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Stansbury optimistic about WKU season

By DEREK BRIGHTWELL THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

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Rick Stansbury, right, talked with Central Hardin head coach Matt Nickell before the dinner started.

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Western Kentucky University men's basketball coach Rick Stansbury highlighted center Jamarion Sharp and point guard Dayvion McKnight as two of the main reasons he was excited about this year's team.

While mostly discussing his 2022-23 team, the Meade County High School graduate did share anecdotes about his time growing up in Wolf Creek and how it informed him as a coach and a player during his appearance Tuesday at a joint meeting of the Elizabethtown and Hardin County AM Rotary Clubs at the State Theater.

He said he might not have been the smartest or most gifted kid, but nobody was going to outwork him. That work ethic, he said, is what he now tries to instill in his players.

Sharp was one such player, as Stansbury recalled the first time he saw the 7-foot-5 Conference USA Defensive Player of the Year. While on a recruiting trip to Hopkinsville High School for another player, the WKU coach noticed the then-7-foot Sharp during warmups and asked head coach Tim Haworth why he wasn't playing.

Sharp ended up in Carterville, Illinois, playing for John A. Logan College before arriving at Western last year and quickly establishing himself as a presence.

Despite receiving many offers to transfer to bigger programs, Sharp decided to return to WKU, much to the delight of Stansbury who touted the big man's loyalty to the program and the trust he has in the coaching staff.

The other player of note from Tuesday's speech was the 2020 Mr. Basketball Davyion McKnight. Stansbury called the Collins High School alumna a "stud" and noted that every other school in the state "missed on him."

He praised McKnight's calmness under pressure, saying he never gets too high or too low in any situation, ideal for a point guard. Stansbury also noted that McKnight's roommate is his son.

Stansbury was bullish on his team, saying "if there are 25 teams better, they must be pretty good" and saying he's not in Bowling Green to just compete with the C-USA, but to compete with established state powerhouses Louisville and Kentucky.

Stansbury also talked to the local coaches in attendance, including North Hardin legend Ron Bevars. Stansbury played against Bevars' Trojans during his final two years in high school. The WKU coach said Bevars' team were tough to play against.

Central Hardin's Matt Nickell, Elizabethtown's James Haire and John Hardin's Austin Jones were also in attendance and got shouted out by and talked with Stansbury before and after the speech.

Stansbury said he'd be stopping by their workouts afterwards.

It wasn't just his basketball program that Stansbury was pitching either — although that was the primary talking point.

After Elizabethtown junior Liz Hanson, who was honored as the Rotary Club's student of the month, said she was still weighing college options, the WKU coach pitched her on all the benefits of Bowling Green as opposed to the other schools she was considering.

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