

Hoop Hopes

Rewards on & off the court

by Laurel Keser '85

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Candace Crabtree, coach of the women's basketball team, paces the sidelines, arms slicing and jabbing the air, dogged determination on her face. Men's coach John Giannini patrols, gestures and signals, keeping vigil from his court side lookout. Both offer words of wisdom and encouragement to center court.

Following the successes of previous years, expectations were high this season for both men's and women's basketball teams. In 1994-95, the women advanced to the conference tournament for the fourth straight season. In the same year, the men finished third in the nation at the NCAA Division III Championship Tournament.

You might think that with all their success they could relax. Not so, says Giannini, who holds degrees in kinesiology (the study of motion) and sports psychology. "Success is both a blessing and a curse," he says.

While it obviously feels good to be on the winning team, people often work harder when they face competition. "If they begin to feel gifted, that can affect the effort they exert," he says. "We have to avoid seeing winning as our only goal; our goal has to be to fulfill our potential."

For a couple of Giannini's players, fulfilling their potential might mean a shot

at the pros. Seniors Autwan Dasher and Terrence Stewart have earned national attention and scouts have indicated they're watching. Dasher, a communications major, says he "takes it in stride. If you work hard enough, you achieve."

Success can be tough to maintain, however. Giannini says players must fight complacency and overconfidence. "While I like to feel we have a successful program, nothing in the future is guaranteed. We have to work even harder if we want to be more successful."

One of Crabtree's challenges is to get her players "over the hump" of being afraid to lose. "A loss for this team is devastating; we've only lost seven games since I've been here," she says. Crabtree, who holds degrees in English and physical education, is in her third season at Rowan.

Stewart, a communications major and one of the star players, finds that being part of a successful team is less stressful. "We have so many good players, there is not so much pressure on me as an individual," he says. Instead, their opponents provide the tension.

Dasher agrees. "Being ranked number one means that every opponent is after us and we have to be ready every night. If we don't play hard enough we can be

Rowan Magazine

Volume 1, Number 2

Spring '96

Pages 27-30

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knocked out just like that,” he adds with a snap of his fingers.

Darius Taraila, who emigrated from Lithuania, says he’s excited and happy” about this season. “I’ve been here three years and I really want us to win the championship. We have so many good players we have to sacrifice and share playing time.”

Yet they can’t let the pressure stand in their way. “Life moves so fast you can’t let yourself be set back by one mistake. On the court you must stay focused,” explains Stewart.

While team-building exercises and one-on-one meetings with players help relieve some of the stress, Crabtree says pressure is not all bad. “We all need some type of motivation; sometimes pressure is it.” Admittedly a “driven person,” Crabtree acknowledges that “the most pressure comes from myself. I’m very goal oriented, very competitive and I love the game.”

True rewards, say both coaches, lie in their relationships with their peers and the athletes. “The biggest thing for me is to see these students doing well off the court--getting good grades, graduating and getting jobs,” says Crabtree. She adds, “Our team has the best GPA (3.0) of any sports team here at Rowan.”

“Many people may not be aware of

what happens to the players after graduation,” says Giannini as he points proudly to a team picture on his wall. “There’s a plant manager at Sony, a CPA, two high school teachers and coaches and a graphic artist.” Giannini likes to keep in touch with his former players. “When I see former players socially, and have a relationship beyond that of a coach, that is very rewarding,” he adds.

These players are athletes and also sons and daughters, students and leaders, employees and volunteers. They conduct basketball clinics and teach sports skills to disabled children. They raise funds for organizations such as the National Abused Children’s Fund and the Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey, and support an annual food drive for the Glassboro Food Bank. They tutor elementary students, serve as motivational speakers for a variety of school groups and participate in elementary school read-a-thons.

On the court, the athletes develop skills that will bring them success after the season and college are over. “Playing basketball is an invaluable experience for the players,” says Hall of Famer Lee Harvey, who played for the Profs from 1955 to 1959 and has coached several high school teams and Gloucester County College’s men’s basketball team.

He cites learning team skills, developing self-discipline and enjoying camaraderie with teammates as the major benefits.

That camaraderie is what senior Donna Marie Ferriola likes best about playing basketball. “We all get along, we support each other,” she says of her teammates. Senior Karen Brown agrees that their team is a strong unit. “Everyone sticks together,” she says.

Being part of a successful basketball team has had a positive effect on Brown, a psychology major. “It builds self-confidence and teaches you to work closely with others,” says Brown, who works at a camp in the summer. To Ferriola, a math major, achieving success means “giving 110 percent in everything I do.” Besides serving as team captain, she is a resident assistant and counselor for special education students.

Win or lose, these basketball teams are made up of people who are succeeding on many levels. And that’s what is important to coaches Giannini and Crabtree. “If all we did was win games, it would be pretty empty,” Giannini says. Crabtree concurs. “Success is not based just on the win column,” she says. “Winning is just the icing on the cake. I like to see them maturing as people. The biggest win for the athletes is when they graduate.” ■