

Special Olympians share special night

By **DANNIE OLIVEAUX**
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A group of local Special Olympic basketball players recently had a night to remember.

More than 1,200 children, students and parents from Sumner and Bonney Lake packed the Sumner High School gymnasium to cheer on two teams preparing for regional competition.

"Pack the Gym Night" was hosted by Sumner High School Feb. 11 as the Special Olympics Spartans faced the Rogers Rams.

The atmosphere created by the crowd - including cheerleaders and band members - was rival to a high school playoff basketball game.

It wasn't just to cheer on the Sumner team, but the visiting squad, also. Cheerleaders and band members from both high schools performed together.

"It was nice to see two rival schools come together and focus on a common cause," Sumner coach Keith Ross said.

Ross, who has guided the team for the past six seasons, said they have attended "Pack the Gym Night" at Rogers in the past, but it did not reach the level displayed last week.

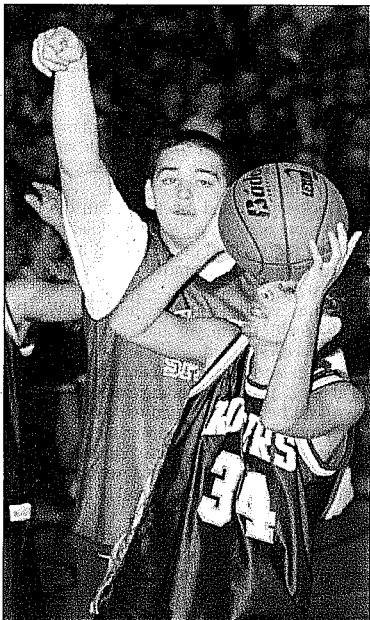
Ross said the athletes were "in awe" of the atmosphere and people.

"Rogers prepared us for it because they do it at their own gym," Ross said. "But being at our own gym, having that many people, the cheerleaders for the tunnel, the band playing and the announcer. It was an expe-



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Juliet Griffin (left) and Stephen Scheitzah, members of the Sumner Spartans Special Olympics team, surround a Rogers player during the first half of the "Pack the Gym".



Chad Gore applies defensive pressure to a Rogers player.

rience for our kids. They had their moment."

Before the game, several players competed in dribbling and shooting skills.

Both teams were tied at half-time, 16 apiece, but the Spartans lost in a close encounter, 38-36, as both teams prepared for a tournament in

Bremerton last weekend. "After the game we told our players they did a great job," Ross said.

Following the game, both coaches and players congratulated each other with handshakes and hugs.

"A lot of parents came up to me and told me how exciting it was for the players," said Ross. "I would like to see us do it each year."

Ross said it was good to see how everyone came together to make the event happen.

"All the other sports get all the credit, all the time," Ross explained. "It's good for others to see how hard our kids are trying, like the others."

During the game, Sumner's Chad Gore drilled a trio of long-range baskets.

But in the Special Olympics there are no 3-pointers.

"It was funny when he nailed his first basket past the 3-point line, the scorekeeper gave us three points. I had to turn around and tell the scorekeeper there are no 3-pointers in Special Olympics," Ross laughed. "It was exciting anyway."

Ross, Sumner High's varsity football coach, said he enjoys coaching the team because it allows him to have fun.

"Coaching football is a pressure-packed atmosphere, but here I get to enjoy myself," he said. "Either they play good or bad, I get to enjoy the kids."

Ross said the special needs students from Sumner and

Bonney Lake get together and practice once a week. If they place at the regional tournament, they'll advance to the state tournament in Wenatchee next month.

Last year, Sumner lost in double overtime at regionals.

Members of the Sumner team are Michael Daily, Gloria Na, Stephen Scheitzach, Cody Kuhlman, Chad Gore, Ally Frame, Amber Maier, Juliet Griffin, Jenny Humble, Daniel Daily, Ryan Swanson, Sean Kasbaum, Cody Fielding, Nathan Stonebeck and Brittany Merrell.

Coaches are Lacey Hertlein, Shena Mourning, Shelia Cheatham and student coaches Evan Brown and Natalie Jansson.

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