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Chargers give Denker first win

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After two weeks of uncertainty, a fresh face and a fresh approach seem to have the Eugene Chargers adjusting their methods - and their expectations - for the second half of the International Basketball League season.

IBL

The Chargers displayed a newfound urgency on defense in a victory over one of the league's top teams Saturday night, slowing the Portland Chinooks' pace in a 109-101 victory before 275 fans at the Morse Event Center.

At the center of the new approach was coach Chris Denker, who just Thursday was named the Chargers' coach for the remainder of the season.

"He's the reason we won," guard Rodrick Stevenson said.

Denker, a graduate of South Eugene High and Oregon, debuted in a navy pin-striped suit and slicked-back hair, pacing the sideline as if he'd done it before.

"I'm a Eugene guy. It was attractive to me to come back to Eugene and see my family," said Denker, who lives in San Jose, Calif.

The son of longtime South Eugene girls basketball coach Jim Denker, he previously coached the women's teams at Santa Clara and Colorado State. He was most recently an assistant for the boys team at Archbishop Mitty High School in California.

He replaces Scott Jones, who was fired after six games.

"I've been here all of three days. There's only so much you can do," Denker said. "You can't make wholesale changes, but we really didn't need that."

Since Wednesday, Denker made it a priority to instill a respect for defense and rebounding. It seemed to quickly become the players' priority, too.

The Chargers (6-4) held Portland (10-4) to just 15 points in the second quarter en route to a 56-44 halftime lead.

In welcoming Denker, a new face, the Chargers were also reacquainted with an old one in Bo Colas' return to Eugene.

Colas, an IBL All-Star with the Chargers last year, finished with 17 points for Portland, but he was routinely frustrated by the officials (one technical foul) and baffled by Eugene's Lamar Harris (four blocks, 20 rebounds).

"I love coming back to Eugene. I had a good time here last year," Colas said. "I just wish we could've gotten a win."

A 17-8 run gave the Chinooks a 79-78 lead early in the fourth quarter, but two Solomon Yearby three-pointers and an Adam Zahn putback dunk started a 9-0 run to put the Chargers back on top for good.

The Chinooks were held 30 points below their season average.

"We needed to defend, get on the boards and get in our transition game, and I was really pleased they did that," Denker said.

Charles Easterling had a triple-double - 11 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists.

Yearby led the Chargers with 19 points.

Another former Duck, David Jackson, made his return to Eugene, scoring 18 points.