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Boys assistant Vela named new Ross girls coach

BY MATTHEW HORN
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Fifteen girls showed up for open gym at 6 a.m. the last few days at Fremont Ross. Apparently the reputation of new varsity girls basketball coach Juan Vela precedes him.

Vela was Mark Gedeon's boys junior varsity coach the last two years, ninth grade boys coach the year before that and eighth grade boys coach the year prior to that. He also played for Gedeon, graduating from Ross in 2000.

"He was so dedicated as a player and he's carried that over to coaching," Gedeon said. "He got to the YMCA at 6 in the morning to shoot and after practice he'd be back over there. His senior year he was a self-supported student. His mom moved to Florida and he wanted to stay in Fremont. He worked in a factory before and after school.

"He scored 21 points on a Friday, goes home and works 6-2 and comes back the next night with 20 points. Basketball is just a game and it's supposed to be fun and here's a high school student doing adult work and playing the game he loves and never complains. He's one of the great stories in terms of fine young men I've worked with in terms of working to be successful and never taking anything for granted."

Vela always told himself that somebody always had it worse, so he had to make the best of what he had in your hands.

"I knew what I wanted and I wanted to work to get it done," he said.

Vela would like to leave behind a legacy similar to that of outgoing coach Sue Wolf while realizing the magnitude of the objective.

"When I think about it she's been there 34 years," Vela said. "That's someone that left a legacy for girls basketball at Ross. She did a lot for the program. Anybody that takes 34 years of their life to teach these kids -- it's amazing. That's a goal of mine. I feel proud to take over a position like that after she put the ladder so high that not many coaches can reach.

"To leave a legacy like she did, as much as I love basketball, I'd love to leave a legacy like that when it's all said and done."

Vela's passion is evident to Gedeon.

"Juan's got a sincere love of basketball," Gedeon said. "He's extremely positive. His love of the game is contagious for players he's coached. His love of Fremont Ross and love of the community are something else he can offer the program.

"His enthusiasm. He's been around basketball basically his whole life in Fremont. A lot of the characteristics that are special about Juan were developed by basketball and he'll transfer those qualities to the kids he coaches."

Vela is also flexible.

"At JV you have to work your team and help the varsity team," Gedeon said. "Juan has a gift to be patient and adapt on the fly. He won't get too high or too low and he'll work well communicating with the people he's dealing with as a people person."

Gedeon is proud to see yet another assistant move to a head coaching position. Perkins boys coach Scott McVeigh and Tiffin Columbian boys coach Bill Beaston were both former Ross assistants.

But Gedeon also acknowledged that it will be strange seeing someone other than Wolf on the girls sideline.

Vela, who played three years at Defiance after graduating from Ross, was a three-year letter winner that dressed varsity as a freshman for Gedeon. Gedeon watched Vela mature then and later as a coach.

"The biggest thing when you get into coaching ... it's not just Xs and Os," Gedeon said. "Juan has developed a better sense of the organization and psychology that goes with game. The expectations are higher for JV than middle school. Each year he's improved leaps and bounds and I know he'll continue to improve because he wants to do everything he can to best prepare his players."

Vela, who said he learned to control and teach the game mentally from Gedeon, wants to learn more.

"I've never been a head coach so that was appealing," he said. "I'll go through the learning exp. Some college buddies are coaching girls, too and say it's awesome and I'll enjoy it.

"I've had some good years with Ross. I know a lot of people. I bleed purple. I love the Little Giants. It's not just a school I'm coaching -- there's extra pride there. I'm very excited."

Vela said his girls can grow as people through their basketball journey.

"I want to attract as many girls as possible to the game, teach them the game and then go from there," he said.

"I'd like to express to the community that I want to bring energy to the kids and I want the kids to bring energy to the program. That's how the program will be strong. It's going to be fun, we'll work hard and learn a lot. At the end of the day I hope they love what they do like I do."

