

Jaciana works to J-Hawks' delight

Written by Tom Fruehling

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For their final regular season game on Friday, each of the Jefferson girls basketball players got Valentines from their biggest little fan.

Coach Jason Edwards' daughter Jaciana, who points out she's "almost eight," also gave all of the girls J-Hawk blue and white stretchy bracelets she'd made herself.

"She's a very creative little girl," says freshman point guard Avery Guy. "She's also adorable."

A fixture on the bench this year, Jaciana is the team's official water girl.

"My dad had me fill out a paper," she explains of the application process for a position that hadn't existed before and for which there were no other applicants.

"He asked me why I should get it. I said cuz I'm sweet and cute and nice and I deserve. And you're my dad.

"And he said, 'You've got the job.'"

A second grader in Mrs. Crippen's classroom at Arthur elementary, Jaciana was bored last year just sitting in the stands with her mom, Jennifer, in her dad's first year as head coach at Jefferson. He previously was an assistant under Frank Howell at Washington.

"At the Washington games," Jennifer says, "there were Frank's two little girls to hang out with. She didn't have anybody here at Jeff."

Besides, Jaciana wanted to be closer to the big girls her father coaches.

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"She's always cheering for us," says Maddie Blietz. "She gives us high-fives when we come out of the game. She's just like part of the team.

"And she's so fun to be around, she always brightens things up for us."

Jaciana totes big plastic bottles of Gatorade to the girls during time-outs and joins the huddle for her dad's always animated but soothing instructions.

"I have no idea what he's talkin' about," she admits. "But when he's done, we all go, 'J-Hawks on 3.' And I go sit on the bench."

It's clear that she has loads of admiration not only for the young women on the team, but also for their coach.

"When we win," Jaciana says, "I look at Dad and start to do a little victory dance.

"If we lose, I kinda make a sad face at him."

Once he was sure his daughter was serious about becoming sort of a midget team manager, her father had no hesitation about handing her the job.

"She's always been a little shy and quiet," Jason Edwards says. "This has been good for her self-confidence.

"And it's a real positive thing that she has the girls on the team to look up to. They're all great girls and tremendous role models."

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Jaciana agrees.

“They're really nice,” she says.

Heroes they may be to a little girl, the J-Hawk players say Jaciana is a joy to be around.

“She's excited for us when we win and tries to make us feel good when we lose,” says freshman Kennedy Dighton. “She can't help but make us smile.”