

Coach James Moses: A big name with solid values

Written by Don Taylor

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There is a rich tradition of successful sports at Cedar Rapids Prairie, and basketball is no exception. Athletic programs are cyclical by nature, and the cycle has not been kind to the Prairie Hawk basketball program in recent times.

In the past 10 years there have been a number of coaching changes, and in the last six years a number of players from the Prairie district opted to open-enroll in other area high school programs. But that is mere background music for the current situation at Prairie.

Former basketball coach and current Athletic Director Rocky Bennett spent last summer locating a big-name coach to turn the fortunes of Prairie basketball back to the up cycle. He selected James Moses, former star for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

In his press release, Bennett said, "Coach Moses will not only be a good coach but a wonderful role model for our young men at all grade levels."

Expectations are high. Moses played for Tom Davis at Iowa from 1988 to 1992. Moses said Davis always told him he looked good in a suit and maybe he should consider coaching, but at the time Moses "wasn't thinking in that direction."

Moses is from Carson, Calif., and said his parents provided him with values that are important to him today. Among the values he mentioned were the importance of family, making a difference in the community, a work ethic, and being accountable for the decisions you make.

Moses credited his high school coaches for his focus on fundamentals. Armed with these tools, Moses has achieved success as a player, a family member, a corrections officer, a teacher and a coach.

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He said his experiences have underscored the importance of building solid relationships and a need for a strong sense of reality.

"My coaching roots begin in the youth programs in the area," Moses said. "Then Dave Garner got me involved with helping out at Washington and encouraged me to get my coaching certificate.

"I helped at Washington for eight years. This past season I was an assistant at Mount Mercy College (now University)."

Philosophically, Moses sees coaching as the same process as teaching a hands-on lab class.

"Every player is at a different place developmentally with different styles," he said. "It is important for me to recognize those differences and approach each player in a way that they can understand and provide situations for their success, while still allowing them to express their own personality. You even have to adjust to the younger kids at the youth level, and provide opportunities for each player to grow."

Moses is driven by a strong desire to make a positive difference in young people. This motivation is reflected in his involvement with the Department of Corrections, and it is observable in his approach to coaching.

"I want to be in a position to help kids develop skills and qualities they need to succeed in basketball and in life," he explained.

While observing a film session at Prairie, it was evident some of those skills are already being facilitated. The players went through a realistic assessment of where they were developmentally (as compared with teams Prairie had already played), identification of where they would like to be and a discussion of what needed to be done to get there.

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Moses paid close attention to detail, included everyone and went through the process with his kids, not by preaching at them.

Moses said his coaching philosophy includes close attention to fundamentals, being sensitive and understanding where players are coming from, and providing an honest assessment of individuals and the program for all to understand.

Moses reverently described his wife, Peg, as his “foundation” and reflects with loving pride when he speaks of their three children: Jade, a player at the University of Iowa; Alexis, a student-athlete at Kennedy; and young Jaylon.

Moses said faith plays a big part in his life. He described his faith journey as an opportunity to connect all the elements of his life that are important and to honor his beliefs through the relationships he builds.

At the Department of Corrections, Moses said he tries to help others learn how to make better decisions and to be accountable for their errors. As a parent and coach, he shares the same message. He lets people know that life is a team sport, and he makes a positive difference in the lives of others.