

500 victories, and counting

Cascade coach Mark Stevens has touched many lives

PETE MARTINI
STATESMAN JOURNAL

TURNER — For Mark Stevens, it's always been about the journey, not the destination.

The hard work, the sacrifice, the camaraderie.

It has been a long journey for the Cascade girls basketball coach, who joined an exclusive club Tuesday when the Cougars beat Newport, giving Stevens his 500th career victory.

"For me, it means stability and the length that I've been able to survive this process," said Stevens, who is the fifth girls basketball coach in state history to reach 500 wins. "Being able to stay at the same school, being in the same system. It hasn't gotten old. It's still fresh. Just the body of work."

Stevens joins Brad Smith (629 — Oregon City), Gary Lavender (544 — Sheridan, Lake Oswego), Marty Stallard (519 — Myrtle Point) and Dave Wakefield (532 — North Clackamas Christian, Damascus Christian) as the only girls basketball coaches in state history to reach 500 career wins.

"Being a part of the 500th win is definitely a great experience," Cascade junior Halle Wright said. "Especially with my whole family growing up in the Cascade community. It was pretty cool to be a part of it."

Stevens is in his 27th season as head coach of the Cougars, who are 12-0 this season and ranked No. 1 in the OSAA Class 4A girls basketball rankings.

Stevens took over as coach of the Cascade girls basketball program in 1990, replacing his wife, Ruth.

Throughout the years, Stevens has kept a simple philosophy: "This is not for everybody. We appeal to kids that don't mind working hard and handle a little bit of constructive criticism. Our numbers have never been huge, but generally speaking, we got the right kids out all the time."

Wright said that Stevens is an intense coach, but also allows his humor to help him relate to the players.

"He's funny because he has his moments where he's so intense, and he has that little vein popping out when he gets mad," Wright said. "But then he has these moments when he's joking around with you. So it's always fun to have that coach who can joke around with you, but in certain moments he can be serious when he needs to."

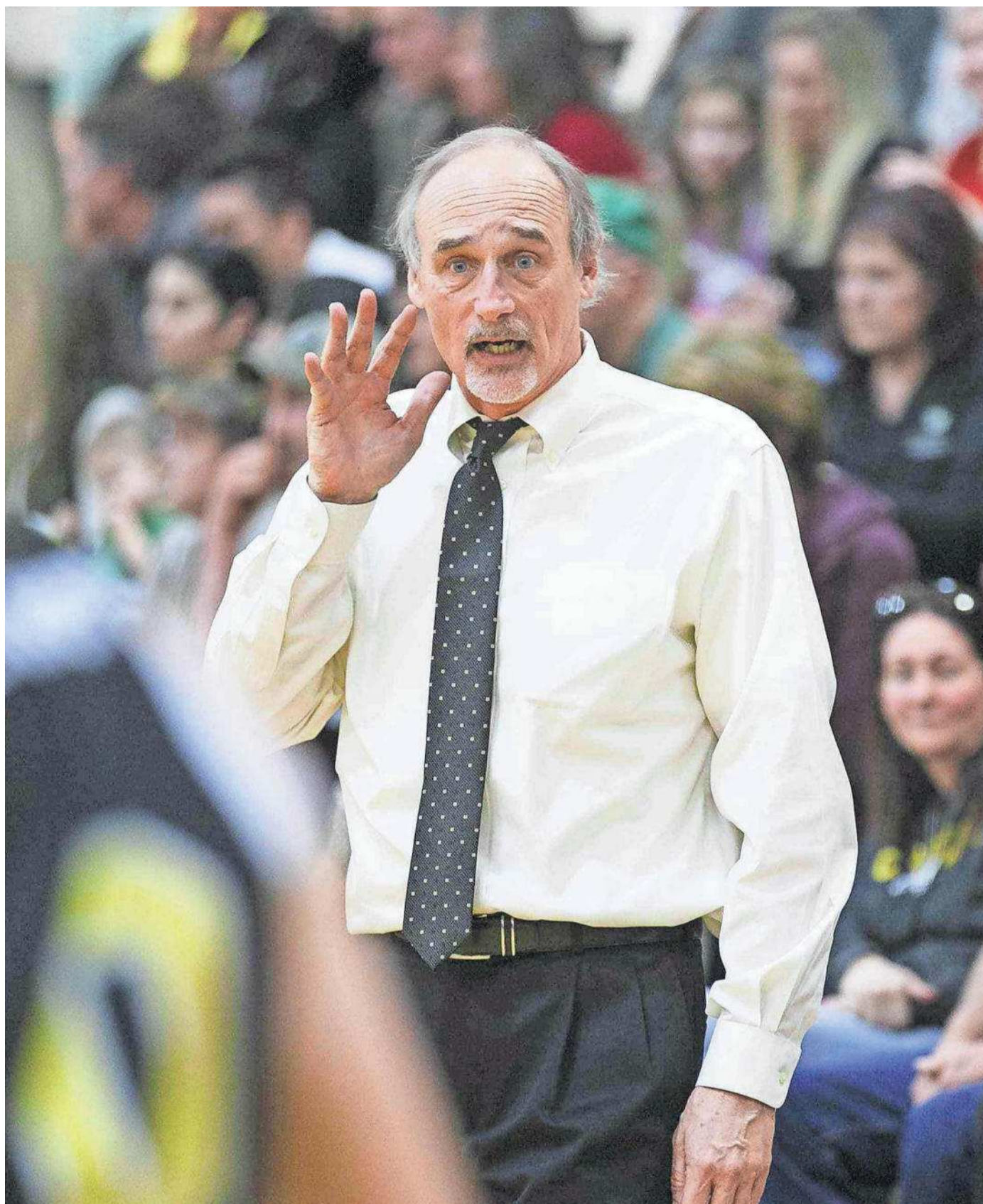
Travis Newton, who has worked as a Cascade girls basketball assistant since 1995, said Stevens has had a significant influence on his life.

"I wouldn't be the father I am or the coach I am without him in my life," Newton said. "He changed things for me that I've never really told him before, but he's made me the father and coach I am today."

During his career, Stevens has led Cascade to five state championship games, including capturing the 2011 state title.

Tava Lewis, who was a key player on the 2011 championship team, said it was important for the players that year to win a title for Stevens.

"I know that Mark had been in some championship games before and the outcome hadn't been what they wanted, so we really wanted it for Mark. Obviously,



MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

Cascade Coach Mark Stevens directs players against North Marion on Feb. 23, 2016.

we wanted it for ourselves too, but we really wanted him to have a state championship," Lewis said. "He makes you want to work hard. He pushes you, and he's inspiring with all the experience and knowledge he has. Everybody likes him. He's just a really fun guy to be around. Since I graduated, I've visited him a couple times, and he's been a great mentor and always has good advice."

Stevens enjoyed the experience of winning the state championship in 2011, but for him, he did not need to win that one game to validate what he's done at

Cascade.

"Obviously, winning a state championship puts something extra on your head, I'm not sure what it is," Stevens said. "It's those kinds of things that make people say, 'oh, you are a good coach because you won that one game.' Like in football, you have to win the Super Bowl or you're not that good."

Stevens said he still loves coaching at Cascade and doesn't know when he will retire.

"I'm pretty sure teaching-wise I'll be done next year," said Stevens, who teach-

es P.E., weight training and health. "And the basketball thing, I don't know. I enjoy it. I've always told myself I don't want to be one of those coaches that retires and leaves the program empty. I'm saying this, but whether I do it, I don't know. I would like to hang in there. I'll just have to see."

"In retirement, you want to stay busy," Stevens added. "What do you do in Oregon in the winter? I'll probably coach something, even if I get out of this. I think I could go help in the junior high. I'll probably be in a gym somewhere."

Bigger is better for OSU wrestler Crawford

GARY HOROWITZ
STATESMAN JOURNAL

CORVALLIS — Oregon State's Cody Crawford made a decision in early November that renewed his passion for wrestling.

A 197-pounder throughout his college career, it had become increasingly difficult to make weight.

Crawford, a three-time state champion at Cascade High School, was at a crossroads. Spend the 2016-17 season cutting weight or make the jump to heavyweight, which has a 285-pound weight limit.

Crawford got down to 200 pounds in early November, but "that's when I hit that wall and couldn't make weight."

Since that point Crawford has added 45 pounds of muscle to his 6-foot-3 frame and has grown into a legitimate heavyweight with solid results. Heading into Monday's dual meet against No. 17 Stanford at Gill Coliseum, Crawford is 16-5 with three pins and is ranked No. 17 nationally by The Open Mat.

A season-ending knee injury to OSU all-American heavyweight Amarveer Dhesi, who placed fifth in the NCAA Wrestling Championships last season, meant that Crawford's move filled a void for the Beavers.

Crawford said even if Dhesi had not been sidelined, he was on his way up to the heavyweight ranks.

"It's the best decision I ever made," said Crawford, a redshirt junior from Turner. "On the road I get to go eat now. The worst part of the sport by far is cutting weight."

But that is no longer an issue for Crawford.

OSU coach Jim Zalesky, now in his



SCOBEL WIGGINS

Oregon State's Cody Crawford (top) competes in a match against Michigan earlier this season.

11th season, supported the move.

"Wrestling's not about cutting weight, it's about getting to the ideal weight class," said Zalesky, a three-time national champion during his collegiate days at Iowa.

Dhesi said he is "100 percent" on board for returning next season as a senior, which could translate into an interesting battle at heavyweight. He is considered a contender to represent Canada in the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

Crawford is keeping the focus on this season.

"I'm not too worried about that right now," Crawford said of the 2017-18 season.

Neither is Zalesky.

"You have to have good competition," Zalesky said. "If something happens to

Dhesi or something happens to (Crawford), you've gotta have a backup. That's a good problem to have."

Dhesi, who had surgery last month to repair a torn ACL in his left knee, remains close to the wrestling program and is around to offer Crawford advice if needed.

"He knows what to do," Dhesi said. "He looks like an all-American."

Crawford's 32 wins in 2014-15 rank fourth all-time for OSU freshmen. He won the Pac-12 championship at 197 and won two matches in the NCAA tournament.

Last season Crawford went 19-14 coming off a shoulder injury and placed third in the Pac-12 championships, but did not qualify for nationals.

A return to nationals is definitely on

Crawford's to-do list, albeit in a different weight division.

Although Crawford is at a weight disadvantage against some heavyweights, they often can't match his quickness.

"I got up to 245 so I'm feeling good, strong," Crawford said. "I've still got my speed so I feel like I have an advantage there with my endurance, speed and strength. It's all good."

Crawford said he's most effective on the mat, but Zalesky would like to see him take more shots on his feet.

"He's actually real good on his feet, but he doesn't believe it. He doesn't take his shots," Zalesky said. "He's got skills that most heavyweights don't have."

The more experience Crawford gains at heavyweight, the better he'll be for the Pac-12 championships Feb. 26 at Stanford. OSU is the five-time defending conference champions, but will be hard pressed to repeat this season.

In addition to Dhesi's absence, two-time NCAA qualifier Ronnie Bresser (125) is redshirting this season. Crawford, junior Joey Delgado (149) and sophomore Corey Griego (197) are the Beavers' only nationally-ranked wrestlers.

"We're working hard and getting better each day," Crawford said. "We always peak towards the end of the year."

Stanford figures to be the Pac-12 tournament favorite.

Crawford's wrestling career will end after next season, but the human development and family science major plans to stay in the sport as a college coach.

"Wrestling, I've done it my whole life," he said. "I wanna give back to the sport and the community I came from."

ghorowitz@StatesmanJournal.com, 503-399-6726 or Twitter.com/ghorowitz