

Krieger: Hoops man Scheuerman has faith to make it count

By Dave Krieger

The Denver Post

05/08/2010

At the height of his chemotherapy, Sharm Scheuerman couldn't spread the word about faith or basketball, pretty much his two favorite things. So he quit the medicine. The cancer was already in his bones. The prognosis wasn't good.

"I was in chemo for over a year," he said. "The first couple were bad, very bad. And I said, 'Don't keep giving me that stuff, because I can't take it.' I mean, I might as well die. I couldn't do anything but lie in bed.

"So then they eased up on it, but it still took a toll. And so last December, I just said I'd had enough. And my doctor agreed. He said, 'I can see why you would make that decision.' "

Maybe he knew about the basketball/values camp for at-risk kids Scheuerman had planned for this spring. With a little white hair back on his head and a little more energy in his step, the former Iowa basketball coach flew to Philadelphia to help supervise the camp two weeks ago. He returned to Denver, his home the last 24 years, pretty fired up.

"We talked about heroes a lot," he said. "We talked about. 'Who's your hero? What sort of heroes do you have?' And they all want to be NBA players, or NFL. That's what they want out of life.

"But then you break it down: 'That's OK. Let's say you don't make it in the NBA or the NFL. What do you want out of life?' And then we start talking about heroes and it gets down closer to home. It's surprising how many grandmothers are the heroes of these kids.

"One kid just broke down and said, 'My grandmother raised me, and she's put me through Spruce Hill. I don't think I do enough for her.' "

Spruce Hill Christian School in Philadelphia was one of Basketball Club International's partners in the camp. BCI is Scheuerman's brainchild, his second attempt to put his Christian values to work in sports.

"I'm a little careful in that when you start talking about Jesus, it turns some people off," he said. "And we don't want to turn people off. So we just talk about our faith. We are faith-based, faith-led. I don't want to be holier than thou, but what we're trying to do is put integrity, character, values and our faith back into basketball."

He has been at it awhile. The Rev. Leon Kelly of Open Door Youth Gang Alternatives in northeast Denver has a picture on his wall of a group of supporters taken at the old McNichols Sports Arena in the late 1980s. Scheuerman is there. So is former Broncos linebacker Randy Gradishar.

Kelly took a group of about 50 kids from Open Door to Scheuerman's last local camp, at Colorado Christian University in Lakewood a little more than a year ago.

"The way that Sharm put it all together, man, it was a blessing to those kids," Kelly said. "My kids couldn't afford an all-day camp like that. The way that it was structured, with the college players and the food and just the energy, was something that a lot of my kids still talk about. They all took pictures, and a lot of them still have those pictures up in their houses."

A lifetime ago, Scheuerman was a celebrated player, one of Iowa's "Fabulous Five" of the mid-1950s. They won back-to-back Big Ten titles and lost the 1956 NCAA championship game to Bill Russell and the University of San Francisco. Iowa asked him to stay on after he graduated, and when coach Bucky O'Connor was killed in a car crash, he took his place.

Former Nuggets coach Doug Moe, then a college player at North Carolina, remembers playing against a Scheuerman-coached all-star team in 1962.

"They won," Moe said. "It stuck in my mind because it was really unusual that he was that young."

"For sure, I was the youngest Big Ten basketball coach, and maybe the youngest Division I coach ever. I had just turned 24," Scheuerman said.

"Bobby Knight, I heard him on TV say something to the effect that he was the youngest. Well, he was 24 when he got the Army job, but it was later on in his 24th year. I was a younger 24. I'm not bragging. It's a fact."

The coaching gig ended, as most of them do, and Scheuerman has indulged his basketball jones through volunteer work ever since. He'll turn 76 in eight days. After he quit the chemo, his doctor estimated he had six months to a year.

"I'm a strong believer, and I've got a pretty strong cancer and I want my life to count," he said. "I've wanted it to count for quite a while. I've got so many years on Earth before the Lord calls me home and when that happens, that's OK, but I want to impact lives as much as I can."

He has a camp scheduled for August in south Los Angeles. There's so much demand, they might have to hold two.