

Tuesday, December 22, 2009

Northgate Basketball: Still A Tradition

As I write this at 1:45 am, I am simply amazed at what was accomplished tonight. I went back to my old high school to honor our legendary, State Championship winning coach, Coach Frank Allocco, Sr., and also inducting one of the greatest players in Northgate Basketball history, Jim Croy, into the Northgate Athletic Hall of Fame.

It was immediately great to see faces from Northgate basketball past. Frank Allocco, Jr., Mike Allocco, Rick Croy, Jim Croy, Bobby Callaway, Ryan Inouye, Nate Murray, Mike Samuels, Jeff Samuels, John Grigsby, Jarrett Tong, Ben Wallis, and Mark Alexander (to name a few.) Catching up with everyone was excellent, and I was extremely honored and proud to be a part of it.

It was also great to spend a few moments with Coach Allocco and Coach Brian Sullivan. Growing up, I was always tall, but it took coaching from those two to truly mold me into a basketball player (and I am a better man for it.)

The formal honoring of Coach Allocco, our 1995 State Championship team, and Jim Croy took place during halftime of the Northgate/Las Lomas game. The Las Lomas crowd was fairly rude as they could not appreciate how undeniably dominant our program was 10-15 years ago. True, the ceremony took up more time than a normal halftime would, but this was a special occasion that should have been treated with ultimate respect. Teacher Jeff Spoden spoke of how Coach Allocco changed things at Northgate for the better by instilling an intense feeling of playing perfect basketball in order us to not let our teammates down. Rick Croy spoke about when Coach Allocco first arrived at Northgate, brought all the players to the parking lot and said, "Imagine the street in front of the school lined with cars and the parking lot full. Forget earning a winning record, we will win a State Championship here." A couple years later, he brought the team out back to the parking lot before a game, and what did they see? The street was gridlocked with cars attempting to get into a full parking lot. They did it. They then went on to rip out the soul of that opponent and many other opponents that they faced in the Corral (the name of our home gym.)

Northgate won the game against Las Lomas, which was fitting, and then our group went to Rocco's for some pizza and to catch up with one another. Many of the former players have wives and children and it was great to see of these players that I once looked up to and admired growing into men and starting families.

But the fun did not stop there. at 10:30pm, we were allowed to go into the gym for an hour and a half practice with Coach Allocco and Coach Sullivan- just like the old days. You might be wondering, how did that go with a bunch of older guys that were 10-17 years out of high school? Let's just say that I guarantee that it was the hardest working practice that will take

place in the Northgate gym this year. We did Olympic drills, including a weave to half court. We did Vegas and Motion offense drills. We did dribbling and defensive slide drills. We did free throws for water (Frank, Jr. and Nate Murray went 4 for 4 with their free throws.) We ran a line when one player did not dive into the corner of the gym for a ball. We did defensive breakdowns, box-out drills and rebounding drills. We had a legitimate practice for a solid hour and a half.

I dove on a couple balls, got hit in the throat by Rick Croy as he went through a screen, missed a defensive assignment (and got yelled at for it), had one strong move in the post, and played as hard as I could for 90 minutes. I made sure to challenge myself by always looking to be in Coach Sullivan's group. More importantly that all these "I" sentences- "WE" as a team, came together for one night, 10-17 years after we were done playing, and 13 years after Our Coach had moved on (to De La Salle High School in Concord) and we played hard for each other. We were a team again. And even though it was a smattering of guys from different class years, we held up the old Northgate Traditions with pride for one more night- and it was an absolute honor.

I can't relay to people how challenging it was to be in a Coach Allocco led program (unless you are in it now, or have been in it in the past), but their saying still holds true today: Northgate Basketball is not for everyone, but those that stay will be Champions.