

Published: Dec 16, 2006 12:30 AM
Modified: Dec 23, 2006 06:41 AM

At home on the basketball court
Big wins, good friends for homeschool team

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Homeschool basketball may be a little-known part of local high school sports, but that could change with the ongoing success of Durham Flight.

The team finished second in the North Carolinians for Home Education championship this year after winning it all in 2005. They also won the National Christian Homeschool Athletic Association tournament in 2005 and 2006.

Durham Flight is one of 11 homeschool basketball teams in the state and one of only two in the Triangle. With so few teams, Flight players travel up to an hour and a half to practices in Bahama and Durham.

The team started in 2002 with eight middle school boys who "literally practiced at the end of the street in someone's cul de sac," said head coach Doug Dahms.

Practices moved to a gym the following year, and with that came more players and a full season. The team became Durham Flight in 2004, with one middle and high school squad. Now there are middle school and varsity teams for both sexes and a boys junior varsity squad.

The program also fields middle school and high school baseball teams. Most homeschool athletic programs have other sports, including football, volleyball and golf.

Teams like the Flight are considered a hodgepodge of talent.

"We're between a public school junior varsity and varsity," said Logan Dahms, 17, the coach's son who plays for Durham Flight. "I suppose even a good junior varsity team from a public school would give us a good game, but a poor varsity team may still be a little bit better than us. We draw from such a small number of people."

Homeschooled students are taught at home, mostly by their parents, who use various curriculums that meet the same requirements as regular schools.

Without dedicated facilities -- a common problem for homeschool programs -- the Flight often rents out gymnasiums for practices and games. Getting the entire team together for practice can be challenging because of the students' different schedules. Then there's fundraising: Each home game costs about \$125 for gym rental and referees, not

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including tournament fees, uniforms and travel expenses. Exposure is also a challenge, mainly because most people don't know homeschool sports exist.

Space constraints forced the Flight's middle and high school teams into a joint practice recently. The size and talent level easily separated the younger and older players, but all of them seemed flat during the middle of practice.

"You got the drill down but no one's putting the ball into the basket," Coach Dahms told the players. "That defeats the purpose of the drill. You have to concentrate. You haven't had focus within the past few minutes."

This practice was no different than those in public and private schools. There were drills, skill development sessions, and of course, constructive criticism from the coach. The competition is the same as in a regular high school conference, said Will Patrick, 16, a Chapel Hill resident and four-year program participant.

"It's great competition," said Will, whose younger brother is also in the program. "It's like any league. There's good teams and not-so-good teams. But I can't say there's no team who won't try their hardest to win."

As practice continued inside, Will's mother, Sue, graded his younger brother's homework while sitting in her vehicle. She admits that being a team mother takes a lot of time, but says such programs help dispel any myths that homeschooled students are stuck at home all day.

"This league has been a blessing to us in many ways," she said. "They both enjoy sports and it has given them a good outlet. But more importantly, they've made a lot of good friends on the team."

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