



FEATURE STORY

WORK ETHIC PUSHES BOULDER CREEK BASKETBALL TEAM

PHOENIX, AZ (Jan. 6, 2010) – There are no superstars on the boys basketball roster at Anthem’s Boulder Creek High, and there is no magic formula for success.

The Jaguars are among the top teams in Class 5A Division II because of a simple work ethic.

“We’re not the type of team that can just show up and win. We work hard and that has humbled our guys,” said Randy Walker, in his second season as head coach.

Entering the first week of January, Boulder Creek was 12-2 overall and 2-0 in 5A-II Northwest Region play with a home region game against Kingman set for Friday, Jan. 8.

Boulder Creek defeated El Mirage Dysart in the championship game of the Great Desert Shootout at Cave Creek Cactus Shadows and a runner-up finish to Class 2A powerhouse Phoenix Scottsdale Christian in the annual holiday tournament at Phoenix Horizon.

The Jaguars had a strong season in 2008-09, reaching the quarterfinals before falling to Phoenix South Mountain. Walker added life to the program after a one-year term as a graduate assistant coach at Northwestern (La.) State and head-coaching prep stops in the Valley at Horizon and Cactus Shadows.

The start of the 2009-10 season was full of uncertainty. Senior leaders Alex Dykhuizen and Ryan Crane were coming off serious injuries. Dykhuizen had a head injury following an all-terrain vehicle accident that claimed the life of a friend and classmate. Crane suffered a knee injury in last year’s home opener and missed the rest of the season.

As the team’s tallest player at 6 feet, 5 inches, Dykhuizen would be counted on to carry much of the scoring and rebounding load. He saw several specialists who deal with head injuries, and the accident, which also injured a third student, took its mental toll.

Dykhuizen worked his way back to form, and was finally cleared to play. He keeps the memory of his late friend, Taylor Wisdom, alive by putting her name on his shoes.

The team struggled in the early stages of the preseason, particularly in a scrimmage against Cactus Shadows, coached by Walker’s brother, Dirk.

“Alex had only been back a week, and we saw a lot of things we needed to work on,” Randy Walker said.

Things started to fall together, and the team continued its hard-nosed style.

“We have to execute, be unselfish and outwork the other teams. That’s who we are,” Walker said.

Dykhuizen, 6-4 junior Joe Simpson and 6-2 freshman Josh Braun do a large share of work under the glass. Braun, in particular, has been a welcome addition with his rapid development, Walker said.

The 6-1 Crane has become one of 5A-II’s top shooters, particularly from three-point range. In the victory over Dysart, he was eight of nine from beyond the arc.

Walker also has been pleased by the play of sophomore guard Weston Newell, and junior point guard Ryan Zettle. The 6-2 Newell is a versatile defender, capable of guarding opponents' quick guards or mixing it up with the bigger players inside. Walker said the 6-foot Zettle has been very steady.

The players' approach is similar to last season, according to Walker.

"We take the attitude that we can lose the rest of our games if we don't do some of the things that have taken us this far," Walker said. "It's whatever it takes by whoever it takes. They don't care who gets the credit."

And the team has gained a following beyond the school. The home games are on radio (KXEG – 1280-AM), and Walker said a couple from the area who does not have ties to the team gave up their tickets to a recent Phoenix Suns-Boston Celtics game to watch Boulder Creek instead.

"We've been pleasantly surprised by what the teams have done last year and this year. No one was expecting this," Walker said. "Anthem is like a small town, and it has been very good for the community."

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