played such a big part of today's wins. Will had another big double-double for us. He might have had 30 rebounds in the final. He anchors everything on D and on our offense, too.”

The athletic and articulate Gojic noted the key to their emphatic win over Albert College during a brief break between the Pumas' semifinal and championship games.

“It's been all about moving on offense. When we worked as a team, it was easy. We felt really good going into the game after finishing the regular season 8-0. The start of the game was so important for us. We set the tone early and we kept pressure on them at midcourt.”

Indeed, Gojic and Jindani spurred that quick start versus Albert College. The Pumas' dynamic duo asserted their intense midcourt

pressure leading to three turnovers and a backcourt violation in the first 1:40 of play.

Jindani ran wild in the opening quarter with 11 points to set the tone discussed by Gojic. After building a 10-0 lead on Jindani's steal and a layup, Eugene Zhou's three-ball, Gojic's steal and layup, and Jindani's old-fashioned three-point play, the relentless offensive attack by the blue-clad Pumas withered the visitors.

Gojic poured it on with a pair of mid-range jumpers and Jindani continued to slash to the hoop for two more dynamic layups to build a 24-5 lead after the first quarter.

Coaches Grenier and Campbell substituted freely in the second quarter with the prospect of back-to-back games on Wednesday afternoon.

Zhou steadied the subs in the second quarter by slicing to the basket and hitting another big three to make it 40-16, much to the delight of the packed gymnasium which featured a demonstrative Pumas mascot. Excellent free throw shooting by the on-court Pumas and some aggressive D extended the lead to 47-22 at half time.

The visitors regrouped at intermission and the third quarter belonged to a reanimated squad from Belleville. Shooting guard Grant Williams hit his fourth three-ball of the game and the Kelly Green-clad Panthers cut their deficit to 53-43 one minute into the final frame.

The Pumas' starters were reinserted and the squad's 3-2 midcourt trap press generated turnovers to stifle the Panthers' offense. Gojic exerted his will in the paint with drives to the hoop and strong offensive rebounding to spur a critical 7-0 run that ballooned into a 66-43 lead with 2:51 to play.

The speedy and steady play of Zhou and Jindani netted the guards 19 points each to lead all scorers in the semifinal.

The Junior Pumas' recipe for success in the semifinal was not replicated versus Greenwood in the championship final. A comparatively-sluggish first quarter yielded the home side a narrow 12-8 lead after eight minutes of play. Zhou and Gojic paced the Pumas with five points each in the opening quarter with Ethan Gao hitting two crucial free throws.

With 'Let's Go Pumas' echoing through Egan House, the Pickering squad's offence woke up when Gojic's layup made it 18-12 and Jindani's successful 'and-one' extended the home side's lead to 21-12. The nine-point margin was maintained by the Pumas in a 25-16 half-time lead.

Greenwood opened the third quarter on a 7-2 run to narrow the home side's lead to 27-23. Quite suddenly, the Conference of Independent Schools Athletic Association championship final had something the semifinal had lacked: suspense.

However, the Pumas demonstrated their balanced scoring when Gojic, Jindani, Aaron Prasad, and Zhou delivered big baskets on their ensuing 9-2 run. Gojic's left-handed layup with 15.6 seconds left in the third quarter executed a timeout play to create a 39-27 lead.

Jindani opened the fourth quarter with a flourish, scoring his team's first six points on daring layups.

Zhou's drive and old-fashioned three-point play helped push the Pumas' lead to 52-35 with three minutes to play. Gojic pulled down nine rebounds in the quarter to limit the Panthers' second-chance scoring opportunities.

When Prasad's jumper hit the mark at 2:02 and Ethan Gao turned a steal into a layup to make it 59-35 at 1:26, the Pumas' starting lineup was extracted from the game and the undefeated team added another year to the Pickering College championship basketball banner.

It now features titles from 1930 to 2026.

By Jim Stewart