

Women's basketball team is finally commanding respect, all it needed was a new coach and some fresh talent

By EVAN LEIBOVITCH

"For the first year since I've been with the team, it's earned the respect of its opponents".

So says four year veteran of the Women's Varsity Basketball team, Wendy Michalowicz, and with good reason. A new coach, fresh talent, and sound training promises to turn the team around from one that got run off the floor, last year, into a possible championship contender by next year.

The key to the turnaround lies with first year coach Skip Letheren, who comes to York with plenty of coaching experience, with Parkview Secondary in Toronto and at the Cayuga Sports (summer) Camp.

"The first thing I had to overcome within the team was player apathy, a defeatist attitude built up from past years of being a pat-sy," said Letheren, "I immediately had to get rid of this hot dog attitude, as well as establishing York as a contender."

It wasn't easy. According to Michalowicz, many of the players from previous year's teams quit the team during the season for various reasons. The team was thus forced to take on new members in mid-season, which led to inconsistency within the team, and even poorer performances, sometimes losing by over 60 points.

The change that was needed was an entirely different outlook towards the game, which Letheren gladly provided. A believer in the coaching style of Vince Lombardi, he strived to emphasize what he calls "excellence of execution", an attitude that emphasizes perfection of basic skills, combined with good strategy.

Following this technique, the team has been drilling three times weekly, concentrating on the fun-

damental skills. From dribbling while blindfolded to underhand foul shooting, much of the players' time is taken up practicing specifics and coordinated team play.

One of the ideals of the team is that there is no such things as a "first string" of starting lineup.

"When most teams make substitutions, it's usually only one or two players at a time. Some of our substitutions can be entire lines."

This system has helped to lessen competition among the players for starting positions or more

playing time. Thus creating a relaxed attitude at the practices and at game time which is rarely found in varsity teams.

The team has been keeping a pace of winning slightly less than half their games. This is excellent, considering the pathetic record of last year. Nobody questioned remembered precisely last year's record. Perhaps it just faded away like a bad dream.

The team, bolstered by group effort and cooperation, plays an extremely aggressive game, a possible cause of some strange in-

juries.

There have also been a number of offensive plans created, including one "borrowed" from the UCLA Bruins, a very successful American team. The basic plays were chosen for their adaptability to any specific situation.

All this has been quite successful for the team, which also suffers from a few weaknesses.

The biggest problems for the team are shooting and passing. Letheren notes that the team shoots an average of 80 per game, but only converts on an average of between 13 and 25 per cent. Both of these points get special attention during practices, and the team has shown "substantial improvement since the beginning of the season."

One point on which York must take a back seat is the team height.

Aside from one or two players, the average height is about 5'4", though Letheren isn't too worried, "because we still get our share of rebounds". This is a rather modest statement to make,

because what the team lacks in height, it makes up in its aggressiveness and hustle.

Most of Letheren's present plans include the future. He hopes that all except one player will return, and thus create a base for continuing improvement in coming year.

Skip feels that the extra games and the improved quality of the team's play will possibly be incentive to more students to come to play for the team.

"There are a lot of good players out in the university at large who are great players, but won't come on the team because they think it's too Mickey Mouse."

And although Skip knows of at least one other university who recruits students specifically for its varsity team, he refuses to go out of his way to find players.

"If you set your goals only at winning, losing is a really depressing experience. But if you go out on the floor just to play your best, you're more relaxed and you end up winning anyhow".



Girls' basketball team practicing the lay-up at Tait.

Gary Cook photo

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