Ray Harper Feature

VFTH

3/15/12

It’s been an unbelievable run for WKU’s Hilltopper basketball team.

The man at the center of the team’s success is new head coach Ray Harper.

Amy Bingham talks with the coach in this week’s View from the Hill.

Hilltopper Coach Ray Harper is quick to give credit to everyone else---the players, the assistant coaches and especially Hilltopper Nation whom he calls WKU’s “sixth” man. But there’s a reason Harper is being called one of the best kept secrets in college basketball.

“I walk in every day, I walk in Diddle Arena and I can’t believe I’m the head basketball coach.”

Ray Harper’s dream of becoming head coach at WKU started a long time ago.

“It’s a program that I’ve always admired, all the success, the fans it has everything you want in a basketball program.”

“This is where I wanted to play in college, I thought this was my destiny, and unfortunately it didn’t work out that way.”

Instead Harper hit the hardwood in Texas, then closer to home, at Kentucky Wesleyan where he eventually coached as well.

“I wasn’t chasing money, not chasing division one jobs like a lot of guys do. I was happy where I was, I’d look up and see familiar faces.”

It was time well spent at Kentucky Wesleyan where Harper laid claim to seven NCAA coaching records.

“I think some of the best basketball coaches in the country are at the division two NAIA level. The difference is they’re not on national TV, you don’t hear analysts talk about them on a daily basis.”

That’s all changed now with Harper leading his team of seven freshmen straight into the NCAA tournament.

“This group of young men hung in there every day and they were resilient and they believed and that’s why we won a conference championship.”

One person that couldn’t be happier is Harper’s wife of 22 years.

“We’ve been through all this together, just happy to have someone who cares about me every step of the way.”

So how would Coach Harper describe this journey that began on January 7th?

“A roller coaster at an amusement park, a really tough one that when you get off you know you’ve been on a tough ride. Your also smiling, cause it’s been a lot of fun.”

And its only just begun.

Harper’s resume includes four national championships in twelve seasons at Kentucky Wesleyan College and Oklahoma City University.

He says he intends to make the NCAA tournament a regular part of WKU’s schedule every year.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

####