

LETTER TO THE SPORTS EDITOR

by Brett Horyna, Liberal

I enjoyed your article about Coach Baird in the paper on Saturday, and I couldn't agree more about him. He LOVES basketball and no one wants to win more than he. What I like and respect most about him is how positive he is to every single girl and how hard he is working to try and build the program up.

However, I do disagree with you when you say that Liberal doesn't have any gym rats. We are at such a disadvantage in Liberal with our basketball programs.

WHY??

It isn't because we don't have gym rats. It is because we don't have gyms to be able to have rats in our basketball programs.

Our kids would and do play, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a practice — just play basketball, but where and when?

There is no open gym available for this, and it is difficult at best to be able to practice once or twice per week with our new gym system. Also, basketball is a winter sport and most days it is 30-40 degrees outside. It is hard to practice outside in these temperatures consistently.

This weekend was the MAYB Winter Kickoff Basketball Tournament. Liberal sent a total of six teams in the fourth-sixth grade divisions to participate. There were four boys teams and two girls teams with a combined record of 19-14 with a first, second, and third place in their respective brackets.

Our kids do very well against schools our size or smaller, but we cannot compete as easily with the Wichita, Kansas City, or Oklahoma select teams.

WHY??

Simple, they play against good competition daily or twice weekly and they have the opportunity to play all of the time. Liberal does not have this luxury. To be good you have to play against good players consistently. They have competitive leagues that they play in twice a week.

They have open gym times that they can go and shoot and play a game of pick-up on a daily basis. Liberal is not afforded with these opportunities. We are lucky to be able to practice twice per week and there is virtually no practicing on the weekends.

Tournaments in Wichita or the surrounding area happen almost every single weekend. It is expensive for our teams to go and play in these tournaments.

We have to get a hotel rooms, meals, etc., for 10 kids, parents, and siblings. We try to only do it once or twice a month, but these teams are afforded the opportunity to do it on a weekly basis from their own backyards.

Our girls third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade MAYB teams played over 30 games each last year and not one of them was in Liberal. We practiced once to twice weekly every week that they allowed us into the gyms.

Gym rats need gyms

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We appreciate greatly Coach Baird and what he is doing with our girls programs, but in order to be better we have to go further as a school and as a community. We need more gyms and open gym times for our kids to go and shoot and play. We need competitive teams and competitive leagues. We need tournaments in Liberal, and we need our kids to be able to play and become gym rats.

If we can continue to build on what Coach Baird has started we can have a program we can all be proud of.