

Old school hoops

Granny Basketball looks to expand to Faribault



From
the Hart
Bobby Hart

In some circles, a granny shot is a joke. Lobbing a basketball underhand is what Will Ferrell does for laughs.

But when 12 women gathered at Shattuck-St. Mary's for a pick-up game Tuesday, the granny shot was a valued asset worth three points.

The Wanamingo Bulldogs Granny Basketball team, the only team of its kind in Minnesota, gathered to promote the game and try to recruit members to start a Faribault team.

Karen Brant and Lois Bjorngaard, both 69-year-old women from Wanamingo, officially started the Bulldogs last October.

For a generation of women who went through high school with no organized female basketball teams, Granny Basketball is a source of camaraderie, mental stimulation and exercise.

Avis Erlanson, 80, was one of the women on the court working up a sweat Tuesday. Erlanson had triple bypass heart surgery in 2002, but was urged to hit the hardwood after losing her husband, Vern, to cancer last summer.

"It keeps you alert," said Erlanson, who prior to joining the Bulldogs, had never played a game of basketball in her life. "You've got to be watching your feet and your arms, because you can't bump into people."

As you could imagine, there aren't many fouls in Granny Basketball. That's because if a player gets three, they must sit the rest of the game — and they can't be replaced.

The Granny Basketball League has teams nationwide, and operates under a different set of rules than a typical basketball game. The floor is divided into three sections, which are designated areas for two guards, two forwards and two centers. Players are allowed only two dribbles per possession, and there is no running or jumping allowed. But these ladies, required to be 50 or older, could sure hurry.

Elise Halvorson, 71, was one of the forwards shredding through defenders on her way to double figures at SSM.

"It helps me in so many ways," she said. "It's made me more agile, it made me lose weight and I just love basketball, and I hate exercise. This is a great way to exercise."

Cheri Sterling, Jane Hale and Judy Lee were a trio of newcomers from Faribault participating, the first of what is hoped to become the start of the second Granny Basketball team in the state.

"Our goal is to get a team, possibly two teams," said Lee, 63, "so during the colder seasons of the year we can practice and play against other teams."

The Bulldogs played an exhibition game at the Mall of America June 20, winning 24-17 in a game cut short to two quarters. The highlight for Erlanson was getting an assist with her two daughters and son cheering her on. But her favorite part of her newfound passion isn't the stats, competition, or the final score.

"It's all the nice people you play with," Erlanson said. "It's the camaraderie, because it's pretty quiet at home."

No jumping, no running, two dribbles and the granny shot; that's the recipe for Granny Basketball, an opportunity for quiet old ladies to make a lot of noise.



Elise Halvorson, 71, goes up for a shot Tuesday at Shattuck-St. Mary's during a Granny Basketball exhibition. Halvorson is a member of the Wanamingo Bulldogs, the only Granny Basketball team in Minnesota. (Bobby Hart/Daily News)



Karen Brant, 69, dribbles the ball upcourt Tuesday during a Granny Basketball exhibition at Shattuck-St. Mary's. Brant is one of the founders of the Wanamingo Bulldogs, who was at SSM to recruit members for another local team in Faribault. (Bobby Hart/Daily News)