

BY  
BOBBY HART

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Hoopers (from left, back row) Jacob Schutz, Jack Dahl-McGlone and Mitchell Dickerson; (middle row) J.J. Svac, Nolan Leyse, Coach Todd Leyse and Graham Schroeder; (floor) Nick Erlien, Mitchell Rekstad and Bryan Guenther.

# Hope for Hoops

A local basketball association shoots for a new facility for youth.

IT WAS AN HONEST QUESTION. “What would you be doing if you weren’t involved in basketball?”

It only took quick-witted sixth-grader J.J. Svac a split-second to offer an honest answer. “I’d be on the couch watching TV,” said Svac, as he sat with the rest of his teammates on the sixth-grade Osseo Maple Grove Basketball Traveling 6A team between games at Cooper High School.

I could relate to this kid. After all, I was in his sneakers 15 years ago. I played in the Osseo Maple Grove Basketball Association’s house league from grade school through my senior year at Maple Grove Senior High in 2000. Not only did playing in the program keep me from letting my brain and body rot

in front of the TV, it also helped me bond with my friends (I remain close to many today)—and with my father, who volunteered to coach some of my teams.

In this booming area, it’s fair to say a lot has changed since then. The OMGBA now supports about 2,000 boys and girls, grades 1–12, in the Osseo Senior High and MGSB attendance area. About 85 percent of those kids come from Maple Grove.

That high attendance is a credit to the non-profit association, which is run almost solely by volunteers. But with so many teams and programs competing for limited gym space, provided by the School District 279 Community Education Department, it’s getting harder to schedule gym time.



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OMGBA president Todd Leyse says that out of all the available hardwood floor time offered at both high schools in January, the OMGBA only received about 15 percent because other district programs took priority. As a result, some older OMGBA teams don't have the luxury of practice time, while others are forced to moonlight.

"I think a lot of people think we get those gyms after 6 p.m. at night, but the reality is, at one of the high schools we only get two nights out of the whole month," Leyse says. "We're having practices until 10 p.m., and to fifth-graders on school nights, that's awfully late. But that's the time we get the gyms."

Rather than begrudge other district programs, Leyse and the OMGBA board have brought forth a possible solution. Five years ago, the OMGBA board started setting aside fundraising money for a new facility with multiple hardwood floors. Three years ago, a committee formed to research building options and costs.

The committee is hanging its hopes on the city of Maple Grove, which would likely need to partner with the OMGBA for a new facility to become a reality. Asking the Maple Grove Hockey Association to contribute 20 percent of the funding, the city helped build a new ice rink attached to the Maple Grove Community Center this past November. Leyse thinks his association could contribute a similar 20 percent for their proposed project.

Leyse, who had preliminary meetings with the city as recently as February, says if the city can help out, it's possible that a new facility could be built in a few years.

Bob and Sue Drag have been involved in the OMGBA for 20 years. Two of their sons have gone through the program, and the Drags remain dedicated volunteers. Bob, a longtime board member, is a referee, the referee coordinator and the insurance advisor, while Sue is the referee scheduler and gaming manager.

"Our main reason that we have stayed so long on the board is for the kids," Sue says. "We enjoy watching the kids having fun and playing basketball, and we take pleasure out of possibly being a small part of that." //

*Elizabeth Millard is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer.*



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