Speaker 1: Hi. Hello. Hi. Hey. You are listening to the newsroom at Seattle university.

Patrick Leary: This is Patrick Leary with Seattle university magazine. Okay, so happy to be sitting down with a Seattle university basketball coach, Jim Hayford. Coach, hanks so much for agreeing to do this. I really appreciate it.

Jim Hayford: It's great. I love talking CLU basketball, especially to Seattle U people. People who love the school. So let's have some fun.

Patrick Leary: Absolutely. Okay, so I just wanted to start out pretty big picture. What would you say you're most proud of from your first two years at Seattle university?

Jim Hayford: The thing I would be most proud of is that we're bringing the school a winner. It's 12 years now since the return of division one and we put up two winning seasons, a 20 win season and 18 win season without any seniors. And when I think of how I want people to think of our program, there's many descriptors, but one that I don't think you can substitute is winning. That's a winning program because if you're winning games, you can do a lot of other things, but that's the first thing that someone looks at it on the sports page or in these days now on the website.

Jim Hayford: And so I'm really proud of the hard work put in by the players, the staff, that we could have an immediate turnaround in the record of the program since our staff took over a couple of years ago.

Patrick Leary: Sure. As you look at the first two seasons, lot of similarities between the two. Where do you feel like the program improved from year one to year two?

Jim Hayford: Well, year one was a really interesting year, in that we took over a roster that most of the production from the previous season with the previous coaching staff had graduated and there were some guys that were coming off of injuries. Who are we going to be able to count on? How are we going to feel a competitive team. There is a lot of youth and how it all kind of shaked out to get our first 20 win season at the division one level at Seattle U.

Jim Hayford: We kind of saved the day with these three grad transfers who came in. And so Rashad, Jordan and Josh just helped us bring some immediate credibility. So we didn't do any grad transfers the next year so that would be something that has nothing in common, but we sat out some guys who then were able to be a part of the next year's team and then we added our first freshman class of recruits. And so what's most in common is both teams had ... we had to pass out name tags at the beginning of each season cause it was just new guys in new roles.

Jim Hayford: But both teams over achieved. The first year, we had one player miss two games with an injury. Unfortunately last year, I think we had a combined like 51 starts missed with injuries and so we get out to this great start 12 and three non-conference. Beat Washington State. Beat Cal. I think we were like nine and one on our home court and just ready to go attack the conference season, and then just injuries just kind of crumbled our team for the next five weeks.

Patrick Leary: Sure.

Jim Hayford: They say the hard part of experience is getting it. Well, a lot of guys got a lot of experience, but we got exposed for not having that depth where the first season we did get by with playing six guys mainly. A seventh guy, about eight minutes a game, but our depth didn't get exposed because we were injury free and so that's just a part of sport.

Jim Hayford: You got to adjust to it. You would hope that as your coaching staff develops tenure and time that your roster then has more depth and that you're just not getting crushed by graduation in any one class but bringing experience back. But that's also a little harder to do right now because there's never been an era like this in individual one basketball that's just so transfer crazy. I think 25% of the division one roster since the season ended in March, have transferred out. That's 350 division one schools, you know, across the country, across the board.

Jim Hayford: Whether it's a high major basketball team, a mid-major basketball team, like we are a low major team. There's just a lot of just moving around going on and the transfer rules have been relaxed and so my hope is that our majority of our recruiting, probably 75%, 80%, will go to high school students that you can build a program around over four or five years. When I looked back at the success our staff had at Eastern Washington before I came here, it was a group of guys that went through adversity together, bonded together, and then grew up together that got them into the NCA tournament.

Jim Hayford: And so I still believe in that model, but it's a lot harder to do now than even it was five years ago.

Patrick Leary: How hard is it to do something like that initially, because obviously you come into this job and like you mentioned, a lot of roster turnover initially. You were super reliant on transfers, especially in the first year, but also last year. How long does it take to sort of phase into the kind of high school recruiting model that you'd ideally like to implement?

Jim Hayford: Well, I think we've moved that way. Even this year, the five newcomers into the program, four of them are right out of high school. But then there's two sides of it. You've got to do good evaluation and then players have to develop. So as a coach, you got to evaluate well. Are these players going to develop and mature into a better player than maybe they were?

Jim Hayford: I mean, everybody can go to a recruiting event and look at a guy like Kentucky fills their roster with and say, "That guy's good." You know, well we're not going to get those guys at this point right now, and so we need to look between the lines and around the corner and find the players where the upside is way ahead on them. And so you have to be really good at evaluation, but then you get those guys in your program, and then this is one of the things that I take the most pride in, in our coaching staff is our ability to develop players.

Jim Hayford: I mean earlier in my career from someone who was a walk on to a NBA draft choice, you know, and so when you develop players well, and that takes first and foremost, the effort of the individual to really want to be the very best they can be. Evaluation on taking somebody who has a lot of upside and then just care, love and discipline to walk beside that player and help them be the best they can be. And so those are the different ingredients or the combination that happens in that.

Jim Hayford: At the same time, another side of recruiting is you're recruiting players that maybe all of the recruiting experts are saying, "Oh, that guy's too good for you" because maybe they get in a situation at another school where there's a coaching change and they realize, hey, it's not about necessarily the reputation of the school I'm going to or what conference they're in, but what is the learning situation? What's the academic setting? What's the regional identity or what's that relationship with the coach that supersedes all that and then you're on the good side of the transfer equation because you did a good job maybe recruiting somebody that others said was too good for you.

Patrick Leary: Sure. In a kind of a unusual situation, your leading scorer last year, Tyrell Brown, played the year before at Shoreline Community College. What did it mean to get such huge production, you know, in sort of an unconventional way of recruiting that person to the university?

Jim Hayford: Well, I'm excited to talk about Tyrell. Absolutely love being his coach. He's an amazing person and I think when we look at the present, it's also a good point to maybe look at the past because we're talking about these different recruiting models. The best players Seattle U ever had was a transfer, Elgin Baylor and then the two, probably the next most notable players were four year players that developed and graduated the O'Brien's.

Jim Hayford: So even when you look into our history, you see success with both types of models. So Tyrell, you know, played at Garfield High School right up the street and then was in community college here at Shoreline and just came to us and said, "I just want a coach, that'll take a chance on me."

Jim Hayford: His saying on life is double down on yourself, and so Tyrell has a confidence and maybe a little chip on his shoulder because he was, you know, a part of his high school teams were very, very highly recruited and maybe his contribution wasn't as noticed as well as it should be.

Jim Hayford: So he got on the division one stage with just a heroic academic effort to be able to get here and then he made the most of the opportunity, and the more and more he got comfortable in the offense and we got a better understanding of what he was capable of doing, than he really came into his own and became an all conference player as a sophomore and I think it's really fun for people within a short distance of here to be able to come and see Tyrell, who grew up in the neighborhood, starring at Seattle U.

Patrick Leary: Yeah, absolutely. Switching gears, I know that you kind of have an interesting backstory. You went to college on a soccer scholarship. What made you get into basketball coaching and how did you make that transition?

Jim Hayford: Well, soccer was kind of the first sport that I just excelled at. So as I was growing up, athletics were always a big part of my life and then coming from a family where my parents weren't able to just say, "Hey, we're going to pay for college. Where do you want to go?" But knowing I would need financial assistance and that would probably be through athletics. So I put a focus there but at the same time, I played three years of varsity basketball in high school and so I loved soccer. I was better at it, but I really, really loved basketball and so that's kind of what started the college journey.

Jim Hayford: I did end up playing a year of college basketball, not really good, didn't get to play much, but I got to participate. But I think now maybe we're maybe has a difference from other coaches is maybe just seeing the game just a little bit differently with spacing and ball movement that's not just coming from a traditional basketball perspective.

Jim Hayford: So our offense was one of the early adapters to the three point game and in spreading the court, attacking off the drive, which really kind of perfected until recently by the golden state warriors. And so kind of see what the next wave is but as a head coach for 20 years, when I kind of made that shift about six, seven years ago, it was kind of fun to be on the cutting edge of that.

Patrick Leary: Yeah, absolutely. What do you like about the Pacific Northwest? Because you've stuck here as after sort of growing up in California, you stuck here since 2001 with the jobs that you've had. What is it about this region and area that you like so much?

Jim Hayford: Well, I'm stuck here. So I've been a college coach 20 years, 18 of them in the Pacific Northwest, and so I think what I liked was continuity. I mean, my life is about investing in people, but I'm sure that people in the Northeast or the South, if I had anchored my coaching down there, I'd love those people too, but what I've loved the most is the people I've been around.

Jim Hayford: But hopefully I'd love the people no matter where we are. If I went to a different country and I had to learn a new language, hopefully I'd love those people too, you know? But then having the continuity that, in my business, there is very few division one head coaches that can say, "Hey, my children went from kindergarten to 12th grade in the same community." Right?

Jim Hayford: And so I think that was one of the things to just really anchor into a community for my family's sake that really kept me there and I was able to go from division three to division one and we wouldn't have been able to make that jump without some really good players and some coaches who coached with me to get Whitworth to number one in the nation, which opened the door to go to Eastern.

Jim Hayford: And then, you know, having competed against Seattle U while coaching at Eastern, I had a belief that Seattle U could be a really special program. And so then when I was approached, when the job came open, I was really interested to listen to the leadership of Seattle U and what was their vision and they, they'd just hired Shaney Fink and she's just a brilliant leader and that's what it all put together to and it was like, well, I'm going to make a move, but here I am staying in the same state.

Jim Hayford: And at the same time, my son who went to Gonzaga Prep, a Jesuit school in Spokane, really wanted to come to Seattle U. He's a current student here. So I'm also a Seattle U parent and I'm also a Seattle U employee and he's loving school and it's neat to be in Seattle with our son.

Patrick Leary: Absolutely. How do you, you mentioned Eastern Washington, how do you handle being on both sides of that rivalry, so to speak, and how do you now, I mean, you play them pretty much annually. How do you handle that game yet?

Jim Hayford: There's a couple, I don't know, they're on plaques, Seattle times articles in my office. The first one was the hiring, you know, when we kind of use them for recruiting and stuff but you know, I don't like it so much now that I'm on the Seattle U side of things, but I sure liked it when I was coaching then, on the the day of the hiring, they said, "If you can't beat him, hire him."

Jim Hayford: And so while I was coaching at Eastern, we were fortunate to win some very close games against Seattle U. There wasn't much margin of different, but our guys maybe made one more clutch shot, which made me look a little smarter, a little better. And so then the next article that's on the walls is the Times did this day in the life of a coach and it just so happened they picked the day that we were playing my former team, Eastern Washington, that first season.

Patrick Leary: Sure.

Jim Hayford: And that was a very emotional time because, you know, almost all those guys were guys who called me coach and now you're coaching against them. We won the game. Won it kind of easily, which surprised me, but what was neat is I came in and one of my assistants says, "Well, at least everything kept their rightful order." So we won, and then last year we played them again and we caught them at a time when they were really injury riddled and we won easily again. We'll play them again this year for homecoming. Seattle U's homecoming, and they got a really good team back.

Jim Hayford: And so the players, there's a lot of guys that are new that I hadn't recruited there. My assistant is their head coach. I'm really proud of him and he's doing a great job. So it's still emotional but not nearly as much.

Patrick Leary: Okay. So a lot of college basketball coaches sort of get the reputation for being negative and you see a lot of basketball coaches get criticized for being super angry on the sidelines, but you take a much more positive approach. So what inspires that and why do you feel that strategy is the best way to go?

Jim Hayford: Well, it's nice to be described that way. I have a lot of room for growth on that. I'm better than I used to be, but I'm not where I want to be on all that because yeah, I can still remember a really good friend told me a long time, like it doesn't feel like you're enjoying coaching. You're in such pain and it is a stressful thing, but that kind of opened my eyes. That was a long time ago. But then, you know, just like anything in life, you don't do your clearest thinking when you're angry, but it is an emotional situation and there's a clock ticking. So it's like sometimes you'll interact with the official and then later on you'll be like, "Oh my gosh, what was I saying?"

Jim Hayford: On one hand it's not like when you're dealing with other things in life. There's a clock ticking and scoreboard counting and so it is a different situation, but for the most part, I just think you think better when you're emotionally balanced and it's what my aim is.

Jim Hayford: Hopefully not too many people listen to this interview, or I guess maybe it isn't best, but I'll tell you one secret is at the end of the National Anthem, every day, every game, I say a prayer to the Lord and I say, "Oh God, please help me not make a mess of myself in this game today." Because you just know that this stressful situation is coming right at you and you and your staff and the players put so much work into the week to prepare for that game that the worst thing that I could ever imagine would be to make a mistake, that it was my fault that the players couldn't experience a victory after all that preparation and stuff.

Jim Hayford: But as father Kelly, one of the great Jesuit priests here at the school has taught me a lot about flow. It's kind of when you just get out of the way yourself and kind of just a place of just feeling one and enjoying one of the great things on life you were created to do for which for me is to coach and just be in that setting and just be totally at peace. That's what I'm looking for in every single game.

Jim Hayford: And so like I said, I'm not where I want to be, but I'm better than I used to be. And then, what do I love in life? I love encouragement. Who doesn't?

Patrick Leary: Sure.

Jim Hayford: And so to go into a game and look for ways that you can really encourage in the moment your players because so much of coaching is correction, like you didn't do that properly. And so I try to also look for opportunities, which is something I didn't do earlier in my career, to just be really intentional about encouragement.

Patrick Leary: Do you find that the positive outlook improves your ability to develop players?

Jim Hayford: I try to be positive about everything in life and one of the things that's kind of a catch on myself is when you're not giving that person the benefit of the doubt or you're not assuming the best. Or like anytime I find myself getting caught in a negative rut, I reflect and can kind of discern that to use a couple of Jesuit words, you know, and say, "Hey, hang on, this isn't how I want to be living life right now."

Jim Hayford: And so I try to be positive in everything I do and I think the more that you commit to just a life of positivity, then it is just going to come out of you everywhere you're at. But again, it's a challenge and it's something you have to be intentional about because again, so much of coaching is corrective.

Patrick Leary: Well said. Looking ahead to next season, you have five new players that you've added since the end of last season. Would you mind going through each one and sort of talking through what they add to the program in your mind?

Jim Hayford: Well Jordan Dallas, who's a grad transfer, who wants to become an athletic director, he's enrolled in our master's in sports administration, who injuries kind of hampered what he was able to accomplish as an undergrad at Weaver State. But he really brings size and some skill that is really unique to our system because we just didn't have enough depth. If you look at four of these five guys, they're all six eight or bigger. So we needed more size.

Jim Hayford: So Jordan brings a little experience with him. Out of Long Beach Poly High School, which is a great program to have kids, coming from, who'll have a good experience. And then traveling from Utah, he's just a phenomenal young man and he's got over a seven foot wingspan on a six eight frame. He's a straight A student. He's been parented great and I just think he has just tremendous upside on him.

Jim Hayford: Dovi from Lithuania. I was over in Lithuania about three weeks ago. Got to meet his family and his coaches and he's on the national team there and we're hoping that in the future we might see a few more Lithuanians on the team, but he has a skillset.

Jim Hayford: He reminds me a lot of Josh [inaudible 00:21:51]. Just a left-handed six seven guy who can also dribble it, but score in a variety of ways and a great young man. And then our two walk ons that will earn scholarships. Jared and Cade from California. Both just have huge, huge upsides. Could've gotten scholarships at lower level schools, but said, we'll take an academic scholarship because we believe we can be successful at the division one level. And so we're giving them that opportunity. And I think it might be a ... They got to realize all that potential, but I think they have really, really high ceilings on how good they can be.

Patrick Leary: Sure. And you also have a majority of your roster from last year returning. What do you think the strengths of that roster are and where do you see some room for improvement, specifically with the returning players and some things they might be able to get better at?

Jim Hayford: Well, it's my first year at Seattle U where I actually have been in games and tense situations and through a season with the guys I'm coaching. So last year Morgan and Aaron and Matteau, we had a little experience the prior year, but all three in much bigger roles and then Miles and Delonte getting those experiences and then the addition of Tyrell. But have real high hopes for Rip [Economou 00:00:23:18]. Trey is other freshmen, Trey Hopkins. And so just knowing what I've got and the familiarity and then each of them having had success and knowing, okay, this is what it takes to have success. And then them having played with one another, I'd expect the chemistry to even be better.

Jim Hayford: And so I'm just really excited to see what the opportunity holds. The schedule is going to be much tougher and so the non-conference might not, you know, we came out 12 and three last year. We're going to play some harder teams, so that could be different, But then I think our conference record could be higher and so we'll see. There's been some coaching changes in the whack, see how those teams respond to those coaches.

Jim Hayford: What the WAC has come, you know, four years ago was ranked 30 out of 32 conferences. It was the low end real estate in division one basketball and now we've been as high as 12th out of 32. It's the highest rated conference without a major television contract. So, you know, there's other teams that you're seeing league games on TV that aren't as good as what our conference is. If you get a whack road win, you've got something special, then you better defend your home court.

Jim Hayford: And so it's all neat. It's all part of the challenge. And when you think of great cities and great universities and the Jesuit tradition, my goal is, I'm at 52, but before I retire that they're not just thinking of Creighton and Marquette and Georgetown.

Jim Hayford: And then there's another Jesuit school in our state, Gonzaga. Yeah, you know I'm thinking of those, but you're also thinking of Seattle U. And so that's a challenge I really embrace and I'm excited about and my staff is and we're just really glad to be a part of this Seattle U community.

Patrick Leary: Do you feel the roster's in a better place this year to absorb some of the adversity that you guys ran into at the start of conference play?

Jim Hayford: Yeah, just because the freshmen are sophomores, the sophomores are juniors and the juniors are seniors. There's a saying that's very, very true in life - the hard part of experience is getting it, and we got it. And so I think that's a big part of it right there.

Patrick Leary: Sure. What are your goals for next season as a team and a program?

Jim Hayford: Well, my goals for my team always are first and foremost is everybody's going to excel in the classroom. So that changes whether you have 10 seniors or no seniors. And so I expect our teams grade point average to be something that anybody who sees it says, "Oh wow." So we put a lot of effort and intentionality into their academic performance.

Jim Hayford: My next expectation is just I tell each guy, hey, I'm going to coach you to be your best, and so that each player has moved the line on what their best is, whether that be in life and relationships, on the court, in the classroom. And then, for me, I feel like in my career, I've been a coach 20 years, 399 wins. So would I average 19.999 wins pursuit or whatever it is.

Jim Hayford: But I really would love to see every team I coach at Seattle U get to that 20 win mark and then set a new goal. And then the key, you know, except for six, seven conferences in the country is you got to be really, really good for three days in your conference tournament in March because you can have a remarkable season and then lose one game in that tournament and you're not going to be a part of the big dance.

Jim Hayford: I was born in 1967 and I think that's the last time Seattle U was in the big dance. And so I'll start every season as coach at Seattle U with the goal of let's get this team into March madness.

Patrick Leary: Sure. And then looking down the road past next year, you mentioned wanting to have Seattle U mentioned as one of the elite Jesuit basketball schools. What are your goals for the program longterm and what do you want to see take place in sort of the more three to five year range for Seattle U basketball?

Jim Hayford: Well, there's things that are in your control, there's things that are out of your control, and so, when I first said that, we were playing at key arena in a building that the NBA used to call home and then out of our control that was taken away from us. Though the university has a great partnership with the OVG group who's going to be the new manager and is in relationship with the NHL team. And then there's going be some space for us there. So you know, to be one of those elite Jesuit schools, you've got to have some elite facilities. And so I think the new model though is when you look like what Gonzaga did with their facility, that ultimately it's going to be an event center here on campus.

Jim Hayford: Now does that happen in the next three to five years? You know, I don't know. First you got to go get the $100 million, then you got to build the $100 million building and then you got to do it in the middle of a urban city like Seattle. So is that three to five years? Is that four to six years? Is that five to seven years? But if you have $50 million and you're listening to this and you want to give it to Seattle U, give me a call, I'll make sure we get after it quickly.

Jim Hayford: But for us to do that, we're going to need to do some things institutionally too, so that we have the facilities and the resources so that if a player chooses Seattle University, they know they're going to get great coaching, they're going to get great education, they're going to be a part of a great city, but they're also going to have the facilities to develop into professional athletes.

Patrick Leary: Sure. Coach, thanks so much for doing this. I really appreciate it.

Jim Hayford: Yeah, my pleasure.

Speaker 1: This has been the newsroom at Seattle University where you get all the news you need in one place.