Falcons watch postseason awards roll in

By Luis C. Medina
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Throughout the season, Todd Franklin challenged his players to play to their highest potential. And over the final nine games, the Southeastern Illinois Falcons did just that.

On Tuesday, Franklin, along with Mamadou Seck, Isaac McClure and Troy Long were honored for their hard work. The 22-9 Falcons were honored Tuesday as Seck, McClure and Long were named to the All-Region XXIV and All-Great Rivers Athletic Conference teams. Franklin was named Region XXIV Coach of the Year.

Franklin said the team’s play down the stretch helped individuals earn their postseason awards. “The biggest thing is that I’m happy for these guys. I don’t think that they were 13-9 that they didn’t do what it needed to become champions,” Franklin said. “Since that point, I believe that without question they have earned it. They didn’t back into it and that’s the thing I feel best about.”

Seck averaged 15.5 points and 9.5 rebounds per game as he battled to overcome early season injuries and a few slumps along the way to garner the nomination. McClure averaged 13 points and 6.8 rebounds per game and has been a key force for SIC in the paint, playing along with Seck in the front court. Southwestern Illinois’ inside-outside game is complimented well by Long, the team’s third all-conference member. He averaged 10.2 points and 2.4 assists per game, but also extended defenses with his accuracy from the 3-point line.

Franklin said, had the voting process put more emphasis on the Falcons’ late-season run, freshman point guard Charles Ashford would have likely been in the mix. Ashford took the reins of the offense midway through the season and flourished as the year progressed.

Being honored with postseason awards marks the end of one season and the beginning of another as the Falcons prepare to make their fourth trip to Hutchinson, Kansas under Franklin. With its 79-67 win against Wabash Valley in the Region XXIV championship game in Ina being in the team’s past, SIC began preparation for a national title run. Southwestern Illinois faces off against Howard College next Wednesday, which knocked off the nation’s former top team, Midland College, in the Region V title bout.

Franklin said the team watched its championship game performance Monday before getting back to business. It was not necessarily a smooth transition, but Franklin’s point came across to his team quickly on Tuesday. “I thought the guys were about flat for about five minutes and then we clicked into the mode we were in over the last five weeks,” Franklin said. “We’ve got a tremendous challenge in the first round, but I believe this team has a chance to win it. We were so happy to get it done the other night, but now we turn our eyes to what can be.”
Sophomore Dameika Mitchell and freshman Courtney Smith earned all-conference and all-region honors, capping a tremendous single-season turnaround for the Southeastern Illinois College women’s basketball team.

SIC turned a disastrous 1-11 start into a championship-caliber season in what seemed like a blink of an eye. The Lady Falcons went 11-5 in Great Rivers Athletic Conference play and rode a second half hot streak all the way to the Region XXIV championship game.

Mitchell, who was the team’s top scorer and rebounder, was the second-highest vote getter for the All-GRAC Team and received the third most votes en route to being named to the All-Region XXIV Team. The sophomore forward is also one of two regional nominees to be considered for a JUCO All-American slot. “That’s one of those things you earn, and she certainly did that,” head coach Rod Wallace said of his team’s go-to post player.

Smith, a freshman from Benton, earned all-conference honors and was a steadying force in the Lady Falcons’ back court. Among the leaders in points, steals and assists, SIC’s head coach said he was happy to know Smith’s all-around efforts did not go unnoticed. “Courtney Smith is one of those players who does everything well and does everything quietly,” Wallace said. “She doesn’t make a lot of mistakes, and from a team perspective, she can hurt you in a lot of ways. She’s got a terrific perspective not just on the game, but on life in general.”

Southeastern Illinois College returns four of its five starters next season and will look to move into the national tournament field after beginning to tap into its potential as it ended its season on a seven-game winning streak before being outlasted by Lincoln Trail College in the regional championship game.