



The DCA Lady Warriors had much to celebrate this season. (Photo by Chris Zollner)

# DCA girls’ success will again have lasting effect

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For the second straight season, the Danville Christian girls’ appearance in the Girls Sweet 16 has changed lives.

A year ago, Grace Mbugua became the target of coaches at some of the country’s top college programs because of her performance in the Lady Warriors’ biggest game to that point.

And after DCA advanced to the semifinals of the state tournament in their return trip to Rupp Arena last week, it’s a safe bet that some other Lady Warriors will draw increased attention as well.

It’s much too early to know what will come of that, but it’s also reasonable to assume that, just as was the case with Mbugua last year, college coaches who knew little or nothing about some of her top teammates are going to be calling about them.

“They will, and they already are,” DCA coach Billy Inmon said.

Those coaches will call asking about Alaya Quisenberry, who had 42 points, 18 assists and four steals in three tournament games to cap the one and only year she spent at DCA after transferring from Danville.

And they’ll ask about Amauri Blackford, who finished her sophomore season by racking up 21 points, 22 rebounds and three steals in three games.

“They’re talking about Alaya, and looking back on the season I feel like (she) is underrated. What she did against (Sacred Heart in the semifinals) was super impressive,” Inmon said.

“And Amauri already has

some offers but I think she’s going to get some bigger offers.”

They might also make a note to keep an eye on Nadya Abrams, the eighth-grader who averaged 10 minutes off the bench in the tournament.

“I think that she’s going to play big-time Division I basketball. Her defense alone would be something that any college coach would love to have,” Inmon said.

And they’re already been asking about Shuna Deng, the 6-9 freshman who appeared in four games after becoming eligible in February. She played only about a minute in the Sweet 16, but college coaches knew about her before she ever took the floor for DCA.

After all, they don’t see 6-9 every day.

“They call about Shuna about every two weeks,” Inmon said.

Inmon said several of the players’ lives have changed in other ways at least in part because of their time spent at DCA and on the basketball team. At least three girls became Christians, one rededicated herself to the faith and all were baptized.

“Those are the things that are important,” he said.

**MBUGUA’S SWAN SONG**

No matter how long Inmon continues to coach, no matter who he coaches, he doesn’t expect to see another player like Mbugua.

The 6-5 senior finished her high school career with a flourish, posting 70 points, 43 rebounds, 14 blocked shots and five assists in three games, and she scored her 2,500th career point in her final game.

She almost certainly owns the vast majority of the girls basketball records at DCA, and her name will go into the state record book in a couple of places following a stellar five-year career with the Lady Warriors.

“I’ll never coach another girl like Grace,” Inmon said. “She’s just one of those that is just special, and it doesn’t take long (to see that).”

Mbugua was the reason Louisville coach Jeff Walz called Inmon early in the morning after their late-evening game at last year’s Sweet 16, and she ultimately signed with the Cardinals in November.

According to statistics submitted by the school to the KHSAA, Mbugua will leave DCA with 2,507 points and 1,810 rebounds and per-game averages of 20.5 points and 14.8 rebounds over 122 games.

Her totals would have been much higher if not for two shortened seasons. DCA played only 17 games in the truncated 2020-21 season during the COVID-19 pandemic, and she missed 13 of 35 games this season while recovering from knee surgery.

She is one of about 80 girls to reach 2,500 points in Kentucky, and her rebound total ranks in the top 10 in state history.

She was honored Sunday as the 12th Region girls player of the year and a Miss Basketball finalist.

“There’s never going to be another one like her,” Inmon said, “and the impact she’s made on the school and on this program and on those kids, you can’t measure it.”

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