

BC3's Craig in "whirlwind" after breaking women's basketball scoring mark

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Butler County Community College sophomore forward Mackenzie Craig, standing fourth from left, is shown during a brief celebration held during a time-out of Saturday's game against Potomac State College in Keyser, W.Va. Craig broke Julia Baxter's all-time scoring mark in the BC3 women's basketball program with her 1,094th point on a free throw following a technical foul. Pictured are, kneeling, Casey Kretzer; standing, from left, Brooke Dingel, Jenna Heitzenrater, coach Dick Hartung, Craig, Carly Burdett and Kelly Kriley.

(Keyser, W.Va.) Jim Walton gave Mackenzie Craig exactly the opportunity she wanted, although she didn't know exactly what that opportunity held in store.

Arguing from the Potomac State College women's basketball coach led to referee Anthony Bates assessing a technical foul, which led to Butler County Community College coach Dick Hartung immediately selecting and shouting "Craig!" which led to the Pioneers' sophomore forward standing at the free-throw line – and, unbeknownst to her – at the cusp of BC3 history.

Craig was aware only that BC3 held a 49-48 lead, and that she stood where she is most comfortable, at the free-throw line, where she is a standout 76 percent shooter, and where, she says, “It is your own time. You don’t have to worry about anyone else. It is just me, the ball and the hoop.”

Standing alone on the Pioneers’ side of the court in Potomac State’s Lough Gymnasium, her teammates observing from the sideline, Craig sank only the second of the two free throws, heard Bates’ whistle and turned toward BC3’s bench, expecting to quickly sip water from her 20-ounce plastic black Blender Bottle.

“I thought we were just going over to the bench and I was going to get a drink,” Craig said.

Hartung had called a time-out after the successful foul shot, Craig’s 16th point of the afternoon and 1,094th of her BC3 career, which passed the all-time record of 1,093 scored by Julia Baxter from 2015-2017.

“Everyone started high-fiving me,” Craig said of the brief sideline celebration during the time-out with 7:05 left in the third quarter of the Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference game. “Casey Kretzer was the one who told me I broke the record.”

“A total whirlwind for me”

Baxter’s scoring mark was one of two Craig has broken this season. Craig passed Baxter’s program record of 680 rebounds in December.

“When Baxter set those records a couple of seasons ago in rebounds and scoring, I said they could never be broken,” Hartung said. “Two years later, they’re broken. I didn’t think anyone would catch the numbers Baxter put up.”

Neither did Craig, a Karns City High graduate who said she never entertained thoughts of breaking records at BC3.

“That was never a goal of mine,” she said. “I was just happy to play. To have all this happen has just been a total whirlwind for me because I never expected it at all.”

Craig’s 24 points Saturday, during a game the Pioneers lost 80-73, marked the 35th time in her 37 career games that she has scored at least 20 points. Of her 1,102 career points at BC3, 304 have come from the free-throw line, where she often finds herself after being fouled by opponents frustrated with her tenacity under the basket.

“She takes care of the ball. She protects the ball. And then you’re fouling her,” Walton said. “You can’t foul her. She is going to make her free throws.”

Craig made 12 of 16 Saturday, and finished with six layups or baseline jump shots, often sliding between two or more defenders unable to contain her left-handed shots.

“When she is in the paint and there are four defenders around her, we will throw it in and she will still get a layup out of it,” teammate Kelly Kriley said. “It just amazes me that she can beat all four girls around her, even when they collapse on her.”

Baxter, a Butler Area Senior High graduate named the BC3’s women’s basketball program’s first National Junior College All-American in 2017, said she was pleased to see Craig top her records.

“It makes me excited to see people who worked as hard as I did and get to see the same type of accomplishments and outcomes as I did,” said Baxter, a forward who averaged 24.3 points for the Pioneers.

Craig’s average of 26.1 points entering the game was sixth among players on all 91 National Junior College Athletic Association Division III teams and her 18.3 rebounds, second. She recorded a team-high 18 rebounds Saturday, pushing her program-leading mark to 760.

“Her heart is in it”

“Everyone who plays this game has a different motor,” said Steve Andreassi, Karns City High’s head coach who served as an assistant during Craig’s high school career, when she became one of only two of the school’s girls basketball players to win four consecutive District 9 championship teams. “Her motor is relentless.”

“She is aggressive and she is always playing hard,” said Jamestown Community College coach Travis Wells. “She has a motor that doesn’t stop.”

“Her heart,” teammate Brooke Dingel said, “is in it.”

“She plays to the buzzer with all of her heart,” said Kretzer, who Saturday led BC3 with 26 points, including six 3-pointers.

Craig has played to the buzzer in 13 of BC3’s 14 games. She missed only the season opener, against Penn State-Greater Allegheny on Nov. 2, when she was a member of a BC3 volleyball team that beat Patrick Henry Community College of Martinsville, Va., in the first round of the NJCAA Division III District I/J Tournament.

Craig in December became the seventh BC3 volleyball All-American since 1999, and the sole player among the 84 volleyball All-Americans in the NJCAA’s three divisions in 2018 to represent a Pennsylvania college.

The Pioneers (4-10, 1-2 WPCC) host the Community College of Beaver County at 5 p.m. Monday. Potomac State moved to 12-3 and 3-0 WPCC.

