

SPORTS & RECREATION

Brewer basketball coach overcomes heart attack, decides to retire

BY ERNIE CLARK
BDN STAFF

BREWER — At least a few people were less than thrilled when Clayton Blood resumed coaching the Brewer High School boys basketball team this past winter.

It had nothing to do with wins and losses as the Witches were projected to be among the top contenders in Class A North.

But Blood was entering his 20th year as a varsity basketball coach still recovering from the heart attack he suffered last fall.

"I didn't have many medical people telling me to return," he said. "In fact, no one did."

But after a challenging opening night when his pregame preparation consisted of a trip to a hospital emergency room, Blood, his coaching staff and players went on to have a stellar season.

A 14-4 regular season good for second place in the final Heal point ratings was followed by a trip to the regional semifinals. It was a positive final coaching memory for the 58-year-old Blood, who has announced his retirement from coaching.

"It's bittersweet, certainly," he said. "It's not the overriding reason I'm doing this. I don't have to get done physically, but the heart condition did open my eyes about life. My uncle was a coach, and he died at 48 of a heart attack."

"As far as basketball goes, it put that in perspective this year. I probably had the best year I've ever had coaching as far as it being enjoyable and having great kids and a very rewarding season," he said.

Blood, who also plans to retire from a 36-year career in education, cited several additional reasons for his decision.

They include his desire to pursue other interests such as writing and the lengthy commute from his home in Beddington in Washington County — particularly as it relates to running a summer basketball program.

"Thirty-six years is a long time at one profession, I think," said Blood, who began his teaching career in the western Maine town of Canton while a student at the University of Maine at Farmington.

"I have so many other things I enjoy doing. One thing I don't have is any re-

grets for the profession I chose. At the end of all this it's still wonderful, but I think I'm pretty blessed that I love a lot of things. My wife and I will have an opportunity to be able to spend a lot of quality time together, and I might even shoot a deer this fall."

Blood was a Bangor Daily News All-Maine second-team honoree while playing guard for Searsport High School in 1976, then continued his basketball career at UMF.

He coached varsity basketball for 16 years before initially taking the Brewer post. He worked one year at Belfast, two years at the former Mexico High School and 13 years at Hermon.

Blood became Brewer's head coach for the 2008-09 season and guided the Witches to a 14-5 record while earning Kennebec Valley Athletic Conference Class A co-coach of the year honors.

He left the job after one

season for family reasons but returned as Brewer's freshman boys basketball coach for 2012-13.

Blood regained the varsity post a year later after Ben Goodwin resigned for

wants the kids to do and how they should do it in his opinion. They're always watching him and when he speaks, they listen. The delivery really makes a difference there."

Blood's heart attack was followed by a procedure to place two stents in his arteries to facilitate better blood flow. It brought a sudden sense of uncertainty to his immediate teaching and coaching future.

He was determined to return to both the classroom and the basketball court, but the latter hope was almost short-circuited on the day of Brewer's first game of the new season against Cony of Augusta when Blood had to return to the hospital.

"My blood pressure spiked again, and I had to fight to get out of the emergency room to get to the game on time," he said.

Blood did take his customary seat on the Brewer bench, and any further concerns that evening may have been alleviated by the Witches' 68-60 victory.

Blood credited assistant coaches Nick Arthers, Phil Pushard and Mark Savage for their support that night and throughout the winter.

"They were the biggest blessings I had this year. They were fantastic," he said. "The support I got from them for my physical well-being was tremendous — and I did need help because this season was hard. There were games when I physically had to sit down."

Blood said he benefitted from being able to sleep in on Wednesdays during basketball season, per doctor's orders.

"If you think of a basketball coach with a Tuesday night game, that allowed me to make up school work and also basketball plans instead of getting home and then having to get right up again," Blood said.

Blood says he feels good these days.

"I've been walking, and the stents are working," he said.

He will miss the relationships he's made through basketball as well as with the students he has nurtured in his classroom.

"You teach people," he said. "It isn't just the subject matter you teach, and I've always felt that way with coaching, too. You teach people and you work with people. That's the big thing for me."

RAPID RACERS



ASHLEY L. CONTI/BDN

Sillas Hagerty and Josh Prokey celebrate after successfully navigating Six Mile Falls on the Kenduskeag Stream during the 50th annual Kenduskeag Stream Canoe Race Saturday, April 16. The 16-mile race starts in Kenduskeag and ends in downtown Bangor.

HOOP! THERE IT IS



KIMBERLEY CUMMINGS/SPECIAL TO THE WEEKLY

Members of the Lumberjacks freshman AAU Basketball Team huddle with Coach Chris Lausier, during a recent game against Lawrence at Cony High School.

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