

# Thunderbirds Repeat As Hoops Champions

By Vincent R. Crawford  
Sports Editor

Prior to the combined National Junior College Athletic Association Region 1 and Arizona Community College Athletic Conference Division II Women's Basketball Tournaments, Mesa Community College (24-6) moved up in the national rankings to No. 2 and second was a trend for the Thunderbirds as they ultimately won the event for the second year in a row for their second straight trip to the national tournament, in East Peoria, Ill, on March 19-23.

Their title game opponent, second-seeded Pima Community College (17-15), did not make things easy for the host and top-seeded Thunderbirds as the Aztecs jumped out to an 11-0 lead while keeping MCC scoreless for the first 6:10 of

the competition.

Mesa, in front of a full house about evenly split, soared back to beat PCC for the third time this year and punched their ticket to the Big Dance by a final score of 58-45.

"The secret is that we have done that a few times this year already," said Thunderbirds coach Kori Stephenson, on trailing 11-0 to begin the contest. "We've been through that. So, this wasn't the first time. During the timeout, we revisited that and they regained their calm and composure. I'm just so proud of our players."

With 11:10 left to play in the first half, PCC had their biggest lead of the matchup - 18-5 - and appeared poised to get their first win against the Thunderbirds this season, but then MCC became their comeback.

In a span of 3:56, the Thunderbirds had scored 14 consecutive

points to take their first lead of the battle, 19-18, and they were able to maintain the momentum the rest of the game after erasing an Aztcc's 20-19 edge on a three-point basket by Peace Amukamara, who led her team in rebounds (7), assists (5) and steals (4).

"First of all we did not deserve to win especially after the way we played the last part of the first half on," Aztecs coach Todd Holthaus said. "You can't lead by 13 points and then give up the game's next 14 points and deserve to win. They now have beaten us three times. Clearly they are better than us."

Amukamara (13 pts.) and Maria Willadsen (12) were MCC's top scorers with Willadsen also grabbing seven caroms.

Felicia Foster (10) was PCC's lone double-digit scorer with A'jha Edwards snagging 19 boards.