

FORREST PARK GETS TO THE LINE AND MAKES FREE THROWS; NOAH MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

It was last spring when Tom Beach attended the Indiana Basketball Coaches Association clinic in Indianapolis. There he spotted John Carter managing a display booth for Noah Basketball.

Intrigued, Beach approached Carter and was shown a demonstration.

"Like a lot of coaches who watched it, I was very interested," said Beach, varsity boys head coach for Forest Park High School in Ferdinand, Ind. "I immediately signed up to receive a free clinic at the school."

It wasn't long before Carter, CEO of Noah Basketball, was at Forest Park, which is located between Evansville, Ind., and Louisville, Ky. The gym was packed with players, parents and the boys and girls coaches.

"You heard a lot of 'wow' and 'Ooh and Ahh,'" Beach said. "John let every player shoot on the Noah (Select System) and worked with them a bit. He then gave the result printouts to the parents. We were all like kids in a candy store."

When Carter departed, members of the Rangers basketball program huddled up. The consensus was unanimous.

"Everybody was in agreement that we needed to get a Noah," Beach said. "The only sticky part was raising the money to buy one."

It was decided that Forest Park would finance a Noah, pay half the cost upfront and

pay the other 50 percent over the next 12 months.

To raise some of the money, players, parents and coaches worked a picnic hosted by a local company. They served food and drinks, supervised rides and even worked the cotton candy machine.

"We provided the manpower for the event," Beach said. "For our efforts, we received a check for \$1,500."

The rest of the down payment came from the parents who each wrote a check.

"It kind of shows you how much we believed in Noah and how much we wanted one," Beach said.

It also shows what a community can do when it comes together to accomplish a goal.

Forest Park received its Noah just before last summer. The players worked with it throughout the searing months, familiarizing themselves with Noah and slowly becoming better shooters.

"I believe in fundamentals," Beach said. "If you can shoot the ball and guard somebody, you have a good chance of winning. I'm always looking for ways to improve those two things. I think Noah is something that really helps kids."

It's not like Forest Park was a poor team before the Rangers worked with Noah. In fact, the team posted a 14-7 record in Class 2A.



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But just this past season after using Noah in practices and during the offseason, the Rangers improved their record to 19-6 and advanced to the Elite Eight of the state tournament.

Beach bluntly credits Noah for the progress of the program.

"I think the difference between the two seasons is we got to the line and we made free throws," Beach said. "I know in the sectional championship, we had a five-point lead when it got to the point where our opponent needed to foul us. We just walked up to the line and hit the free throws. We won the game by nine."

One player who perhaps benefited the most from Noah was Casey Van Winkle, a 5-foot-10 senior. Van Winkle was simply the team's best defender, but also its worse shooter, especially from the line.

That created a dilemma for Beach, who wanted Van Winkle on the floor to guard the opponent's best offensive player, but also didn't want him touching the ball on offense.

Van Winkle started the season shooting 55 percent from the line. By the end of the year, he had moved that mark above 75 percent. Van Winkle became so confident with his shooting that by the state tournament, he was calling for the ball.

"I definitely wanted the ball," Van Winkle said. "I knew I was shooting free throws well at the end of the year and I knew I was going to knock down the shots."

In the sectional championship game, Van Winkle hit 5-of-6 free throws in the fourth quarter.

"Good free throw shooting does help you become a great team," the senior guard said. "I definitely believe Noah helped us get better."