

Elk Grove Citizen ONLINE

SPORTS

Small school, BIG dreams

BC favored for section titles again

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Nestled on the border of Elk Grove's city limits, sitting directly behind Sheldon High School's campus, Bradshaw Christian, a small private high school of slightly more than 200 students, is quickly emerging among the elite athletic departments in Northern California.

Five years ago, all of the recent success hardly seemed imaginable.

Athletic director Mike Ruble, also the boys and girls' basketball coach, fondly remembers the school's first varsity season in 2004-05. Skimming through the boys' current media guide, Ruble laughed when he flipped to a page of the inaugural team's roster.

That season started with just seven players – none taller than 5-foot-9 – and ended with only five available on the bench. The girls' team, which lost by more than 80 points to Modesto Christian that season, also had just seven players.

"Back then it was so raw, it was so new," said Ruble, now in his seventh season overall at the school and fifth as the varsity basketball coach. "It's been amazing to see the expectations grow so quickly."

Fast forward to 2010.

Bradshaw Christian is unquestionably the most successful basketball program of any local high school since 2007. The varsity girls team has won back-to-back section titles, and the boys claimed their first section title last season.

Combined, the school has already displayed six section banners on the gymnasium wall, including consecutive football titles and one for soccer.

"It's amazing," said Ruble, who became the first coach in section history to guide a boys and girls team to a section title in the same season. "Any given night the ball could have bounced the other way. We've been fortunate. When you sit there and see the six blue banners on the wall, it really just is amazing."

Sudden section success and instant expectations have not only increased recognition for the school but also for Ruble himself. He acknowledged receiving an offer for an assistant coaching position at Seattle University, where former UCLA guard Cameron Dollar is in his first season as head coach.

Ruble and Dollar are friends, and the offer was extended prior to this season. Ruble declined because of the famed rainy weather in the Northwest.

His preference is to stay in California, most notably in Southern California, where he attended college. For now, Ruble is content coaching high school basketball and his primary focus is a return trip for the

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Courtesy photos - Bradshaw Christian's Lauren Beyer and Co. are vying for a third consecutive Sac-Joaquin Section title. The Division V playoffs began last night.

boys and girls teams to Arco Arena for the section finals.

Ruble estimated that approximately 85 percent of Bradshaw Christian's 225 students are active in school athletics. The positive and successful culture of the school and support from administrators and parents keep Ruble from seriously considering offers – for now.

"I've had offers," he said. "There is an attraction to coach at the college level. But it has to be right.

"I'll definitely keep my options open," he added. "But I'm very happy with where I'm at. We have a great opportunity here. We are the only private school out here. I really do like the culture here."

Ruble, who at 6-8 played collegiately at Vanguard University, a NAIA school in Costa Mesa, and then professionally in Ireland, Austria and the Philippines, anticipates a possible influx of students next season with the possibility of discontinued freshmen athletics in the Elk Grove Unified School District.

Bradshaw Christian is capable of expanding to 900 students.

The existing limited enrollment certainly hasn't hindered athletic programs, specifically basketball.

The boys clinched a share of the Sacramento Metro Athletic League title and enter the Division V playoffs at 20-7 overall.

Four different players average double figures, led by Orion Kidd's 17.3 points per game. J.J. Mina averages 15.3, Brady Dragmire 13.2 and Scott Ecklund 12.0.

They had not lost prior to last Friday since Jan. 16, an 80-67 setback to Modesto Christian, and had won 17 of the last 18 games.

The girls also clinched the SMAL title, ending the season at 18-8 overall and on a six-game winning streak.

Cheyenne Williams averages 14.5 points and 10.3 rebounds per game. Ashlee Jones is second on the team in scoring at 14.1.

Lauren Beyer averages 10.8.

"I think winning is contagious," said Ruble. "It's almost expected here now. I don't recruit my kids, so I just pray that the good Lord brings me a good kid from a good family, with a little athleticism."

And, maybe two more section titles as well.

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