



Photo by Gary Stewart

BASKETBALL CAMP - Duke basketball standout Bob Bender is pictured here lecturing to a group of area youngsters attending the Kings Mountain Basketball Camp of the Stars

this week at the Community Center gym. Bender coached the youngsters on the fundamentals of passing, dribbling and shooting.

Duke's Bobby Bender Likes ACC Tournament

By GARY STEWART
Co-Editor

Last winter, after four Atlantic Coast Conference basketball teams were eliminated from the NCAA playoffs in regional play, former Marquette Coach Al McGuire blamed their lack of success on the ACC tournament.

The tourney, he pointed out, emotionally drained the players. Any of the four, he said, could have won the national championship had it not been for the ACC tournament.

But, maybe some of the so-called experts aren't the experts they'd like the nation's basketball fans to think they are.

Bob Bender, Duke guard who helped lead the Blue Devils into three national tournaments, says he's read and heard such statements as the one McGuire made, and he disagrees.

"I don't think the tournament drains you," Bender said Monday while taking a break from working with the Kings Mountain Basketball Camp of the Stars at the Community Center.

"Anytime near the end of the season, the players are going to be so excited about playing one game at a time, the ACC tournament is not going to mean that much," he said.

The ACC tournament, in fact, was a stepping stone for the Blue Devils last winter. The pre-season pick to win the ACC, they faltered in mid-season and finished fourth in the final league standings. Their third straight trip to the NCAA's under Coach Bill Foster wasn't assured until they won the ACC tournament.

They went on to the Mideast finals before losing to Purdue, which went on to finish third in the land under former UNC-Charlotte Coach Lee Rose.

"We had our goal set before the beginning of the season to go back to the final four," noted Bender, who played on a national championship team at Indiana before transferring to Duke his sophomore year. "Winning the ACC tournament increased our momentum. It was a positive factor for us, not a negative one as many people are saying."

Bender, though never the individual star like a Mike Gminski or Gene Banks, reached some goals in college basketball that few attain. During all four years

of his eligibility, he played on a team that made the NCAA tournament field, and, as previously mentioned, was a member of the national championship Indiana team four years ago.

Naturally, fans in this part of the country assume the reason for Bender's coming to Duke was a dislike for Indiana's fiery head coach, Bobby Knight. But, nothing could be farther from the truth.

"That wasn't the case at all," says Bender. "Indiana was just not the place for me. I was fortunate I went there for a year. The things I learned under Coach Knight, I'll always benefit from."

"Although I didn't get in that much playing time at Indiana, I felt as much a part of the national championship as anyone else. There were some very great players on that team and it was a challenge just to practice with them."

As for his three years at Duke, Bender says he'll remember the last one best.

"The biggest thing at Duke is that I was a part of a winner," he said. "I was not a star, and was never on an All-American or All-ACC team."

"But I was fortunate enough to play with good ballplayers. And Coach (Bill) Foster blended the talent into a winning tradition which I feel like will continue."

Bender served as a co-captain his senior year, along with Gminski.

"All in all, it was a great year," he said. "We had a period of time where we had a lot of guys hurt and lost five games in a row. A lot of people counted our season as over at that point. But we had enough character to come back and win the ACC tournament and go to the Mideast finals."

Duke came within an eyelash of winning the national title Bender's sophomore year, and had the Blue Devils defeated Kentucky for that crown, it would have made him a member of a national champion two years in a row.

The Devils played under little pressure that year, since they had been picked to finish as low as sixth in the regular season ACC race.

"That was the big difference our junior year," said Bender.

"After going to St. Louis our sophomore year, the pressure got to us that next year.

"We had never faced the attention we got after going to the final game," he said. "The next year, we were picked number one in the nation in pre-season and we started thinking about how we were going to devy up our time to talk and meet everyone that wanted a part of us. We tried to take some shortcuts and it caught up with us. But we learned from it."

The future of Duke is bright, he says, even though players like Gminski and Bender, and Coach Foster, are gone.

"There will be a lot of basic changes next year," he said. "Duke will be a small team. They didn't recruit a big man to take Gminski's place. They won't put anyone on the floor under 6-3 but they won't have the dominant big man. They'll match up well against most teams but when they face Sampson (Ralph Sampson of Virginia) and Clemson with all their big men, it will be the telling point. But with Kenny Denard and Gene Banks and Vince Taylor back, they'll have a good nucleus for a good team."

Bender looks for Maryland to win the ACC and everyone else to be well-matched.

"With their change in attitude, Maryland literally ran away with the conference last year," he said. "They came back to the tournament with the idea of winning it, even though they had an NCAA bid wrapped up. They almost won the tournament too, but by not winning it last year, they'll have something to prove this year."

As for Bender and Gminski, it'll be on to the NBA. Bender was drafted in the sixth round by San Diego and Gminski in the first round by New Jersey.

"Gminski will be an instant factor for New Jersey," he said. "With his shooting ability, he can't do anything but help. I won't say he'll be All-Pro his rookie year, but he will be a big help to the New Jersey team."

As for Bender, well, it's not easy to predict success for oneself. But, he has the good guard size, is a good ballhandler, shooter and defensive player. And, he's a believer in hard work. Look for him in the NBA.

Football Drills Begin

Kings Mountain High football practice will begin Friday at John Gamble Stadium.

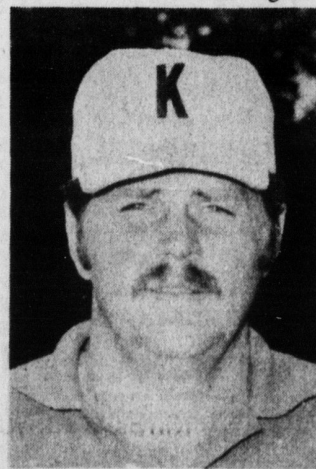
Mountaineer hopefuls for 1980 will undergo physical examinations at 5 p.m., and will have a light workout afterward.

Head Coach and Athletic Director Dan Brooks said all candidates should bring a pair of tennis shoes for the first workout.

The Mountaineers, as re-BOOSTERS CLUB

The Kings Mountain High Mountaineer Club will hold an important meeting Monday night at 7:30 at B.N. Barnes Auditorium. President Bill Grissom urges all members who are selling ads for the football program to turn them in at the meeting.

quired by state football regula-



DAN BROOKS

tions, will undergo a week of conditioning drills before putting on pads. They'll begin heavy workouts on Fri., Aug. 8.

Coach Brooks and his staff, which includes Steve Foster, David Brinkley and Bob Jones, will be trying to rebuild the program after enjoying one of their better years last fall. The Mountaineers finished 8-2 and second in the tough Southwestern 3-A Conference but lost 26 seniors to graduation.

The Mountaineers will work out next week at 7:30 a.m. They'll have a month to get ready for their SWC opener on Fri., Sept. 5 against Burns, one of the two teams to defeat the Mountaineers a year ago.

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