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MEN'S BASKETBALL SPORTS



📷 Oregon Men's Basketball Head Coach Dana Altman high-fives fans after leaving the court. The No. 1 Oregon Ducks take on the No. 8 Saint Joseph's Hawks in the second round of the NCAA Tournament at the Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena in Spokane, Wash. on March 20, 2016. (Adam Eberhardt/Emerald)

## Dana Altman's knack for finding junior college talent spans back to the start of his coaching career

Kylee O'Connor — January 19, 2017 at 6:00 am

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As the head basketball coach at Moberly Junior College in the early 1980s, Oregon head coach Dana Altman was able to build an immediate connection with future NBA hall of famer [Mitch Richmond](#) and prompt [Richmond to come play for him at Moberly](#).

While at Moberly, Altman helped improve [Richmond's](#) shot, a change that ultimately led to his improved game play.

When Richmond's time at the junior college came to an end, Altman and Richmond went together to Kansas State, and Altman hasn't stopped building connections with junior college athletes since.

Now, as the head coach of the Oregon men's basketball team, Altman has surrounded himself with a special group of players, including a few junior college transfers — most notably, senior forward Chris Boucher.



"I've had very few junior college players that have played like Chris — and that quickly," Altman said. "Maybe only Mitch Richmond would be the other one that did that going to the Division I level. It is very unique."

Boucher has started the majority of the games so far in his Oregon career, but was briefly injured and has since moved [into the role as the first Duck off the bench](#). Despite not starting every game, Boucher averages 13.7 points while shooting 36 percent from beyond the 3-point line.

Last year, junior college transfer Dwayne Benjamin played a similar role as the Duck's sixth man. Benjamin's acceptance of his role off the bench really helped with the team chemistry, according to Altman.

For Boucher, he is accepting of his newfound role as long as he's helping the team.

"Like everything, you get adjusted and I'm fine with that," Boucher said. "I feel like I can help my team in so many ways. ... It's my last year, so I'm trying to help the most that I can."

Like most junior college transfers, this is Boucher's second and final year at Oregon. The two years post-junior college can go by quickly, so when Altman recruits a JUCO athlete, he expects them to be more mature than the normal incoming freshman.

"Usually those guys, we hope are ready to give us a few more minutes right away," Altman said. "We want them to be able to compete at a high level, we want them to want to be here. We're really excited when guys like Chris Boucher and Elgin Cook — those guys come here and really develop as players. ... You hope that physically they are a little bit more mature and ready to go."

Junior Kavell Bigby-Williams is another junior college transfer to join Altman's team. In his first year as a Duck, he has slowly adapted to the offense. With Boucher coming from a similar situation as Bigby-Williams, Boucher has made an effort to help him and offer his advice whenever he can.

"I tell him all the time, just take your time," Boucher said. "When I came here, I was trying to do things fast too, and I had to slow down and realize how to play. We all come from different situations, so I feel like I can help him, and he can take what he wants to take."

Despite Altman's [increased success with signing top high school recruits](#), he says that he will continue to try to find players who "want to be here" and "want to compete," no matter whether they are out of high school, a junior college or a transfer.

However, Altman, who is a junior college product himself, admits there is something special about junior college athletes.

"I love working with junior college transfers," Altman said. "They're guys who have been in programs, who have been in vans and haven't had many nice hotels and big meals. Then all of a sudden they come and are very appreciative of everything that Oregon provides them. They've probably been as fun to work with and as in tune to work with as any players we've had. Just simply the fact that they appreciate everything that the division one level offers them, and so I've really enjoyed working with those guys."

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