

Mapleton from 1B

grader Bellamy said as she stole the ball Jack was holding. "My real name is Violet, but all the people call me Bellamy."

Why did she like stealing the ball?

"Because it's fun and the only thing I can do well."

Bellamy didn't want to play basketball when she got older, she said. She was at camp just to have fun and take the ball.

Jude, however, was there to hone her skills. "It's my favorite sport and I'm trying to get better at dribbling and shooting," the second-going-on-third grader said. "I love to shoot hoops and play against people."

So far in the camp, Jude had learned to dribble between her legs, dribble behind her, "and I also learned to dribble with both hands," she said. "Left hand, then right hand. Then one hand."

Her favorite part of the game was trying to keep the ball away from kids like Bellamy, who just want to steal the ball.

"I don't know if when I grow up I want to be a basketball player, but definitely I want to play in high school," she said.

And that is the whole point of the camp, which had 35 kids register, equal to one-fifth of the entire Mapleton Elementary School program.

"We're rebuilding the basketball program," said Mapleton High School science teacher Lou Burruss, who organized the camp. "The school is new and beautiful. We also want the programs,



JARED ANDERSON/SIUSLAW NEWS

Mapleton first-grader Violet, aka "Bellamy" (left), works to steal the ball from fellow elementary student Jack. Both were among 35 kids who registered to participate in last week's basketball camp hosted in Mapleton.

and what we offer to kids, to be equally great."

The Mapleton basketball program has had tough times as of late. It went through 57 straight losses before it finally won two games this year.

"Two and a half years without a win," Burruss said. "It's been a long time."

The boys' program has been more up and down.

"This year, they lost a handful of games by a basket or two. It was really close, and if it had gone

the other way — they would have gone to state. But they're still in the process of building a long-term sustainable program."

There are two main problems facing the program, with the first being enrollment.

"Small school," Burruss said. "As an example, the fifth-grade class has one girl. That just happens sometimes, where randomly there will be sections where there aren't that many kids. That puts a lot of stress on a program to try and maintain longevity."

This is not to say that the 1A level of the school is a setback. In fact, Burruss sees it as an advantage.

"You can be small and still be a really successful basketball player," he said. "It's not like playing for Marist or South Eugene, where if you're not 6' 2", don't even bother. Basketball is a combination of skill and athleticism, physicality and intelligence. It's a nicely balanced game as it demands all those things of you. But because it has all those different facets, it allows you to be successful taking different paths. You can be a cerebral player and be successful. Or you can be an athletic player and be successful. There's opportunity for all sorts of kids."

The real issue facing the program is the lack of interest in sports at an early age.

"What we realized is, in order to close to gap at that level, we have to have a youth camp," said Mapleton football coach Jeff Greene, who volun-

teered to help with the basketball camp. "We've got to get them started early, so that at middle school/high school, we can teach them more like strategy. Xs and Os, that kind of thing, rather than working on the fundamentals. They've got to have the fundamentals. Not having a youth program a while back, you can see it. The fundamentals are not as sharp as they should be. It's just not there yet. So high school coaches have to spend more on fundamentals than other things that matter. We need to get it into their DNA when they're little."

Youth sports camps, the kinds that focus on instilling sports ethics in elementary-aged students, had been absent from Mapleton for more than 20 years.

"For a long time, if you were a kid who wanted to play basketball, there was no organized basketball until you were a sixth grader," Burruss said. "That's really late to build skills and love for the game. There may have been individual kids who had an older brother to play with, but in terms of getting a whole group of kids excited and talented? That was challenging."

Greene noticed the same trend. "To like sports, you've got to develop it early. If you don't have that, and you get these kids up in middle school and high school, there's no desire. If you've never really done it, you don't have anything to relate to. If you're not good at it because you didn't do it when you were little, then you don't want to do

it. Usually, if you don't like something, it's because it's hard or you're not good at it. The interest goes away a lot faster."

And in the age of instant gratification, where hard questions can be quickly answered with a search of a smart phone, interest is even more fleeting.

"If it's hard, they're not going to want to do it," Greene said. "Being good at something means getting good at it. Sports teaches that it's not handed to you. Hopefully they learned a work ethic from mom and dad, that if you want to be good at something you have to work at it. It's like the player you are now and the player you want to be. How do you get there? If you don't want to work, you aren't going to get there."

And in sports, you have to work with each other.

"There's less interaction with kids than there was before cell phones," Greene said. "You know, social media, video games. If they're off their phones, doing something healthy, it's the interaction that they're developing. Communicating face to face rather than with a text. It's nice to have something in the summer they can do, and something that's fun for them. And they can work on these skills."

So, over the past few years, Mapleton has been rebuilding the programs.

"Last year we had nine youth teams, going from kindergarten little league all the way up to sixth grade where 50 kids participated," Burruss said. "A lot of those kids are here playing basketball this week."

Recent graduates stayed around to help coach, and Mapleton teachers such as Greene and Juline Walker signed up as well. Dan Gray, who coached basketball in at Siuslaw High School for over 20 years, also stepped up.

As did the community. The basketball camp was able to get a \$500 grant from the Mapleton Community Foundation to feed the kids lunch. After discovering the high school gym was closed for repair on the floor, the local Lions Club donated the use of their facility. And school staff, including High School Principal Brenda Moyer, remained throughout the day to make sure the camp ran smoothly.

And the results appear to be working. Second grader Zachary used the camp to get out of the house during the summer.

"I want to play with my friends," he said when asked why he was there. "I like basketball and I'm super fast. I can go super fast when they try and go to the hoop and I can try and steal the ball when I'm running super fast. I steal people's ball in soccer, too. My favorite sport is soccer."

As for building Mapleton's basketball program? First grader Tinsley is already hooked.

"It's my favorite sport," she said, wanting to play on the high school team when she grows up. Her favorite part of the game is shooting the ball.

"You have to spin the ball when you shoot," she said, lifting her arm up and tilting her hand. Perfect form for Mapleton's athletic future.

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