

A Little Bit of History © 2000

During the last four years it has been a pleasure to watch the varsity high school team from Belleview Christian compete in the Class 1A basketball. If properly handled team sports can be valuable training tools for young people. The training and discipline can be incorporated into future activities such as the research and study requirements of higher education, church ministries, and the job market with the accompanying challenges. I have commented briefly based on my observations and recollections of each of the last four years of Belleview Bruins basketball centered primarily on the state basketball tournament.

Every year in Pueblo Colorado a total of thirty-two teams both boys and girls representing Class 1A and 2A basketball meet for the state tournament to determine the best. There is a special aura of excitement since these top ranked teams, families and supporters have come from all over the state. Many of the games have near capacity crowds adding to the excitement. What follows is not altogether unique but with out a doubt a very special experience shared by many. This tribute is my way of expressing appreciation and thanks for many good times and lots of excitement.

To the principles and coaching staff during this time span:

Principle: Dr. John Reed 1996-97

Principle: Gary Dickinson 1998-

Coach: Mark Sharpley 1996-2000

Assistant: Eric Thimsen 1996-1999

Athletic Director: Todd Daniels 1999-

Re: Belleview Bruins 1996-2000 Men's Varsity Basketball

To all the team members during this time span:

A Tribute

Class 1A State Basketball Tournament: Pueblo, CO, March 6-8, 1997

Thursday, March 6, 1997:

In many ways the opening round of the playoffs, the Belleview Bruins versus the Kim Mustangs the defending champions was the featured game of the state tournament. Who was this young upstart team that know one had ever heard of? The emotions and expectations were high. Belleview's young team fought hard to attain what at the beginning of the season seemed like an impossibility, the state tournament.

My daughter called from Pueblo late Thursday and told the score. I cried. Everyone from Belleview did the players, coaches, students, teachers, and parents alike. This year, the ultimate dream was not meant to be. It was a heartbreaking defeat. It was Kim 59 Belleview 43. It was a close game going into the forth period. After Belleview s freshman star fouled out during the forth period the game began slipping away. The Mustang s had a great line-up, which included the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* Class 1A player of the year, Jeremy Sumpter. The next morning after such an emotional heartbreaking defeat Belleview was unable to regroup and lost again in the opening round for consolation prize championship to Crow Valley who s half court press was extremely effective and proved impossible for the Bruins to overcome.

However, even in defeat you earned recognition for your talents. This was evidenced by the Friday *Denver Rocky Mountain News* which stated in big bold type:

"Belleview hangs tough...."

This is a significant recognition of the quality and character of the Belleview Bruins Varsity Men's team. Your commitment and determination are now widely known. What can be learned? **The joy of victory is much sweeter when first having learned by experience the agony of defeat.** This is how strong characters are formed. The victories will come. This is certain. You will go back to state. What did you accomplish?

League championship.

The Division Eight title.

Class 1A East Central Regional State Qualifier.

State Play-off Competition.

Recognition from the Rocky Mountain News.

Respect and Recognition from all the teams that you played.

Most important, you made school history. You are the first team in Belleview s over seventy-year history to earn an invitation to the state tournament. You made your school proud. Hold your heads high. Thank you for all the fun and excitement. See you next year.

Class 1A State Basketball Tournament: Pueblo, CO, March 5-7th 1998

After losing a close one against the Kim Mustangs the year before in the opening round of the state tournament Belleview hoped to make a run for the state title this year. Unexpectedly tragedy struck in the midst of what appeared to be an unstoppable run for the state championship. The loss of two key seniors forced the Bruins to regroup in order to battle on. In spite of this tragedy, under the outstanding coaching of Mark Sharpley the Bruins fought their way back to the state tournament minus two key players. This year the Bruins lost to DeBeque in the opening round. At the close of the third period the score was tied 33-33. Missing its two seniors was a major factor with several younger players making costly mistakes in the fourth period. It was Debeque 57 Belleview 48. DeBeque then went on to win the state 1A title against Ridgway.

It was heartbreaking to lose for a second year in a row in the opening round. In spite of the defeat the Bruins went on to win the 1998 "Consolation Championship" against Peetz. It was Belleview 60 Peetz 51. When calling the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* sports desk to try and discover the results of the consolation championship game it was found that Belleview s team was indeed a favorite with some of the "News" sports employees. The Bruins team and their talent is now capturing the notice of the press, making this writer believe that in ensuing years things will be different. Again, this year the ultimate dream was not meant to be. The Bruins are only a couple players short of a state championship team. Next year because of the experience of the players some of whom will be seniors the Bruins will sense and taste victory. Don t give up. The future is yours!

Class 1A State Basketball Tournament: Pueblo, CO, March 4-6th 1999

Thursday night at the University of Southern Colorado the Belleview Christian Bruins avenged their two previous losses in the quarterfinal opening round of the state tournament by overwhelming the Idalia Wolves 72-48. Friday night at the University of Southern Colorado s Massari Gym the Belleview Bruins got what they wanted, a showdown with the No. 1 undefeated Kim Mustangs led by Casey Nickell, the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* Class 1A player of the year. The press had described the Mustangs as the 1A team of the decade. This description was not unwarranted in light of the fact that the Mustangs

averaged eighty-one points a game during the season. The Mustangs in a number of games, some of which were against larger schools, scored over 100 points.

To say that Belleview had been gunning for Kim all season is not an understatement. The Bruins were salivating for this showdown all year. The Bruins remembered being knocked out in the opening round of the state tournament two years before by Kim and wanted a rematch. Did the Mustangs take Belleview seriously? This writer, after talking to a knowledgeable Kim supporter prior to the game, got the distinct impression that Kim was planning on teaching Belleview a lesson. Instead, Kim, the team that many believed to be the overwhelming favorite to win the state title learned a lesson as the Bruins stunned the Mustangs 58-52. Reporting the results of the showdown the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* picking up on some justifiable pre-game bravado recorded: "**Belleview boys walk past Kim.**"

The Pueblo Chieftain described the Bruins victory in the semifinal in front of a full house at the Massari Gym as a "**barn burner.**" This was not an understatement. It was thought and said by many that Kim was unstoppable. Except for one time where Kim was ahead 9-8 the Bruins would not relinquish the lead. The Mustangs fought hard but could not stop the Bruins who had prepared for this match-up all year. The Bruins had confidence that they could upset Kim after earlier in the year defeating this year's Class 2A champions, the Caliche Buffaloes by fourteen points.

With Belleview's victory Saturday night at the Pueblo Events Center the school won the Class 1A state title, the first in school history. After an emotional exhausting battle with Kim on Friday it was not until the final minutes of the championship game the Bruins finally put away the stubborn Merino Rams 53-48. When the Bruins were awarded the state championship trophy in front of a near capacity crowd immediately following the game the victory began to sink in. Collectively, the people of Belleview cried. This year the tears were of a different variety. **This year, they were tears of joy.**

The hopes and dreams, training, teamwork, and determination bore their fruit. Experientially you now know: "The joy of victory is much sweeter when first having learned by experience the agony of defeat." **This year, the ultimate dream was meant to be. The Bruins recognized this as they prayed and sang praises to God following the game.**

You will all go on to lead meaningful lives. Some will go on to achieve much greater things in this life. One thing that you accomplished was the making of memories. This accomplishment will be better understood as life progresses. **You made memories for yourselves and classmates that will last a lifetime.** As will be seen, these memories are priceless. In this life there is a time when the eyes begin to grow dim and memories begin to fade. Some memories never fade. This much is certain, that when the eyes begin to grow dim in this life, they will still moisten when you recall the names, the faces, events and memories with clearness from Pueblo, CO, March 4-6th 1999 at the state basketball tournament.

Class 1A State Basketball Tournament: Pueblo, CO, March 9-11th 2000

This year the battle cry was to "Repeat the Feat." Defending the state championship title is no easy task. Over confidence can easily set in and cost any team a key game at district, the regional state-qualifying event or the state tournament. Coach Mark Sharpley's strategy of going on the attack rather than simply defending the title proved to be extraordinarily effective.

This year's Bruins team played together with intensity and efficiency. The team demonstrated rigorous training and discipline, which was evidenced by the way numerous plays were executed. Every player contributed immensely both defensively and offensively. This teamwork resulted in number of high scoring games in particular against the Bruins 1A opponents. During the season, the Bruins convincingly upset several bigger schools such as 4A Skyview and 3A Kent Denver, both teams, which made it to the semi-finals in their respective classes. The Bruins also made it to the championship match against the fifth ranked 5A Westminster High School at the Westminster invitational tournament. Due the fact that one of Belleview's key players was ineligible they were unable to contain Blair Wilson whom this year shattered Colorado's all time high school scoring record. Way to go Blair!

Thursday March 9th in the opening round of the state tournament at the University of Southern Colorado (USC) it was Belleview 51 Eads 44. Then on Friday, March 10th at (USC) the Bruins faced last year's opponents from the championship game, the Merino Rams. In what was a hard fought physical game the Bruins stopped the Rams 57 to 37. This victory in the semi-finals setup the match with the Crow Valley Falcons, the only team it was believed that had a chance to unseat the defending champions.

Saturday March 11th at the Pueblo Events Center is where it all came down to the final showdown. The Falcons were extremely well coached displaying lightning speed and near flawless execution on many plays demonstrating a thoroughgoing knowledge of the fundamentals of the game with amazing consistency. This year's Falcon team upset many larger schools. The Falcon's use of the half court press left many teams in a state of shock. This year the Falcon's collectively averaged twenty steals a game due to their effective use of the "press." In spite of this, Belleview's height advantage, its outside shooting ability and unrelenting aggressive defense gave them the edge. The first period was close, and then Belleview's shooters took over. After the first period the outcome was never in doubt with the Bruins leading by fifteen points going into the fourth period. The Falcons created a little excitement when they narrowed Belleview's lead to four points with less than a minute to go. Then Belleview knocked down three more points at the foul line effectively ending it for the Falcons. The score Belleview 60 the Falcons 54.

The Bruins and their fans celebrated the victory of their favorite high school basketball team as they successfully defended their state championship title. However, there is a certain sorrow mixed with the excitement of this victory knowing that this part of the school's history is at a close. In time God has us all move on to different tasks in life. *The Denver Post* newspaper summoned this sentiment up best by saying: "**Bruins bow out wearing crowns**" and "**All good things must come to an end.**" Belleview fans have watched this team develop in four short years from a newcomer to the state tournament to a dominant force in Class 1A basketball and this year's overwhelming favorite to retain the championship title. Retaining the title is nothing short of a storybook ending to a very special chapter in Belleview Christian School's history. It has certainly been a privilege for everyone whom have witnessed and participated in this special part of the school's history. It is something that will never be forgotten.

The Bruins' point guard Jonathan Sanders in particular at this juncture needs to be mentioned. Jonathan Sanders brought out the best in and helped his teammates play with confident ability during the last four years. Even Belleview's opponents during the years in which Jonathan represented the Class 1A courts will never forget the opportunity of playing against him. Indeed, even the fans of Belleview's opponents were thrilled to see some of Jonathan's slam-dunks. The press, numerous coaches and fellow athletes have widely recognized Jonathan as one of the state's top players. Congratulations Jonathan for your 1A basketball player of the year awards, your state tournament's most valuable player awards, and for the "all tournament and all state first team" three years in a row. Congratulations Jonathan, your nomination to the McDonald's All-American high school basketball team was well deserved.

Congratulations Jonathan for the scholarship that you received to Colorado State University. Congratulations to the Bruins varsity team. Congratulations to Coach Sharpley for the superb job of training the young men on the Bruins varsity squad during the last four years of winning seasons which resulted in two state championship titles. Best wishes to you coach Sharpley as you move on to your new position. Thank you Principal Gary Dickinson for believing in the Bruins. It's been a special experience shared by many. Thank you for all the memories. They will last a lifetime and are priceless.

Mr. Kettler is an elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
Chairman of the Waco Committee with Citizens for the Constitution.

Mr. Kettler is also a member of the John Birch Society.