

Cover Story | Family Tradition

Siblings Patrol The Sidelines For A-H Hoops

It was the night of Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2013.

There was a high school basketball doubleheader between West Sioux, Iowa, and the hometown Alcester-Hudson Cubs. It wasn't a new matchup. The teams had routinely played each other in non-conference action.

If anyone had been paying close attention, though, they would have seen Kevin Kunz — the varsity boys' head coach — step in as a varsity girls' assistant for coach Shannon Hames.

Brother and sister were, for the first time, on the same coaching staff, albeit for only one game.

"It was really nice of him to do that," Hames recalls during an interview at Alcester-Hudson High School, where both teach math and also happen to coach basketball.

"It was fun." That night, the Cubs handed West Sioux a 58-53 loss, marking the first win for Alcester-Hudson over the Iowa school since Hames became the coach five years earlier.

"I don't know if we could do it all the time," Kunz joked. "We'd probably struggle each other."

Joking that her brother likes to take credit for that victory, Hames was asked if she'd return the favor someday and sit on the bench as a boys' assistant coach?

Kunz was quick to point out that it almost happened. "We were close to that a couple years ago, actually," he said. "My head assistant was sick, and her husband (Matt Hames, Kunz's assistant) wasn't sure if he'd be able to make it to the game."

Instead, the Parker natives and Mount Marty College graduates have staked their own coaching claim



Story And Photo By Jeremy Hoek

while at Alcester-Hudson — Kunz for five years prior at Menno High School.

Kunz, the oldest of two years, began his coaching career as an assistant boys basketball and football coach at Menno, where he later spent four years as the head football coach and two years as head basketball coach. He enters his third season at Alcester-Hudson in 2014-15.

Hames, meanwhile, went right from college into the head girls' coaching posi-

tion at Alcester-Hudson, and has since won 53 games in six seasons.

It just so happened that her brother was hired as the boys' coach in Alcester, enabling the siblings to fulfill a dream since high school.

"We always talked about that if we could somehow get a job at the same school, we'd have fun," Kunz said. "We both teach math. We can run our own department, I guess you could say."

That's the thing about

these siblings. When they're not juggling practice time at the gym, they're also teaching — they routinely spend time together in each

other's classrooms — and they happen to live across the hall from each other in the same apartment building.

"Even when we get away from school, we're still, what, 12 feet away from each other," Kunz said.

Basketball, though, is the passion that binds them.

Coaching girls versus coaching boys presents different challenges, but having a sounding board who also happens to be a sibling allows them to share ideas, they said.

"She'll throw an idea at me and I'll think, 'Eh, I don't know,'" Kunz said. "And then you see it at a practice or at a game, and you think, 'Wow, I was wrong.'"

Plus, there's not a fear of a brother or sister sugar-coating their true feelings, Hames added.

"It's nice to throw those ideas off him, because he'll be honest," she said. "I like that honesty as teachers or coaches. You don't have to worry about over-stepping."

"But let's be honest, we do get tired of each other sometimes," she added, with a smile.

Many of their breaks between classes at Alcester-Hudson, the two can be found in the same room, either working on lesson plans or defensive schemes — typically, it's the latter, Kunz joked.

"We're not afraid to tell each other no," Kunz said. "Sometimes with other people, it's tough to handle that."

"With the two of us, it'd

like, 'No, that's a terrible idea, Shannon.'"

As time has passed, their coaching styles have understandably evolved, but so too have their personalities on the bench.

"When I first started, I was excitable," Kunz said. "You get worked about things all the time, because you think you have all the answers."

"Shannon's a lot more calm than I am during a game," he added. "You can tell when I'm really frustrated or upset; I'll suddenly get quiet."

Whenever Alcester-Hudson has a basketball doubleheader, Hames can be found sitting in the stands watching the action — her game is over and she's had time to reflect. But she still makes sure to watch her brother in action.

"Yeah, Kevin's a pacer, and that's when it happens," Hames said. "He might not show he's angry, but if you really pay attention, you can tell right away."

Barring some unforeseen illness, it's unlikely that either would step in as an assistant for the other. But if it did happen, they're ready.

"Once you're a head coach, you think it'd be hard to go back to being an assistant," Kunz said. "But I think if I had to go back, she'd be the only one I'd be an assistant for."

You can follow Jeremy Hoek on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoek. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.

Our 'Family'



Sports Editor James Cimburek (left) and Assistant Sports Editor Jeremy Hoek (right) can't be everywhere, so it helps that we have four 'kids' willing to juggle their school and/or other job to help us out. They are (from middle left) Nick Robinson, Ben Hegge, Rogelio Rodriguez and (inset) Adrienne Kusek.



Each of them has stories in this preview section. We also have stories from our "extended" family over at the Vermillion Plain Talk, who handled all the Tanager previews for this section.

PHOTO BY ROB NIELSEN/P&D

1, 2 & 3 are with our cover features about families of coaches. 1) Kevin Kunz and Shannon (Kunz) Hames, brother and sister coaching basketball at Alcester-Hudson; 2) Chris and Tara Gubbrud, a husband and wife who are head basketball coaches at Bon Homme; and 3) the Fitzsimmons family, which has a father, two children and the wife of one of the children all serving as head coaches at different schools.

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