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Lions' 10 seniors leading by example in final season

by [KYLE PARMLEY](#)

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Photo by Erin Nelson.

Briarwood's Ryan Donohoo (4) shoots a 3-pointer during a game against John Carroll Catholic High School on Jan. 10 at John Carroll. Briarwood defeated John Carroll 55-48.

More often than not, a basketball team leaves its most lasting impression on an evening filled with flawless execution. The coach's game plan is followed to perfection, as the team hits shots and plays with great defensive intensity.

None of those things happened for the Briarwood Christian School boys basketball team the night of Dec. 13.

After ripping off eight consecutive wins to start the season, the Lions were humbled in a 70-67 home loss to Calera.

Following a typical home game, regardless of the outcome, the players will briefly help head coach Bobby Kerley clean up a few things around the gymnasium before heading home.

That didn't happen after this particular game, though. What transpired is something Kerley claims he won't forget.

"All the parents leave, all the students leave, and I'm sweeping the floor and cleaning the bleachers," Kerley recalled. "They're playing. The balls are out. They're shooting. They're dribbling. We have the shooting gun out, and they've got that hooked up. They're working."

It was a Friday night, so there wasn't an immense amount of pressure on the players to get home after the game ended around 9. Kerley encouraged the players who remained on campus to stay as long as they wanted while he went downstairs to analyze the game film.

Instead of leaving after a short time, a handful of those players made their way downstairs and asked Kerley to open the weight room shortly after midnight. They then sat down with their coach and watched the second half of that night's film together.

"For them to do that, unprovoked, it's a pretty cool deal," Kerley said.

The likes of Hayden Lamey, Ryan Donohoo, John Elliott and Sam Russell finally left the school around 2 a.m.

"Those are good, sweet moments that you'll remember," Kerley said. "I'll probably at some point forget we lost that game 70-67, but I will never forget Hayden Lamey, Ryan, John Elliott, Sam Russell sitting in chairs at the football coaches' table and watching film and hearing, 'Oh, I'm so sorry coach, I won't do that again.'"

Thankfully, those late nights haven't come often, because the Lions are winning games at a high clip during the 2019-20 season. Much of that is due to the 10 seniors on the Lions roster, a group that has raised the bar for a Briarwood program attempting to return to the regional tournament for the first time in 20 years.

Briarwood's typical starting five is exclusively seniors: Blake Lester, Donohoo, Lamey, Chance Beard and Russell. Four of those players have been in the Briarwood basketball program since seventh grade. Beard began playing again in ninth grade after focusing on football for a few years.

"The addition of Chance was really helpful for them," Kerley said. "In junior high, they were good. We always struggle with rebounding, and Chance helped that."

Beard was a quarterback in junior high and served as the varsity team's backup quarterback as a sophomore before deciding to play just basketball. Just a couple years later, he has earned a scholarship to play basketball at Spring Hill College.

"He caught the basketball bug in ninth grade," Kerley said. "He's got a lot of natural ability, a natural athleticism and coordination, but he just worked and worked and became a great player."

Donohoo is a sharpshooter with elite court vision, according to his coach.

"He's always been a great shooter. He was coming to our basketball camps when he was little," Kerley said. "Now, physically, he can do what he sees. He's been terrific."

The Lions have three captains, but Kerley calls Lester the "captain's captain." His older brother played basketball at Briarwood, and Lester has established himself as a steady point guard, consistent in making the right decisions with the ball.

Russell is the "glue that holds us together," Kerley said. He fills the stat sheet on a nightly basis despite hardly ever being one of the team's top scorers.

"His goal is set the school record in charges, and we don't even have that one," Kerley said.

Lamey is a product of hard work, having ascended from "just another" player to one that is the defense's top priority every night. He aspires to play college basketball, and Kerley believes his work ethic will help him achieve that goal.

"The reason he's gotten to that point is because he's never been satisfied with where he is," Kerley said.

Stetson Ponder moved to the area this year and plays a role as a post player. Cal Reebals is a standout football player who makes a seamless transition to the basketball court. He is a defensive menace, often guarding the opposing team's best scorer.

Chase Travis is another football player who is a "tough, hard-nosed kid" who has gotten comfortable shooting the 3-pointer this year. Josh Jones took a one-year hiatus from school ball before returning to the team for his senior campaign.

The road to the regional tournament won't be easy, as the Lions have been forced to navigate a tough area consisting of Ramsay, Woodlawn and John Carroll just to get to the sub-regional round.

Kerley anticipates senior night being one filled with emotions. He tries not to think about it much and cherishes the opportunities he's had to tell "dumb old coach Kerley stories" at 1:30 a.m.

"You just hope that they can taste the success they deserve," he said.

Blake Lester John Elliott Cal Reebals Sports Boys Basketball Chase Travis
Ryan Donohoo Bobby Kerley Sam Russell Stetson Ponder Chance Beard Hayden Lamey
Basketball Briarwood Christian High School Briarwood Basketball

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