

First year basketball coach setting the tone for success

by Rich Rosentreter

The Tupper Lake Lumberjacks varsity team has been undergoing a transition this season, both by the team and its first-year head coach Lee Kyler. Although the team is still looking for its first win of the season, both the coach and the players are improving on their game.

The Free Press recently met with Kyler, who was quick to give praise to his predecessor Steve Skiff, who coached the basketball team for 34 years after becoming the Lumberjacks coach in 1980.

"I am building off what Coach Skiff started," Kyler said, as he discussed some of the challenges of taking over the team this year. "Any time you transition from a coach who has ben on the job

for more than 30 years to a coach that is brand new, you are going to have some hurdles."

According to the new coach, the team has demonstrated regular improvement and the learning process has produced some positive results.

"I think our team has done quite well. We've had some tough opponents initially," Coach Kyler said. Tupper Lake's opponents have included what he termed "powerhouses" in Madrid-Waddington (7-0) and Chateaugay (5-1). He also termed Brushton-Moira (7-2) as a tough team. "We've had some games we should have won, such as against Edwards-Knox and Parishville. But I think with each loss we learned something and used that

moving forward."

"We have some young players who do not have tons of varsity experience, but are now getting on the court and learning a lot about the game and themselves," Kyler explained. "They are starting to work well as a team and are certainly improving personally every single game. So we've seen stats like field goal percentage and free throw percentage increase and turnovers decrease, and that is what we want to see. Regardless of a win or a loss, you want to see those stats improve every game."

Kyler said that one of his greatest challenges as a coach is keeping the team focused when it is losing, and sometimes the scores have been lopsided against the local boys. He said he one of his coaching methods is for each individual player to focus on his game.

"It's hard to keep your head up when you are losing to Madrid by 40 points," he said. "So we focus on individual stats, focus on making that good pass so you limit the turnovers. Or make that free throw. It is really important to focus on your game individually even though you have to play as a team. If you have one guy who can't get it together, it messes up the unit as a team."

Coach Kyler said that if each player does

what they need to do as an individual, they can work better as a team.

One thing that Coach Kyler keeps pushing on his team, is not to give up and play hard no matter what the score. He pointed out a game against Parishville as an example of how team is able to stay motivated.

"We scored only one point in the first quarter and were losing by 15 at halftime," he said. "It would have been easy to go in there at halftime and say, let's just have a good time. But it is really important that as a head coach, I keep the message positive and help them keep their heads up and say 'We are still in this game!' and have them know that we are capable of scoring 30 or 40 points in a quarter or a half. We can fight our way back. I think we have proved that to several teams this year."

In the game against Parishville, the Lumberjacks put 30 points on the board in the fourth quarter and lost the game 67-62, rather close considering the very slow stat the team had in that contest.

"I tell them I want 15 points every quarter, and if they score less, they need to make up for it," Kyler said.

Overall, the head coach said he will remain to key on the positive aspects of his team since thinking negative does not

"When you have six losses you have to reinforce the positive," Kyler explained. "If the team starts thinking about the negatives, and they start thinking about what they did wrong, they carry that into the next game and worry about what they are going to do wrong. You have to focus on the positive. So, that is what we do. We focus on the positive, touch upon the negative and work on those in practice."

According to the coach, he still has great expectations not only for the team, but for the entire basketball program as well.

"I think we are trying to have a program of expectations. I expect them to be at practice on time, I expect to work hard in practice and the game. I expect them to encourage each other," he said. "So this year the focus on my expectations as a coach. Their expectations as a player. Everybody's expectations in the stands. I just want people to know that we are focusing on the program as a whole."

And what does the coach think about having played tough team early? He said that served as a message to his team regarding the level of play they must perform at throughout the season.

"I would rather play those tough teams early on," Kyler said. "Not to bring the players down, but let the players know what the level of competition is in the league. Every game that you look at on the calendar is a tough game. It lets the players know what to expect. It is good for them to now that they have to pick up their level of play every game. There is no game that is a gimme or an automatic win they have to fight every game."

Now the coach said he wants to turn some of those losses into wins.

"Moving forward, there are some games that I totally expect to win. I expect the team to play better against some of the team we play again," he said. "There are some games coming up that I

expect to win. We know what we did wrong and are going to fix that, and hopefully we will win."

Overall, the coach said he is proud of his team and what it is accomplishing this season, including the leadership that is present. He also said that winning games is not the only thing he finds rewarding as its coach.

"I'm just proud of my guys. They have transitioned well to a new coach. They have transitioned well to having a junior varsity team and practicing with them every day," he said. "We have excellent leaders. My captains are Noah (Santana) and Kiley (Stradley), and they are both excellent guys. I can leave them alone at practice and trust they will have the team do everything that I expect of them."

I really have good guys and I love coaching them," he added. "I enjoy coaching them. I enjoy watching them develop as men, and not just as players. Win or lose, I want to them to develop as men. I have a couple of seniors and I want them to help teach the underclassmen and to help the transition next season as we move ahead with the program."

"I really hope that Tupper Lake basketball builds on its legacy, becomes a place for community members to go and cheer, and be proud of the boys. My guys are great kids, I hope that they leave my program better men and students first before basketball," Coach Kyler concluded. "Coach Klossner has such an impeccable reputation and I trust he'll mentor me as a new varsity coach and we can work together towards those sportsmanship and personal development goals."

The Lumberjacks played a non-league game this morning in Plattsburgh. Tupper Lake plays its next regular season game at 7:15 p.m. Tuesday, January 5 on the road against Colton-Pierrepont.

Ladyjacks top Norwood-Norfolk

The Tupper Lake Ladyjacks girls varsity basketball team took a 51-40 victory last week on Dec. 22 over Norwood-Norfolk.

Tupper Lake Civic Center Schedule

Wednesday, December 30

8:30am-10am- high school; noon-3pm- public skating; 3pm-4:45pm- stick and puck; 5pm-6:15pm-Initiation/mini mites; 6:15pm-8:15pm- skate club (freeskate); 8:30pm-9:30pm- men's league.

Thursday, December 31

8:30am-10am- high school; 10am-11:30am- stick and puck; noon-3pm- public skating; 5pm-6:15pm- mites; 6:15-8:15pm- squirts / pee wees.

Friday, January 1

noon-3pm- public skating; 3pm-4:30pm- stick and puck; 5pm-6pm- skate club (basic skills); 6pm-7pm- skate club (freeskate).

Saturday, January 2

8am-9:30am- high school; 10am-noon- private rental (Kevin Littlefield); noon-3pm- public skating; 3pm-4:30pm- stick and puck; 6pm - 7:30pm- men's league.

Sunday, January 3

10am-11:30am- mite game; noon-1:30pm- public skating; 2pm-3:30pm- pee wee game; 4pm-5pm- private rental (Bob Fletcher); 8pm-9pm- open men's.

Monday, January 4

noon-3pm- public skating; 3:30pm-4:30pm- skate club (synchro); 4:45pm-6pm- initiation/ mini mites; 6pm-8pm-high school vs Lake Placid; 8pm-9pm- open women's.

Tuesday, January 5

Noon-3pm- public skating; 3pm-4:30pm- high school; 5pm-6:15pm Mites; 6:15pm-7:30pm- Squirts/Pee Wees; 8pm-9pm- open men's.

Wednesday, January 6

noon-2pm- public skating; 2:30pm-3:30pm- skate club (freeskate); 3:30pm-4:30pm- skate club (basic skills); 4:45pm-6pm- initiation/mini mites; 6pm-8pm- high school vs Malone.

359-2531

Smart growth grants available

Adirondack and Catskill Park communities and organizations can now apply for \$600,000 in Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) grants for smart growth projects, State Department of Environmental Conservation Acting Commissioner Basil Seggos announced this week. These grants support the implementation of priority projects including economic development, infrastructure enhancements and other initiatives to bolster the regions communities and organizations.

DEC's Smart Growth Implementation Grant Program promotes projects that combine economic development with protection of the natural and built environment. Under Governor Cuomo's direction, Adirondack and Catskill communities identified and developed smart growth plans for their regions, and this funding is used to catalyze their implementation. The funding includes \$400,000 dedicated to the Adirondack Park and \$200,000 to Catskill Park.

The deadline for both applications is February 12, 2016. DEC anticipates announcing grant awards in April 2016.



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