



THE SEASON IS HERE!

We are two weeks into our season and it is amazing how quickly things have been moving along.

We have most of our players back from last year along with a couple that have really taken a jump forward this year and will contribute on the varsity level. Read through the newsletter to learn more about our 2017-18 season.

GAMES ARE RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER

We are excited for a couple of huge tests this week with opponents that are new to us this year.

Tuesday, December 5th we play at **Anoka** which will be a very strong opening test for us. Coach Jeffery Wall is entering his 2nd season at Anoka having already amassed 565 career wins (13th most all time!) They have very good size which will be a challenge for us including a 6'7" senior post player. To win we need to be able to handle their pressure man to man defense and make sure we compete on the glass.

Friday, December 8th we play perennial 4A power, **Tartan**, at home. They are coming off what I think is their 19th consecutive 20+ win season, going 23-3 last year. Hall of Fame coach, Mark Klingsporn, like Coach Wall, is a member of the 500 wins club. We are excited to have an opportunity for such a strong test early in the season.

They have an elite level PG that we will have to control, and we expect to see pressure defense throughout. They will try to speed us up, and to win we will have to control the pace of the game and take care of the basketball.

CAPTAINS NAMED

We have named our captains for this upcoming season and I think we have a great group of four.

DYLAN RAMBERG: Dylan is entering his second year as a captain and his third year as a starter. He is an emotional leader for us and when he brings great energy the rest of the team feeds off it.

JONAH MARCUSSEN: Jonah started for us last year during his first season on varsity. He, like many of our players, worked very hard throughout the offseason. He is someone that has a high standard during practice and expects his teammates to compete.

ZACH GAZDA: Zach, as a JR, is entering his second season as a captain. He did a great job throughout the offseason working out with players both during open gyms as well as down at the YMCA. So far, this season, he has been our most vocal leader.

BEN ROETTJER: Ben is exactly what a coach and school wants from a student athlete. Nobody throughout our program has had their role changed more drastically and often than Ben, and he always remains positive and does his best to excel at whatever role he is in.



"IN SPORT, IF YOU WANT TO BE THE BEST YOU HAVE TO COMPETE AGAINST THE BEST..." -DALEY THOMPSON

GET TO KNOW OUR TEAM

Who is on our coaching staff?

- Varsity Head Coach:** Alex Kuhlman
- Varsity Assistant:** Gary Dreissig
- Junior Varsity:** Ryan Minke
- 9th Grade:** Justin Voss
- Volunteer Assistant:** Christian Cenidoza

What are our strengths?

- **Experience:** We return nearly every one that contributed on varsity last year.
- **Length:** We have several players that are between 6'2" and 6'4" plus Zach Gazda at 6'8". This gives us a lot of flexibility with lineups/matchups.
- **Balance:** We have 4 players back that averaged between 8.3-10.7 ppg last year. We should be able to score inside and out.



OPENING VARSITY ROSTER

- Front Row:** Brandon Tollberg (SR), Ben Roettjer (SR), Drew VanEerden (SO), Carter Whitman (SO)
- Second Row:** Brady Brodin (SR), Cam Irvin (SR), Austin Grovender (JR), Dylan Ramberg (SR)
- Third Row:** Jonah Marcussen (SR), Colby Knutson (JR), Zach Gazda (JR), Conner Hartmann (JR), Rylen Nelson (JR)

Who is back from last year?

- **Dylan Ramberg #13:** Top 3 in six categories last year. Does a bit of everything for us.
- **Zach Gazda #54:** Worked extremely hard. We are looking for a big jump from him this year.
- **Jonah Marcussen #23:** Can score in multiple ways and can play many different positions. Versatile.
- **Brady Brodin #11:** Leading scorer last year. Very good shooter and underrated defender.
- **Cam Irvin #24:** Strongest player on our team. Has had a great start to practice. Will see major minutes this year.
- **Conner Hartmann #25:** Really came on at the end of last year. Should have an expanded role this year. Very good rebounder.
- **Rylen Nelson #33:** Good athlete and works extremely hard. Good rebounder.
- **Brandon Tollberg #1:** Might be the best shooter on our team.
- **Ben Roettjer #4:** Does all the small things well. Great energy guy for us.

Who are some of the new varsity players?

- **Colby Knutson #5:** Probably our most improved player. Looking for big things from him this year.
- **Drew VanEerden #3:** Brings a competitiveness that we really need.
- **Carter Whitman #2:** Works as hard as anyone we have throughout our program.
- **Austin Grovender #14:** Gives us size that can play inside and outside off of the bench.

Who will start?

We have about 8 guys that we feel comfortable with starting, so our lineup could adjust throughout the year. Heading into Anoka, depending on some injuries, we will most likely be starting:

Dylan R, Brady B, Colby K, Jonah M, and Zach G
More important than who starts is who finishes the games, and that will play out throughout the year.

RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE HERE WE COME!

A quality that I think is extremely important in a person is being selfless/being willing to give back when able. It is something that we stress within our program whether it being willing to help with the youth during camps/practices or if it is something throughout the community.

Last year, Zach Gazda and Dylan Ramberg set up two days that our players volunteered their time to hang out at Gracewood Living Center and I was so proud of the way our players handled themselves and I thought that they enjoyed that experience.

This year, I am extremely excited that we will be cooking a meal for the children and their families at the Ronald McDonald House in Minneapolis on Saturday, January 13th. We will be bringing our varsity players down there and I think that it will be one of the highlights of the year.

LEAD EM UP

Coach Voss will be leading a group of our players through a 9-week course called "Lead Em Up" throughout the season. This program focuses on eight different principles:

- Self-Awareness
- Focus
- Optimism
- Listening
- Communication
- Confidence
- Relationships
- Enthusiasm

I am so happy to be able to add this program to our team and want to thank the North Branch Court Club for paying for it! The Court Club gives us so many opportunities to improve our program on the court as well as off of it. **THANK YOU!**

GET TO KNOW YOUR VIKINGS

Zach Gazda...JR...#54

Favorite on Court Memory: Back to back wins versus Hibbing and Hermantown

Favorite Food: Sushi

College Plans: Pre-med and hopefully basketball

Favorite Movie: Step Brothers

Favorite Musician: Drake

Sporting event Zach would like to attend: All of March Madness

Funniest Teammate: The Cam and Jonah Combo

Role Model: His Dad

Favorite gym other than North Branch: Monticello

Hidden Talent: His height

Off Court Memory: Coach Kuhlman's water cup mishap in St. Francis after losing his phone.

(Kuhlman's Note: Seriously? Here's the story: I lost my phone under our bench and called it while our JV was playing, and a player picked it up. Later, during the varsity game, the cup I picked had a hole in it and it spilled all over me and I wiped it up with one of our players shooting shirts. Not the best stretch for me)

Coaches Thoughts: Zach is one of the most committed players in our program and probably in any program. He shot over 50,000 shots throughout the offseason, often going with a group of guys down to the YMCA to lift and shoot after spending 2 hours at our teams open gym, plus playing AAU.

Last year he averaged 10 points, 4.8 rebounds, and 2.0 blocks. He has an opportunity to possibly break the schools block record this year as a junior.

This season, as mentioned earlier in the newsletter, Zach has really stepped up and has become a much-needed vocal leader. We are really looking for big things from Zach this year.