



THE CHARGER

St. Marys, WHS coaches remain friendly despite competitive rivalry

Lauren Schutter | sports editor

The St. Marys Bears and the Wabaunsee Chargers may be rivals during athletic competition, but the boys basketball coaches of these respective teams see each other as friends.

Wabaunsee coach Christian Ulsaker and St. Marys coach Will Spradling were opponents in college, and coach together in the offseason. During the season, they find themselves on opposite sides again.

Both coaches have led underdog teams to surprising postseason runs. In 2021, Ulsaker led the lowest-seeded state team all the way to the championship, defeating top-seed seed Hoxie and finishing as runner-up after a close loss to Hillsboro.

Spradling led the 2020 St. Marys team to a “forever four” at the state tournament, which was canceled due to COVID-19. The team finished 11-10, entering the postseason with a losing record before going on an unlikely run.

Ulsaker attended high school at McPherson, and then played basketball in college at Washburn University.

In his high school years, Ulsaker was a standout player. His senior year (2010-11), he averaged 23.9 points, 8.5 rebounds, and 3 steals per game. He led the team to a 24-1 record and a state championship. Ulsaker was named first-team all-state 3 years, and his junior year he was 2nd team all class, and 1st team all class as well as being named Mr. Basketball in the state of Kansas in 2011.

In college, Ulsaker played in 115 career games making 18 starts — scoring 603 points while adding 340 rebounds. His



WHS coach Christian Ulsaker speaks in a huddle during the February 22 game against St. Marys. The Chargers entered sub-state 15-5. Below: St. Marys coach Will Spradling coaches during a game against the Chargers. St. Marys ended the regular season 17-3. Photos by Dee Glotzbach.

.777 career free throw percentage (.92 his senior year) is 12th all-time at Washburn, and he ranks 22nd all-time in games played.

St Marys head coach Will Spradling attended Shawnee Mission South, then played at Kansas State University.

In his senior year at Shawnee Mission South, Spradling spread his abilities across the board: averaging 21.4 points, 7.2 rebounds, and 6.6 assists per game. He led the team to a 17-6 record — 3rd in the stacked Sunflower league — and he was recruited to play at Kansas State on full scholarship.

While at KSU, Spradling made huge contributions, finishing his career ranking in the Top 10 in nine categories in school history. These rankings include 3rd in assist-to-turnover ratio (2.04) and games played (134), 4th in minutes (3,698), 3-point field goals attempted (524), assists (331) and steals (128) and 5th in starts (105) and free throw percentage (80.8).

He received All-Big 12 Honorable Mention in 2013-14, as well as 2012-13 and 2013-14 Academic All-Big 12 Second Team. “I loved my team at K-State. While I was there we had a successful four years of basketball, but what also made

ULSAKER vs. SPRADLING



my time there great was the family atmosphere of the whole school,” Spradling said.

Every other year, Washburn and Kansas State play one another in an exhibition game — which pitted the two future coaches against one another. This is where they really got to know each other. After college, they bonded over a shared love for basketball.

Ulsaker got his first coaching experience at Washburn Rural, then Shawnee Heights and later Topeka Hayden. He made the move to Wabaunsee in 2019, taking a position as special edu-

cation teacher, a passion of his being to help others in need.

Spradling, after experience at Manhattan High School, moved to St. Marys in 2017. The Bears are arguably the biggest rival for Wabaunsee. Now that the teams are both in the 2A class, tensions have only risen higher.

The teams have played twice, and unfortunately, the Wabaunsee boys lost close games on January 7, 68-49 and February 22, 55-65. St. Marys currently boasts a 17-3 overall record, with a Mid-East League championship, while Wabaunsee sits at 15-5.

The two coaches definitely battle back-and-forth during the game, but also see this as an opportunity for improvement with their teams. “It’s definitely a friendly competition. The main goal is for the boys to compete, and Will and I love seeing young men succeed and continue to be successful,” said Ulsaker. Though these teams may seem to be completely against one another, the two coaches work together in the summers to coach area players in the off-season.

Coach Spradling founded SSA (Spradling Skills Academy), a spring/summer basketball program that coaches 13-17 year-old male and female athletes. The club was created in 2014 with the goal to “help young men and women reach their full potential on and off the court.” Ulsaker was asked to join the organization in 2017, and Spradling is thankful for the work he does. “I’ve been very fortunate to have coaches like Christian that I can trust to do a great job,” Spradling said.

Several league players compete with SSA, including Wabaunsee’s Eli Oliver, Ryan Schutter, Logan Clark, Cade Oliver, Zach Frank and Brayden Meseke, as well as other league players including Fred Criqui, Jaxon Hurla and Keller Hurla of St. Marys, Kade Perine of Rossville, and Kamryn Kaniper of Silver Lake. Wabaunsee girls coach Trevor Keller is also involved with the organization, coaching 16-year-old boys.

While St. Marys won the battle in the regular season, it may not be the end of the Ulsaker/Spradling rivalry this year, as there is the chance for the teams to rematch in the sub-state championship. Both teams are on opposite sides of the bracket in the Republic County sub-state.

If each team wins Tuesday and Friday, they will have a final showdown Saturday night with a trip to state on the line.

Parents, educators respond to Kansas legislature’s transparency bill

Emma Alderman | editor in chief

Kansas House Bill #2662, which was introduced to the Kansas legislature on February 6, revolves around transparency in schools. If the bill were to pass, all school districts would be required to provide an internet transparency tool containing all curriculum and activities for all grades. The transparency tool would also need to include a catalog of all books that students have access to along with any possible content warnings.

Ron Highland, the Kansas house representative for many Wabaunsee county residents, commented on the bill.

“My hope is to find a balance between what parents expect and what our excellent teachers desire. The trust the public has in the education system, at all levels, is being questioned and all must work together to regain the trust,” Highland said.

Locally there have been a couple instances of parents or community members wanting information on what kids are learning in school.

“Parents/community members want to be informed and I’m thankful they want to be an intricate part of their child’s educational upbringing,” superintendent Brad Starnes said.

One such instance occurred at the start of the school year during which a community member asked for some of the high school curriculum.

“At the start of this school year, a county resident asked for a list of titles we use in class. I provided a list of books and stories we use in English 1 and 3, which included some things that we don’t use every year,” WHS English teacher Brendan Praeger said.

Lots of teachers already provide easy access to their

curriculum for parents. One such way is through Google Classroom. The majority of WHS teachers already use this platform to distribute assignments and even quizzes. It is possible for parents to request access or to look at their student’s device.

Community members have engaged in discussion following the introduction of this bill and lots of parents have spoken out about it. Some parents believe this bill will allow for easier access to information on their children’s education while others don’t think it is necessary.

“As a parent I desire to have information on all grade levels and classes that my students are in. Because I do believe strongly in parents understanding what is being taught and that parents should be 100% active and involved in what

they are learning,” Ashley Wurtz, mother of freshman Payton Wurtz and step mother of sophomore Wyatt Wurtz, said.

Other parents are unsure whether the bill is necessary or not.

“Currently, it is very easy to ask a teacher for information on materials. I would reach out to the teacher in question via email and address the issue over emails or arrange a time to meet. I would also make sure to attend parent-teacher meetings that occur every semester. Finally, I would attend school board meetings if needed,” Brock Emmert, father of senior Celia Emmert, said.

Some teachers have also voiced their thoughts on the bill stating that it is unnecessary due to their curriculum already being accessible.

“I have read this bill and find

that it is unwieldy, impossible to achieve and impossible to enforce. I have had parents ask to see my tests in the past. I sent them a photo of the material in question. I retain my tests during the school year. My doors and curriculum are open at all times and I welcome stakeholders,” WHS science teacher Lisa Hull said.

WHS principal Jan Hutley is also unsure whether there is a need for the bill.

“I cannot speak to how other districts operate, but because we already freely provide information and encourage parents to be involved in, and ask questions about their child’s education. I don’t see the need for governmental control of such concerns,” Hutley said.

The bill was recently withdrawn from the legislative calendar and referred to the Committee on Appropriations.