

A 'Hippleman' enters the Hall

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 15 March 2011 23:28 - Last Updated Tuesday, 15 March 2011 23:39



DES MOINES -- It's been nearly 50 years since Gordon Rundquist played basketball for Coach Les Hipple at Marion High School, but he'll always be a "Hippleman" and will always be grateful.

Rundquist was inducted into the IHSAA Basketball Hall of Fame Saturday night for his accomplishments as a coach, most notably at Maquoketa Valley from 1970 to 2005, but it all began under the watchful eye of Hipple in the 1950s and '60s.

"He was more like a father to me," said Rundquist. "My parents were divorced, and he started taking care of me in about the fourth grade. He'd give me rides to school.

"He lived a block from my house. He'd let me into the gym to shoot. It was a great, great experience."

Hipple was known as a stern disciplinarian who had strict rules about driving (don't, unless absolutely necessary) and girlfriends (avoid them). Those rules were broken on a regular basis, but there were consequences.

"Of course we had girlfriends back in that time," said Rundquist. "We'd be standing by our locker with our girlfriend, and you'd feel this warm glow on the back of your head and you'd look around and there's Coach standing there.

"He never said anything," Rundquist remarked. "You just went down to the gym before practice and 'Twice up the ropes' for talking to a girl in the hall. You just did it. 'That's once, Coach. That's twice.' You knew what the punishment was."

Hipple did not want his athletes driving around aimlessly, wasting time and wasting gas. That led to his frown on borrowing the family car if it wasn't essential.

A 'Hippleman' enters the Hall

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 15 March 2011 23:28 - Last Updated Tuesday, 15 March 2011 23:39

"I can remember my mother calling him and saying, 'Gordon is going to drive down to Cedar Rapids. Is that all right?'" he said, smiling at something that happened a half-century ago.

Rundquist also saw the caring side of Hipple, the man who worked with grade school kids in the morning, the man who gave him rides to school, the man who wanted his players to be disciplined and to get the most out of life.

"He did a lot for me, as far as keeping me on the straight and narrow," said Rundquist.

Rundquist lived with his mother, grandmother and aunt in Marion, without a man in the house. Hipple helped fill that void.

"Basically I was raised by three women," he said. "But having a father figure like Coach in there was real beneficial for me."

Rundquist said Hipple was the first coach in the area to hold basketball practices for grade school kids. Hipple conducted those practices for the 4th and 5th graders himself.

"He had an elementary program, and nobody had that. Nobody," said Rundquist. "I mean, he was years ahead of people in that regard. And so when I first started coaching, that's what I started, and still nobody had done that."

One year, Rundquist brought his 5th and 6th graders from Maquoketa Valley to an Iowa Basketball Coaches Association clinic to demonstrate his own grade school program.

"Coaches came up to me and they were just awed by what was going on," he said. "And from that point, I think everybody started doing it."

A 'Hippleman' enters the Hall

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 15 March 2011 23:28 - Last Updated Tuesday, 15 March 2011 23:39

Dan Kellams, a Marion High School graduate who played for Hipple, wrote a book about the former coach entitled "A Coach's Life: Les Hipple and the Marion Indians." Rundquist was a source for that book and understands what Hipple meant when he said, "I don't really care what they think when they're playing for me, but I want to know what they think afterwards."

According to Rundquist, many former players would stop by and visit Hipple as the years went by, their respect growing for the stern disciplinarian and taskmaster.

Rundquist, 68, graduated from Marion High School in 1962. He received his college degree from Coe and was the coach at West Branch for three years before moving to Maquoketa Valley. He compiled a 559-250 record in 38 years as a head coach, the 12th-most victories in state history, and led Maquoketa Valley to 16 conference titles, eight district titles and five state tournaments.

Rundquist was named the 1992 State Coach of the Year and was honored as his conference Coach of the Year 13 times. He's now an assistant coach at Iowa City West, which finished fourth in the Class 4A state tournament this year. His son, Paul Rundquist, is also a coach and led Mount Pleasant to a third-place showing in the Class 3A tournament.

Rundquist has led his own "Coach's Life," but it all began with Hipple back in Marion. "It made me want to coach," he said. "Just his presence and the things he did for me and for all of us."

Rundquist and his wife, Sherry, were honored at halftime of the Class 4A state championship game at Wells Fargo Arena Saturday night in Des Moines. Rundquist had thoughts of Hipple on his mind that day.

"I had thoughts of him when I first found out I was going to be inducted," he said.

There were fond thoughts, and thoughts of appreciation.