



Lodi High
School Girls
Basketball
takes their
game to a
higher level
with BFS

The *Lady Flames* Heat Up the Court

Photos by Jerry R. Tyson, jtyson-photo@sbcglobal.net



Ask any number of high school coaches when was the last time they worked only 40 hours in a week, and they'll usually respond with laughter. Better laughter than leaving: Ever-increasing responsibilities and relatively low pay at this level are difficult challenges, and high school coaches are burning out a lot quicker than they did in the past. For girls basketball coach Erin Aitken, however, that's not a problem she's likely to face anytime soon. Winning championships and post-season honors are providing all the motivation she needs.

Aitken is having the time of her life as the head coach of girls basketball at

Lodi High School, in Lodi, California. This school must make quite an impression on its students, as approximately half the teachers at Lodi, including Aitken, are Lodi graduates – in fact, the girls junior varsity coach at Lodi, Cal Krienke, was Aitken's high school coach! With such a history of loyalty and enthusiasm, it's only natural that last season the Lady Flames had an undefeated season in league play, with a 23-5 overall record.

To gain insight into Aitken's, and Lodi High School's, success, we contacted Coach Aitken, who took time out to answer all our questions.

BFS: Was it awkward at first

coming back to a school that you had graduated from?

AITKEN: No, actually I was very excited. To me this was a dream come true, and besides, it's great to relive your playing days and the coaches you played for.

BFS: How did you get involved with BFS?

AITKEN: BFS Clinician Mark Beckham did a clinic for us, and it really helped the football team. Now other sports are using BFS, and it's really taken off.

BFS: Was there resistance at first from your girls about weight training?

AITKEN: The first thing I emphasized was technique; but when the girls started going up in weight, many of them were apprehensive. I remember that as the girls started working hard and getting stronger, there were ridiculous rumors going around in school

that they were all doing steroids; so I decided to have the girls work out at the same time as the football team. Since then, the attitude towards the girls lifting on campus has been positive.

BFS: Is dealing with the parents of the athletes a major challenge?

AITKEN: Although it's true that parents can drive some great people out of the profession, I think for most of us the toughest aspect of the job nowadays is the time commitment. You have to put in a lot of time and energy to make a program successful.

BFS: Do you believe that you have an advantage over a male coach in coaching girls?

AITKEN: Yes, in the sense that I believe it's important for girls to have good female role models. And because I can demonstrate the lifts and I'm not bulky, that helps deal with the myth about lifting making girls big and

muscular.

BFS: Do you think it's a mistake for a girl who shows talent in one sport to participate in specialized sport camps and additional leagues in that sport?

AITKEN: Obviously, I want my teams to win, but I also want these kids to enjoy other sports. Other than weight training, I do very limited sport-specific activities with my athletes. I do have players who go and play in AAU, but I think this leads to overtraining and burnout.

BFS: How important is it to participate in these camps and leagues to get more exposure to college scouts?

AITKEN: I believe if you have talent, people are going to know about you and you don't have to spend thousands of dollars to be on competitive teams. If there is a specific college that one of my kids wants to try to get into, I tell her to go ahead and go to



Emphasis on warming up properly, using perfect technique and paying strict attention to proper spotting explain much of the success of the Lodi High School Basketball Team.



Coach Erin Aitken led her Lady Flames to an undefeated season in league play.

that school's camp – I'll even contact the coach for her to help set it up. I've also found that college coaches want to recruit all-around good athletes, not just basketball players – they want to see how you move on a soccer field, say, or a volleyball court.

BFS: Do you believe there is a misconception among many athletes about the opportunities to get an athletic scholarship?

AITKEN: First, you have to look at how you define scholarship. An athlete may say they are getting a scholarship, but maybe that scholarship is just paying for their books. But again, unless you're a major talent, it's better just to be a multisport athlete and enjoy the high school experience.

BFS: Have you had to deal much with injuries with your athletes?

AITKEN: We had one sprained ankle this year, and she was a transfer student who had had no weight training experience. The last major injury we had was three years ago: A girl tore her ACL, but this girl had just started weight training with us. Other than that, girls basketball has had no other injuries. I believe this is due in part to preventative measures, such as doing

the BFS program and using ankle braces.

BFS: Ankle injuries are common in girls basketball. Is there any specific exercise you believe is especially important for the sport?

AITKEN: I really love the Dot Drill for females because it's a single-leg exercise and develops ankle strength and balance. I also believe that plyometrics helps strengthen the ankles, and obviously the weight training is important. For auxiliaries for basketball, I like snatches and push presses.

BFS: Do you believe that females have such a high rate of knee injuries, especially ACL tears, due to their anatomy or due to a lack of proper conditioning?

AITKEN: I believe it's a combination of both, but more so a lack of strength training in getting the ideal quad-to-hamstring ratio. Also, girls are much more competitive now, and often this leads to overtraining, which can cause injury.

BFS: Besides fewer injuries, have you noticed anything different in the way the girls play that might be attributed to your strength and conditioning program?

AITKEN: One thing I've really noticed since we started the BFS program is that we don't have nearly the amount of tied-up balls that cause jump balls. It's unbelievable the number of tied-up balls you have at the high school level, but our girls are getting the loose balls because they are strong enough to literally rip the ball out of opponents' arms. And the weight training has been tremendous for the confidence level of the girls – they are more willing to take risks. I constantly tell my players, "If you can squat 200 pounds, are you trying to tell me that those girls can knock you out of the way?" And they kind of look at me and say, "Yeah, Coach, you're right!"

BFS: Do you do anything special to motivate your athletes?

AITKEN: I do a personal record chart, and I have a record board that is put up for the public to encourage the girls to work hard in the weightroom. And I have T-shirts that say "Lift to Win." In April I brought Coach Beckham in for a Be an 11 clinic, and that helped them set goals and got them fired up to win.

BFS: Are other sports doing well at Lodi?

AITKEN: Our football team has made a huge turnaround over the past several years, and we only have three varsity teams that didn't win league this year. It's pretty amazing.

BFS: How does your girls basketball team look for next year?

AITKEN: We're really excited because nine of our 11 players are returning, and we'll have four seniors on the team next year. We feel like the sky's the limit! **BFS**

Jill McMillen



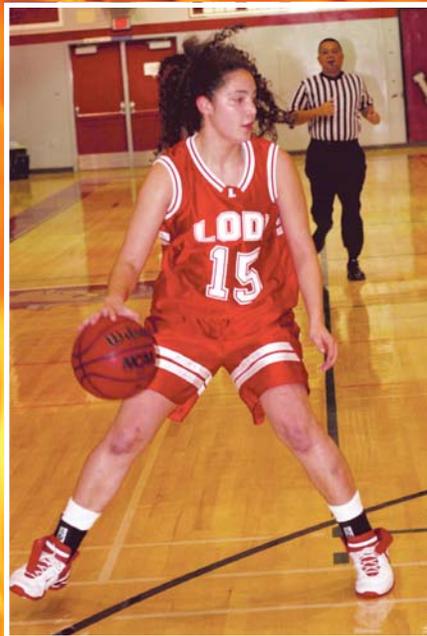
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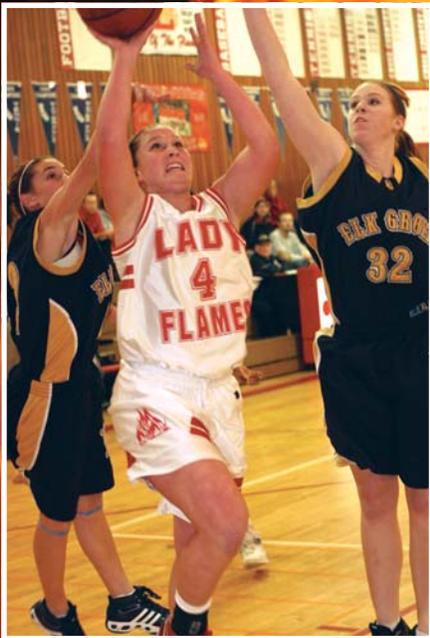
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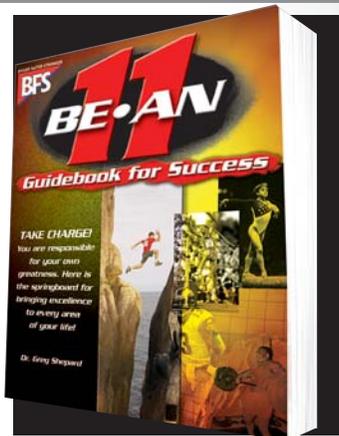
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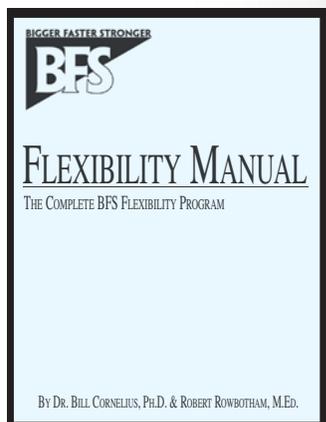


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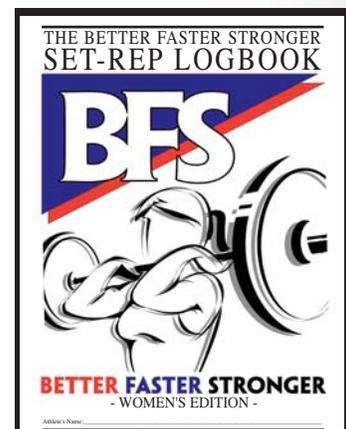
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