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## Berkeley High girls basketball team has real beauty in Chaïrese "The Beast" Culberson

By Stephanie Hammon  
Contra Costa Times  
Posted: 03/23/2011 10:53:42 PM PDT  
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Chaïrese Culberson was never short on nicknames, but her play this postseason for the Berkeley High girls basketball team has inspired a few more for the collection.

Nicknames like "The Piranha" and "The Beast" are the most apt.

A 6-foot-1 power forward, Culberson has long been considered the Yellowjackets' top rebounder. But since fully recovering from an anterior cruciate ligament tear in her right knee that sidelined her for the 2010 postseason, the San Diego State-bound senior has taken her game to a new level.

Culberson recorded a double-double in all six of Berkeley's postseason wins as the team advanced to Saturday's California Interscholastic Federation Division I state title game against Mater Dei-Santa Ana (33-1) at Power Balance Pavilion in Sacramento.

"She's just on a mission right now," Berkeley coach Cheryl Draper said.

Sitting out last year's playoffs and watching the Yellowjackets lose to eventual state champion Oak Ridge-El Dorado Hills in the Northern regional final also served as motivation.

"One of the determining factors of us losing was rebounding and that's what I bring to this team," Culberson said. "I cried my eyes out when we lost, and I just don't want to go home crying again. If I'm going to cry it's going to be tears of joy."

Culberson, who averaged 17.3 points and 17.3 rebounds in the regional playoffs, credits the addition of transfer Kristina Hunter to her own production down low.

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Hunter became eligible in February just before the North Coast Section playoffs, which allowed Culberson to switch from center to her more natural position of power forward.

"It's a huge weight off my shoulders," Culberson said. "I take rebounding to heart, but now with another big body in there it gives me room to not be so hard on myself with the rebounds. Also, she draws a lot of attention."

Though Berkeley (31-1) made history last week by becoming the first team, boys or girls, to win 10 Northern regional titles, they have come up empty on their last six trips to the state title game.

That's something Culberson, who was a freshman when the Yellowjackets made their most recent trip to state, is determined to change. With her gregarious personality, Culberson is an undisputed team leader.

Instilling confidence in the rest of the group has been the most important thing, she says. Culberson learned that from Jazmine Perkins, the senior star and leader on the 2008 Yellowjackets team and now a starting guard at Washington State.

There's no doubt Culberson is playing with plenty of confidence as Berkeley goes after its third state title.

"She's fired up, she's ready," teammate Brittany Boyd said. "She goes by that name 'Piranha', so she's going to get those boards. She's been really big for us in these playoffs and honestly I don't know what we would have done without it."

CIF state championships  
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Boys  
Friday

- DIVISION V: St. Joseph Notre Dame (26-8) vs. St. Bernard-Playa Del Rey (25-8), 1:30 p.m.

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All Listings

- DIVISION II: Archbishop Mitty-San Jose (31-2) vs. Summit-Fontana (28-8), 8 p.m.
- Saturday
- DIVISION IV: Salesian (25-11) vs. Windward-Los Angeles (27-8), 11:15 a.m.
- DIVISION III: Bishop O'Dowd (26-6) vs. Lutheran-La Verne (24-5), 2:45 p.m.
- DIVISION I: De La Salle (27-5) vs. Mater Dei-Santa Ana (31-3), 8 p.m.

GIRLS

- Friday
- DIVISION V: Pinewood-Los Altos Hills (27-5) vs. St. Bernard-Playa Del Rey (24-14), 3:30 p.m.
- DIVISION II: St. Mary's-Stockton (28-2) vs. Rialto (32-3), 6 p.m.
- Saturday
- DIVISION IV: St. Mary's (30-4) vs. Windward-Los Angeles (28-4), 9:30 a.m.
- DIVISION III: Bishop O'Dowd (25-7) vs. St. Joseph-Santa Maria (29-6), 1 p.m.
- DIVISION I: Berkeley (31-1) vs. Mater Dei-Santa Ana (33-1), 6 p.m.
- Visit [www.ibabuzz.com/prepcorner](http://www.ibabuzz.com/prepcorner) for a live chat during the seven state championship games featuring East Bay teams, starting with Friday's 1:30 p.m. Division V boys final between St. Joseph Notre Dame and St. Bernard and concluding with Saturday's Division I boys final between De La Salle and Mater Dei.

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