

Centre High takes on prep label

Move allows school's basketball team to compete against provincial college teams

CHRIS O'LEARY
Special to The Journal
EDMONTON

The Centre High basketball team doesn't have a name. Officially, coach Rick Stanley's club is called Centre High Prep Basketball.

The Trail Blazers wouldn't be a bad moniker, though.

Since leaving Jasper Place High School for an assistant principal job at Centre High this year, Stanley has given the school which allows students to upgrade their marks something it has never had before in its first basketball team.

"No one's ever thought of Centre High like that," Stanley said. "(The school is) built for finishing academics, tweaking courses. It's for students who want to get a 90 and have an 80 ... some students come to us and don't have a diploma. We give support in many ways. We get students from all backgrounds."

Since Centre High is for students in their first and second years removed from high school, it can't compete in the Alberta Schools Athletic Association, which makes Grade 12 the cut-off for athletic involvement. So the basketball team took on the prep label, competing against college teams from around the province. Stanley says his team is the first basketball prep program in Western Canada.

"Our record is now 9-2," Stanley boasted. "I've got a bunch of high school guys out of high school for the first year, coming together who were stars in their areas (who played) Catholic and Public."

With the talent level on his team high and the exposure they're getting against college teams, Stanley said he's making recruitment easier than ever for his opposing coaches.

"This is going to be the best crop of kids in a post-secondary school to recruit from in Western Canada," he said. "You take kids who don't lose a year of (college) eligibility, they train at an elite level, they take sports performance (classes) and they have their own personal trainer here."

Stanley is also developing his kids to be efficient students as well. His players must have 90 per cent attendance in order to play on the team, which only holds practices twice a week. They also have to be passing all of the courses they're taking. He's had players sign a contract promising to do so.

It's having a positive effect for his players.



Patrice Okita goes up for a layup during the Centre High basketball practice at Victoria High School on Wednesday.

Khurram Sultan, 18, is a shooting guard for Stanley this year.

"It's actually a great opportunity. A lot of players just need to tweak their marks up a bit and Stanley has a great basketball program going on," the former Harry Ainlay High School

student and NAIT hopeful said. "I was kind of hesitant about (coming to Centre High) but this program has really helped us out a lot. There are good scholarship opportunities too, depending on how well you do with the basketball program

MEGAN VANDE KRAATS, Concordia University College Thunder Second-year forward, Basketball

Spotlight On

The former University of Alberta Panda is tearing it up in her first season with the Thunder. Using her six-foot-two frame to her advantage,



Vande Kraats is averaging a healthy double-double of 14.75 points and 10.5 rebounds, four games into the season. Blocking four shots in an Oct. 30 win over Lakeland

College has her averaging an Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference best two blocks per game. Her length is also coming in handy in the steals department, where she's averaging three thefts per outing as well. Vande Kraats is a big part of why the Thunder is the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association's second-ranked team in its first poll of the season.

and school wise, too."

Adrian Osman played basketball at Ross Sheppard last year. Another 18-year-old on the squad, he said the prep team fit exactly into what he needed this year.

"Well, my marks weren't really what I wanted them to be for the program I wanted to go into, so (Centre High) was kind of a backdoor plan," he said, noting that he wanted to go into a business program either at NAIT or MacEwan next year.

"He has expectations. He wants us to be in class all the time," Osman continued. "If I wasn't doing this, I'd probably skip a lot, because he wouldn't be there to guide me."

Stanley himself benefited from an upgrading year when he was a student at St. Joseph's. He went on to play at the University of Alberta, where he earned a degree in education.

"If I didn't have a second year of Grade 12, I wouldn't be sitting in this chair right now," he said.

"I think that really helped me. I look back and this is an important investment for these kids. They need a little bit of a twist here and they're getting that. They're all having a great time."

"Nine out of the 14 kids I have are honour students and they're flourishing here."