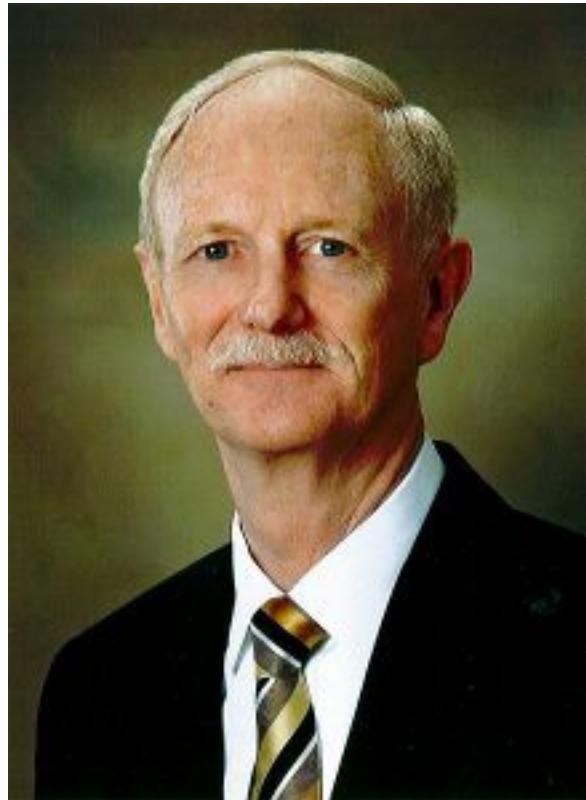


Pointer of Interest: Bennett gets it done with honesty

By Bob St. John on February 13, 2019



Grosse Pointe North girls basketball head coach Gary Bennett reached the exclusive 600-win club last week when the Norsemen went on the road to defeat conference foe Warren Cousino 50-42.

Only six other girls basketball head coaches in Michigan have more wins: Frank Orlando with Detroit Country Day, 785; Al DeMott with Sandusky, 706; William Winfield with Detroit Southeastern and Detroit Martin Luther King, 698; Diane Laffey with Harper Woods/Warren Regina, 644; Mary Cicerone with Bloomfield Hills Marian, 632; and Al Schrauben with Portland St. Park, 628.

There also are a couple of other high school hall of fame coaches in the Grosse Pointes who are among the state's list of all-time victories: former North football and baseball coach Frank Sumbera and current Grosse Pointe South baseball head coach Dan Griesbaum.

"I'm actually uncomfortable celebrating winning 600 games, because winning has never been a major point of emphasis or goal for this program," Bennett said. "Instead, our focus is on competing and sustaining one's effort, and doing things the right way, with honesty and integrity.

"I don't consider all these wins 'my wins.' They are the girls' wins, the teams' wins, the program's wins. I am just happy and blessed to have been a part of it and to have had the opportunity to work with such outstanding people.

"It is their collective effort, their hard work and unselfishness, that brought us to this point. They are the reason for any success we've enjoyed and they are definitely the reason that this has been such a meaningful and memorable experience for me."

North held a small gathering for friends, family and former players after the Norsemen's home game last weekend. One of the people who has been by Bennett's side the entire time is his wife of 35 years, Teresa.



Grosse Pointe North head coach Gary Bennett, center, earned career win No. 600 last week. He is the seventh coach to reach that milestone in Michigan's girls basketball history.

“Our entire married life he has coached girls varsity basketball at Grosse Pointe North,” Teresa Bennett said. “He always stressed playing unselfishly, playing as a team, working hard on defense and not letting your teammates down. Those were also values he instilled in our children. It was never about winning, ever. It was always about effort. More specifically sustaining your effort and never giving in. You will not find a more honest, loyal, caring, sincere individual than Gary.”

The Bennetts have three adult children — Bryan, married to Jennifer; Andy, married to Holly; and Caitlin.

Bennett’s crowning moment came in 2008 when the Norsemen won a Class A state championship, beating East Lansing 58-46. They led 36-34 at the end of three quarters, but outscored East Lansing 22-12 in the fourth quarter to clinch the title.

The girls on that team, Kelly DeFauw, Kayla Womack, Olivia Stander, Jasmine Kennedy, Arial Braker, Allison Liddane, Sarah Bigham, Madeline Kent, Katelyn Vargo, Sarah Perry and Christine Bedway, finished the season 24-4.

Grosse Pointe North beat North Farmington 65-32 in the semifinals and Southfield Lathrup 57-35 in the quarterfinals.

The Bennett-led Norsemen also made a run to the quarterfinals in 2009 and 2010, plus made the state semifinals last season, but lost 46-28 to Saginaw Heritage in the semifinals.

One thing that stands out besides the 600 wins is the way Bennett uses the basketball atmosphere as a learning tool. He wants the players to be productive student-athletes outside the playing field, in college and when they become professionals in the working world.

Bennett has always said winning isn’t the goal of playing high school sports, but learning about how each player can use the experience to better themselves.

Several of his former players have come back to be assistant coaches for the North program, including current assistant Maria Liddane, who was a standout guard for American University.

Another former player, Olivia Stander, is the North varsity girls soccer head coach.

“Gary Bennett is a great motivator and makes it clear that he genuinely cares about his players as much, if not more, off the court as he does on the court,” Stander said. “I’ve tried to build my girls soccer program on the same principles and competitive atmosphere that have been a hallmark of Mr. Bennett’s amazing legacy. I was lucky to play for him for four years and consider him a friend and mentor today.”

A couple other former players, Braker and Womack, are assistant coaches for a couple college programs, Lehigh University and Madonna University, respectively.

Bennett also coached a third Liddane, Micaela, as well as currently coaches Braker’s youngest sibling, Christina, who is a junior at North.

Bennett was a long-time mathematics teacher at Grosse Pointe North. He recently retired and now is a tutor.

With the regular season winding down, Bennett is focusing his players toward winning another basketball district championship. North is hosting the tournament March 4-8.

St. John, B. (2019, February 13). Pointer of Interest: Bennett gets it done with honesty
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