

Henry boys' coach raises the bar

On Monday, Larry McKenzie had a 10 a.m. practice for his undefeated Minneapolis Henry boys' basketball team. And, of course, he spent part of the morning discussing Martin Luther King Jr., on the day named in his honor.

"It's important, like Dr. King said, to have a dream," McKenzie said, "and to live out your dream."



Larry McKenzie

To make sure his players do that, McKenzie tries to inspire them continually. Once a week, he brings in a speaker — a community member or maybe a former athlete. And before every game and practice his players recite the Patriots' creed, which commits them to work hard and take advantage of every day.

"We live by that creed," junior guard Terry Pettis said. "We believe if we waste a day, that's not good."

"I don't think I am that great a coach, but I can prepare kids and motivate my kids," said McKenzie, who has a 59-5 record in the middle of his third season as Henry's coach.

"I'm really into positive motivational kinds of things. If you can conceive it



Roman Augustoviz

and believe it, you can achieve it."

His first team qualified for the state tournament but lost in the quarterfinals.

Last season the Patriots won the Class 3A state title — the school's first in basketball since back-to-back championships in 1944 and '45.

Three key starters graduated from that 29-1 team, but the Patriots might have come back stronger than ever. Henry is 10-0 and rated No. 1 in 3A.

"We've got 10 guys who played on that [championship] team," McKenzie said. "We knew we had a good group of kids. They're very athletic, and this team is much deeper. We've got 10 kids that can play."

McKenzie scheduled Henry's toughest

nonconference games later in the season.

DeLaSalle and Hopkins are upcoming on the schedule, as are the two annual conference games against 4A power Minneapolis North.

On Saturday, Henry defeated Duluth East 93-75 despite forward Rick Rickert's 43 points.

"We threw a lot of stuff at [Rickert], and he was not rattled," said McKenzie of the future Minnesota Gopher. "He made me a believer."

No doubt Henry's opponents are equally as impressed.

All five Henry starters average in double figures, led by Pettis (17 points per game) and junior forward Zerek Knight (15 ppg). Knight also is averaging 11 rebounds. Stephen Neal, a 6-6 freshman reserve, is scoring just less than 10 points.

Another number McKenzie is proud of is his team grade-point average; nine of his 12 varsity players made either the "A" or "B" honor roll last semester.

"When we got here the team GPA was 1.6, now it's 2.6," he said. "That is part of the expectations we have created with our kids."

The "we" includes athletes such as former Gophers Clyde Turner, Walter Bond, Richard Coffey and Mario Green, all of whom have spoken to the Henry

team in past seasons. And business leaders with less recognizable names come in, too, talking about such wide-ranging topics as drugs and teen pregnancies.

"In the African-American community, a lot of kids don't have hope," McKenzie said. "They don't have anything to believe in. No matter what their circumstances are, we tell them to believe in themselves. That they can overcome."

"You are not the first kid from a single family, not the first kid living in public housing and not the first kid whose family is getting financial assistance. You can make it."

On the court Henry, which starts one sophomore and two juniors, has scored more than 100 points three times, with a high of 132 against Brooklyn Center in the Patriots' second game.

Henry forces foes into turnovers; opponents average 23 per game. Brooklyn Center committed 48.

All the victories, McKenzie said, have made his players more receptive to his ideas.

Basketball is important but not lasting, McKenzie tells the Patriots: "You are the best, I am the best," we preach every single day to our kids."

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