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Elementary Excellence: St. Joseph

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Faith and Participation Lead Athletic Program



The following feature is a part of a weekly series called "Elementary Excellence" - a set of profiles that will spotlight Louisville area Catholic elementary schools and its athletic programs, teams, traditions and excellence in all aspects of sports. Do you want your school to be featured? Send us your recommendation to editor@catholicsportsnet.com.

St. Joseph Grade School, a Catholic Grade School with much tradition in the Bardstown, Kentucky area, is looking to continue educating children this year through the ministry of sports.

And Athletic Director Mike Mitro says he wants to continue teaching the values he learned through athletics to his Knights.

"I've been Athletic Director for six years," said Mitro. "My goals for this year are the same they are every year - that any child that wants to participate in sports is able to do so. It's about comradery and the enjoyment of it. You make friends for life in sports. That's what I enjoyed in sports, and I try to teach these kids those lessons."

Mitro, a former athlete himself, is from Northern Illinois. He was involved in various sports throughout childhood, and he went onto play basketball at Blackhawk East Junior College. Mitro got involved with St. Joseph years ago when his children attended the school. When he retired from the military, he decided he wanted to take on a larger role than coaching.

"My kids have been involved in sports, and my wife was an administrative assistant at the school," said Mitro. "When I retired, the opportunity came up to become athletic director and I jumped on it."

Throughout his many years of involvement with the school, Mitro has seen positive changes and improvements to the athletic program.

"We've started baseball for grades seventh and eighth grades and volleyball for sixth, seventh and eighth grades since I've been there," said Mitro. "And as far as success goes, boys basketball and girls volleyball have done the best. And going into this year, volleyball and basketball should be competitive again."

While Mitro wants his kids to be competitive, he says he stands by training and competing the right way with Christian values as the priority.

"I don't pay much attention to wins and losses because it's more about getting the opportunity to play. It's great to be competitive, but it's about doing your best and that's it. We want the kids to keep on smiling," said Mitro. "And faith is a big part of program. An athlete's prayer is said every home game with the National Anthem."

While St. Joseph Grade School does not have an intramural program for the younger grades, Mitro says he can see a growing number of kids across the board interested in athletics.

"I'd say 80% of the students participate in sports. Every year, the numbers depend on each class, but I think for seventh grade, for instance, you may have 31 in class and like 25 playing basketball," said Mitro. "The school also offers bowling and archery, and this year we have 15 kids running cross country with Bethlehem, which is awesome. It's a growing sport with numbers."

As far as practice space is concerned for the Knights, Mitro says he is most proud of the renovations to the gym for the school finished three years ago.

"We had great fundraising and a capital campaign to get the old bleachers renovated, new padding and new floor for the gym," said Mitro. "We are working on the new parish hall which will have a three quarters gym with volleyball sleeves and basketball goals in there. It should be done by next spring, and it will offer more practice space."

As Mitro and his Knights enter a new school season with new hopes in growing athletics, he says he will continue to fall back on his faith and experience for wisdom.

Said Mitro: "I say, 'It's about trust, integrity, having fun, enjoying it- that's what it's all about'."