

Shelly Hoyt – Hoxie basketball

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

USA Today has named the best high school girl's basketball program in the nation. Would you believe, that honor belongs to a small school in rural Kansas? Today we'll learn about this remarkable coach and community and the basketball program she directs. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Shelly Hoyt is the girl's basketball coach in Hoxie, Kansas. Shelly comes from Nebraska originally. Her husband Scott is from Brewster. They studied education and became teachers, first in Missouri and then in Kansas. In 2001, they moved to Hoxie where Scott became principal at the elementary school and later superintendent. Shelly is a special education teacher and basketball coach.

Shelly played college basketball herself. As a coach, she has had a long and successful run. When she came to Hoxie, that school had only won one state basketball championship in its history.

"We've had good athletes here but not necessarily skilled in basketball," Shelly said. As coach, she insisted on a higher level of commitment.

Shelly and Scott have three daughters, one of whom – Jacie - was a freshman when they moved to Hoxie. "Jacie had a lot of talent and was willing to work hard," Shelly said. Jacie became an All-Stater, played at Wichita State and then followed her mom into coaching. Jacie is now an assistant women's basketball coach at K-State.

Shelly really appreciated the work ethic of her young players. "When you have a talented player that works really hard, the younger kids see that," she said.

Coach Hoyt insisted on commitment to improvement. "We tell the girls, don't give up what you want most for what you want right now," she said. In other words, it may be tempting for the girls to hang out at the pool, but that is no substitute for working out in the gym if your long term goal is to have success in basketball.

"It takes commitment by the parents too, summer after summer and day after day," Shelly said.

The hard work, sacrifice, and commitment paid off. In Shelly Hoyt's second year at Hoxie, the team went 21 and 3. Wow.

"That team laid the foundation," Shelly Hoyt said. Among the girls who were cheering on that team were second and third-graders who would go on to become starters for Shelly once they got to high school.

The hard work and success continued. Hoxie has won four consecutive state tournament titles and is now on an incredible winning streak. In December 2011, the Hoxie team lost a game at an early season tournament in Quinter. The team has not lost a game since.

The current winning streak is at 95 games, which is a state record. Yet when Shelly Hoyt is asked about her proudest moment, she doesn't talk about winning streaks or state championships. "This is about working hard and doing what's right, and teaching young women about life," she said. "The choices these kids made will stay with them for a lifetime." Shelly appreciates the community support in Hoxie as well.

USA Today sponsors a contest for the best high school sports programs. "They nominated five successful teams from across the country, and we were honored to be

nominated,” Shelly said. “We got through the first round and then we got to the second round.”

The final selection, however, was made by public online vote. That’s where this gets really interesting. There is no way that a small town in Kansas could outvote some big city school – but that is exactly what happened.

Community support made all the difference. Voters in Hoxie voted early and often. People encouraged their friends to vote for Hoxie on Facebook. Parents organized voting parties at the high school. When the votes were all counted, Hoxie, Kansas was the winner. This is remarkable, considering that Hoxie is a rural community of 1,207 people. Now, that’s rural.

USA Today has named Hoxie, Kansas the best high school girl’s basketball program in the nation. We salute Shelly and Scott Hoyt and all the people in Hoxie for making a difference by supporting their school. It’s good to see the community and school on the same team.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.