

EMANUEL BELL

17-year Wenonah veteran meant for coaching

By Paul Beaudry



Say the name Emanuel Bell to just about anyone in the coaching profession and they'll do one of two things.

A likely response will be "Who?" or their face will turn into a big grin and they'll start nodding their head.

Bell is one of those coaches who lives large, loves life and loves to laugh. He's also been one of the state's most successful coaches in the last several years. In 17 seasons at Wenonah, Bell's girls team has picked up about 10 area titles, regional championships in 2002, 2004, 2008, 2013, and a 2004 Class 6A championship.

Counting three years at Jones Valley Middle School, the 60-year-old Bell has a 409-172 record heading into Final 48 play. Not bad for a guy who was building tank engines in Connecticut 20 years ago.

"I think that coaching is a gift God gave me and I fell in love with it," said Bell, who is a 1973 graduate of Wenonah. "When I got out of college, teachers were making \$9,000 a year and I thought I was worth more than that."

Bell found his passion after moving back home from Connecticut. He started coaching at Jones Valley in 1993 and Wenonah three years later.

"I did my student teaching with him when he was at Jones Valley," said Wenonah boys coach Cedric Lane. "He's just got a way with people. He's got a young spirit, and I think a lot of that has to do with coaching and AAU ball and camps. And he doesn't meet many strangers. Ever."

The young spirit has kept him going. Once high school season ends, it's on to coaching the Birmingham Roadrunners AAU team. When that season ends, it's back to working with Wenonah.

"He's like a father figure," said Harriet Barnes, who played on Wenonah's 2002 team that advanced to the Class 6A semifinals then played at Alabama. She's now an assistant coach at Fairfield, which means at least twice a year, she sees Bell in Class 5A area play.

"He's an excellent coach to play for. He's very sensitive, but he tries to hide it sometimes. But we had fun playing for him. When he yells, we'd laugh, but we still respected him and did whatever we needed to do."

Bell has always lamented his late start into coaching, but he has made up for it with success. In 17 seasons, his teams have posted just two losing records – both in the previous two years. This year, the Dragons have made up for it, advancing to the Final 48.

"If I would have known what I know now when I started, I think we'd have won six or seven championships," Bell said. "We've had some great coaches and some great kids here, who have gone on to college, and that's a great accomplishment. To go from the inner city and this neighborhood to college is a big thing."

His 2004 championship team sent four players to Division I schools and there have been plenty of others. It gives Bell a great sense of pride to see his former players succeed.

"Any time players from Wenonah can do good and represent the school, well, it's a great thing," said Bell, who also stays young thanks to his wife of two years, Adrienne. "These players just keep me young. I'd like to coach five more years. I'm having so much fun keeping up and relating to the kids. They keep me young."

