

American Profile

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On the Brink

LETA ANDREWS poised to become the nation's winningest high school basketball coach

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I thought that this article might
be of interest to you!

With love
Theresa

On the Brink

Leta Andrews
poised to become
nation's winningest
high school
basketball coach

// BY ALAN ROSS

COACH LETA ANDREWS slams a basketball onto the gymnasium floor at Granbury (Texas) High School and yells at the top of her voice: "Go after it! Get it!" as two Lady Pirates scramble to grab the bouncing ball.

"Now finish! Finish it!" shouts Andrews, 73, urging the player who snatched the ball to put it into the basket. "I will not tolerate mediocre work!"

Throughout preseason drills, the demanding coach commands the full attention and effort of her players, chastising her charges one moment,



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encouraging and supporting them the next, in hopes of preparing them for success both on and off the court.

As she begins her 49th season as a coach, Andrews is on the brink of achieving her own remarkable feat—becoming the winningest high school basketball coach in the nation. Beginning the 2010-11 season with 1,328 career wins, Andrews is poised to surpass the record held by former Fort Worth (Texas) Dunbar High School boys' coach Robert Hughes Sr., 81, with 1,333 wins.

"I don't know what I'll do (after breaking the record), but I will be thrilled to get it behind me," says Andrews, who in June was inducted into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Tenn. "Then I can relax and just go on and play basketball. The only important win to me is the next one."

Barnyard hoops

Andrews' passion for the game was kindled more than 65 years ago on her parents' farm eight miles north of Granbury. Alba and Clyde Rains knew the value of hard work and passed that ethic on to their four children, including Leta. Initially, however, Leta had another profession in mind.

"I thought I would grow up to be the next Dolly Parton," she says, recalling how she crooned to cows and chickens while doing farm chores before and after school.

A suggestion from her father, however, directed Leta to another pursuit. "I think you need to put that singing on the backburner and start playing some basketball," Clyde told his daughter. "There's a basketball over there; I think you ought to start dribbling it."

And dribble she did, practicing on the gravel road in front of their house. "I became a pretty good ball handler, because the ball would hit a rock and I could go and move with it," she recalls.

Before long, Leta asked her father for a basketball goal, and soon after, he proudly presented his work—a backboard and hoop mounted to the chicken coop. The skilled dribbler rapidly became an expert rebounder—out of necessity.

"When I shot that ball I didn't want it to hit the ground," recalls Andrews, who shared the barnyard with a flock of chickens, "because you knew what it would land in."

After practicing barnyard hoops with her older—and taller—sister Shirley, the two



// Coach Andrews watches as two Granbury (Texas) Lady Pirates scramble for the basketball during preseason drills.

helped lead Granbury to the Texas Class A championship games in 1954 and '55. Later, Leta played at Weatherford (Texas) College, where she studied to become a schoolteacher.

Incredible career

Andrews landed her first teaching and coaching job in 1962 at Tolar (Texas) High School, followed by stints at Gustine and Comanche high schools, also in central Texas.

In 1965, her coaching skills advanced following an impulsive phone call to the legendary Adolph Rupp, then head men's basketball coach at the University of Kentucky.

"I just called him one day and asked if I could

fly up and study basketball with him," Andrews recalls. "He said, 'I'd love for you to.'"

Rupp taught her basketball basics, such as the location of the passing lanes and to abandon the bounce pass, which is difficult to control and too easily stolen.

After her first stint at Granbury High School from 1976 to 1980, Andrews coached for a decade at Calallen High School in Corpus Christi, Texas, where in 1990 she guided her team to her one and only state championship. In 1992, she returned to Granbury, and she has coached there ever since.

During her coaching career, Andrews has amassed 34 consecutive seasons with at least 20 victories, taken 14 teams to the state tournament, and in 2005 became the nation's winningest high school girls' coach, surpassing Cleveland (Tenn.) Bradley Central coach Jim Smiddy.

"Her coaching style drives the players to succeed where they might otherwise not," says Rick Mauch, 51, sports editor of the *Hood County News* in Granbury (pop. 6,808). "She put this community on the map."

Granbury has shown its appreciation: Andrews' name graces a water tower in town; the

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If the Granbury (Texas) Lady Pirates win six of their 25 games this season, Andrews will become the most victorious coach in American high school basketball history.

smaller or slower than somebody else, if you give enough effort you can beat them every time."

As Andrews nears another coaching milestone, a widening circle of young women forms around her. They have become clarions of the principles and tenets of a coach who has instilled character through the game of basketball.

"Everything she teaches and talks about, you take with you," says Mandy Hayworth, 33, assistant girls' basketball coach at Arlington (Texas) Seguin High School, who played for Andrews at Granbury from 1992 to 1996. "She always said what builds character is what we do when nobody's looking—what we do in our jobs, with our families, with friends, how we treat people."

For Andrews and her young players, it's a win-win situation. ★



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court in the high school gymnasium also bears her name; and her face even has appeared on the cover of area phone books.

"She is the sweetest, most adorable human being you could know," Mauch says. "You can't always see that when she's yelling at an All-American guard, but that's the coaching side of her. Once the game is over, she's the first one to go up and hug that player. When a player graduates, she's waiting right there when they walk off stage, or she'll be the first one to be at that person's wedding."

Building character

While Andrews retired from teaching in 2001, the wife and mother of three daughters doesn't plan to quit coaching anytime soon. She continues to conduct two basketball camps each summer because she enjoys working with and molding young players.

"I want these young ladies to taste the fruits of success," says Andrews, the 1993 Disney Outstanding Teacher of the Year, who also coordinates girls' athletics at Granbury, "and you've got to work in order to do that."

Senior guard Hayley Jordan, 17, clearly understands Andrews' work ethic. "She teaches you to give all you've got," Hayley says. "Even if you're



COURTESY OF WOMEN'S BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME, KNOXVILLE, TN

Basketball's Big Winners

Coach

Career wins

Robert Hughes Sr. 1,333
Dunbar High School, Fort Worth, Texas

Leta Andrews 1,328
Granbury High School, Granbury, Texas

Morgan Wootten 1,274
DeMatha Catholic High School, Hyattsville, Md.

Jim Smiddy 1,217
Bradley Central High School, Cleveland, Tenn.

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