



## NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

### Aggies to shoot hoops for Coach

CURTIS, Neb. (July 22, 2022) Hoopsters who played college basketball for Coach Del Van Der Werff are called to the court for a reunion practice session in late July.

The Aggie coach for the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture wants to bring his players over a 29-year span back to campus for a Saturday afternoon.

“We’ll start at the Community Center at 12:45 with the players out on the gym floor by 1 p.m. to run two miles,” the coach says with a grin, adding, “Oops, I mean two laps.”

The good-natured coach looks forward to seeing a couple dozen players from his August 1976 to May 2006 tenure as the Aggie basketball leader.

Van Der Werff calculates that over the 29-year span with men’s basketball, while simultaneously coaching women’s volleyball for 23 seasons, he’s had an influence on nearly 1,000 athletes at the college level.

In 2003, he reached 400 wins and retired with a 432-326 career. The best season was 1998-99 with 17 wins and four losses. Some of those players are hoping to make the reunion next week.,

“Del was a fantastic coach,” says Anson Nielsen, an agribusinessman and farmer from Minden. “He would get after you in a motivational way because he expected more and knew we could do more with the talent we had.

Del and his wife, Bev, retired as NCTA employees in 2006 and still reside in Curtis.

The coach himself played basketball and football in college but says “track was my big thing” when he attended the University of South Dakota at Springfield.

He is still a runner, recently winning the 70 & under men’s bracket in the recent Nebraskaland Road Race in North Platte.

Perhaps he wasn’t kidding about those two miles for the warm-up on July 30.

“Coach” as he is still called by his players, stays fit putting in a 3-5 mile run every week or so, alternated with one or two miles twice weekly on the trail near the golf course in Curtis.



*Aggies at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture play in the campus gym for a game in 2005. Curtis native B.J. Luke averaged 24.5 points per game that season, fifth highest average in Coach Del Van Der Werff’s 29-year career. (Photo courtesy of Vicky Luke)*

## **Do your best**

His philosophy for leading athletes went beyond workouts.

“I always thought there is more to basketball than just shooting the ball,” he says. “Always be your very best with whatever talent you have. Appreciate the ability that God has given and what you have in life. Get along with others and have respect for all individuals. Enjoy every contest and opportunity. Treat people right all of the time.”

Van Der Werff emphasized personal traits of character and honesty.

“I am a professed Christian. I never put any pressure on my athletes about their faith. I did include prayer before games, but no one was required to take part. That is who I am as an individual.”

The Coach looks forward to hearing from his former players. He has asked team captains to connect with teammates and help spread the word.

Jason Houghtelling, a banker in his hometown of Cambridge, played on '97-98 and '98-99 teams, as team captain the second year. He scored 552 points his first season, averaging 30.6 points per game.

“Coach and Bev were some of the greatest mentors a player could have,” says Houghtelling. “They truly cared about their players and have continued to stay in touch, even after we’ve graduated.”

Players will gather at campus for tours from 12-1 p.m., then go to the Curtis Community Center for afternoon activities. Those include open shooting, a free throw contest, 3-point contest, short tournament and awards.

Nielsen says though it is worn thin, he intends to wear a commemorative t-shirt from the Aggies 98-99 season, his sole year of playing college ball.

“We had some really fun times, traveled many places to play two-year schools, and will always remember the great teammates we had as Aggies.”

NCTA now has coed, intramural sports open to all Aggie students. Activities include basketball, flag football, volleyball, softball and more sponsored by Resident Life.

Competitive travel teams aligned with academic programs and student club interests are crop judging, livestock evaluation, ranch horse riding, intercollegiate rodeo, shotgun sports, and stock dog sports teams.

For information on the July 30 basketball reunion, email Coach Van Der Werff at [delvanderwerff@yahoo.com](mailto:delvanderwerff@yahoo.com).

*Part of the University of Nebraska system, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is a two-year institution with a statewide mission of preparing students for successful careers in agriculture, veterinary technology and related industries. NCTA is known for its affordable tuition, high job-placement rate for its graduates, and for the success of student teams in competitive activities including crops judging, ranch horse events, livestock judging, shotgun sports, stock dog trials, and intercollegiate rodeo. The college is consistently ranked as one of the best two-year schools in the nation.*

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