

Kelly Love - NDII

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

March Madness. It's the time when fans are filling out brackets and cheering on their teams. In addition to high school and college basketball, there is another basketball tournament going on in Kansas with an even higher purpose. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Kelly Love is director of the National Division II Christian Homeschool Association Tournament which happens each spring in Kansas. The tournament, called NDII for short, is for qualifying homeschool groups with organized basketball teams.

Kelly was a basketball player herself as a young girl. Born in California, she and her family moved to central Kansas when she was nine. Here in Kansas, she found love – in more ways than one. In fact, she met and married her husband Dale Love. She and Dale raised a son and two daughters on their family farm. While the kids were still little, the Loves felt a calling to try homeschooling their children. They found it very worthwhile.

The Loves' children started playing on the local homeschool families' basketball team, the Reno County Sabres. Kelly even coached the team for four years, including their participation in an end-of-season Kansas homeschool team tournament that had been founded in Wichita in 1996.

“It was a lot of fun, and (the tournament) was something that the kids always looked forward to,” Kelly said. But when the director of the tournament announced he was going to retire, people were concerned that no one would step up. “One of the dads and I sat down at a tournament and decided that we would try to do the job,” Kelly said. In the end, Kelly Love became the new tournament director.

The tournament has grown through the years. As interest grew from other states, the organizational structure changed and the tournament field expanded.

Since 2000, the tournament has been hosted at Central Christian College in McPherson. Now it also uses facilities at McPherson College and at Bethany College in Lindsborg. In 2015, NDII included 74 boys and girls basketball teams from seven states, including Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma and Nebraska. Wow.

But this tournament is about more than basketball. “Our focus is on Christ and, through that, to provide a high quality basketball tournament for our kids,” Kelly said. The tournament includes lots of competitive basketball, plus a prayer before games and one devotional speaker. There are free throw and three point shot competitions, plus a triathlon which involves people of all ages trying various basketball shots.

The tournament encourages a high level of sportsmanship. Teams will compete hard on the court, but if a player falls or misses a free throw, players from both teams will assist or encourage him.

“We created a display board that says ‘Random Acts of Sportsmanship,’” Kelly said. “When people see anyone demonstrating high sportsmanship, we encourage them to write those down and post them on the board.”

The tournament encourages each participant to bring a non-perishable food item for donation to the local food bank. “I have a heart for missions,” Kelly said. “This is one way of following Christ's example of loving our neighbor.”

“I have an excellent Board of Directors and my staff and my husband are wonderful,” Kelly said. She works from her home on the farm near the rural community of Partridge, population 259 people. Now, that’s rural.

More information about the tournament can be found at www.nd2cha.com.

One touching moment at the tournament involved a player with Down’s Syndrome. “He doesn’t have the skills of the other kids, but he loves basketball,” Kelly said. “When he gets the ball, the defenders will lay back until he makes a shot. I’ve seen some incredible love for that kid,” she said.

March Madness. It’s a time when interest in basketball reaches a peak. In addition to the other tournaments, one of the largest homeschool basketball tournaments in the nation happens right here in Kansas. We commend Kelly and Dale Love, the Board of Directors of the National Division II Christian Homeschool Association Tournament, and all involved for making a difference with good basketball and good values. This tournament is also a site for March Kindness.

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