

# English basketball squad enjoys stay

By Jim Cornelius  
News Editor

Basketball may have brought them here, but for Head Coach Steve Pearl of the Southend Swifts from Essex, England, it's really not about the game at all.

"It's nothing to do with basketball," Coach Pearl insisted in an interview with *The Nugget*. "It's nothing to do with basketball at all. We have played some games, but that's not why we're here."

For Pearl, visiting the U.S. for basketball camps with his all-star girls is about broadening the experience and knowledge of his players — and of those they meet. It's about the conversations that go on over lunch or after a game.

"We want them to talk to each other," he said.

Perl noted that the team also hiked Tam McArthur Rim to get a taste of the majesty of Sisters Country.

Basketball may not be the true focus of the Southend Swifts' visit — but plenty of action takes place on the hardwood. The team hosted skills clinics for young players, and played against Sisters High School girls and against Crook County and Mountain View.

The Southend Swifts are an exceptional club. They've had an outstanding season, with no less than four of their teams making the English national playoffs with their three girls teams at the under-14, 16, and 18 age level making the Final Fours. No less than 15 players from those finals are making the trip, including six who were on the title-winning under-16 squad.

It's no easy task building a basketball program in the United Kingdom.

"When you list the top 25 sports in the UK, one through 20 would be soccer," Pearl said. And he wasn't really joking.

Still, basketball has made inroads.

"It's more popular than people realize — but we've got a huge problem with facilities," Pearl said.

There's not much in the way of outdoor courts, and indoor facilities are expensive. That means the club has to make the most out of its training time, and focus on the fundamentals. And Pearl and his coaches are all about teaching and encouraging.

"We have a warm and safe atmosphere for young people," Pearl said. "(Winning) matters less to me than the kid who shouldn't be playing who ends up playing and gets on a championship team."

That, obviously, has been a successful formula.



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

English basketball players hosted a clinic through SPRD.

Pearl coached Sisters Park & Recreation District Executive Director Liam Hughes when Hughes was 14 and an up-and-coming basketball prospect.

"We tried to sort his feet out," Pearl said with a smile.

The connection between coach and player has lasted for years, and enabled Pearl to bring his squad to Oregon twice for an unforgettable experience.

And for Pearl, the experience is what it's all about.

"It keeps me sane," he said. "It's given me a huge amount of joy."

## Adding names...

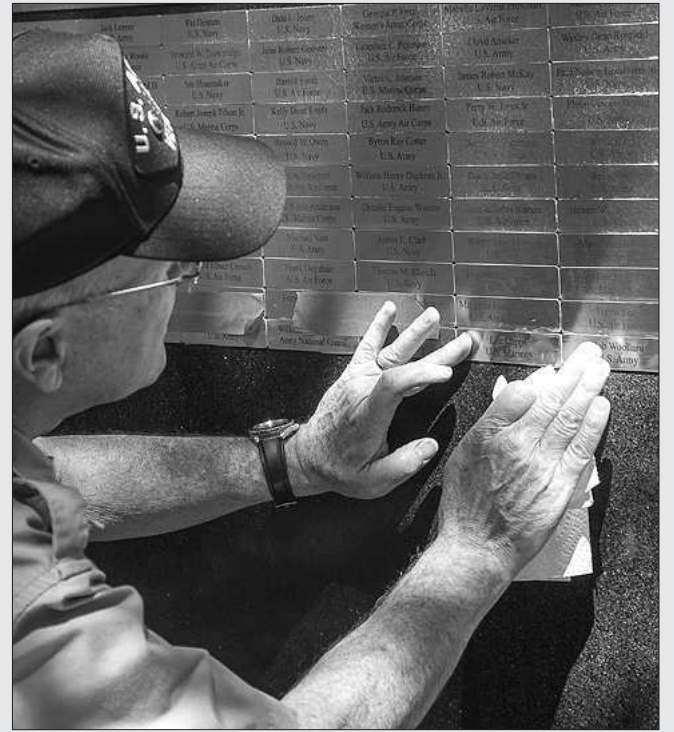


PHOTO BY GARY MILLER

Ed Beacham adds names of recently deceased Sisters veterans to the memorial stone at the Village Green Park. The adding of departed veterans' names is an annual tradition administered by Lance Trowbridge and Sisters veterans organizations.

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