

Wagner has great memory of his 500 wins

Jay Schneider
Life/Enterprise

If you ever have the chance to sit down and talk basketball with WEM boys' basketball head coach Jeff Wagner, you better have a lot of time.

Wagner is considered an encyclopedia of local hoops knowledge.

After winning his 500th career game Friday, Feb. 1 against Hayfield, Wagner became the 13th active coach and 45th all-time coach in the state to reach 500 wins in his career. His winning percentage of 72 percent is 9th among the 45 coaches with 500 wins.

With 25 years of coaching under his belt, you would think he may forget one or more of those teams, but Wagner can give you names, records, conference finishes, and post-season finishes of probably all of his teams.

"Which team do you want to know about," Wagner said with a smile. "I remember them all."

Whether it be that first win 25 years ago or the most recent win against Blooming Prairie Friday, Feb. 8, Wagner can tell you something about each and every team.

"I've been fortunate to coach some many teams which have had a lot of great kids," Wagner said. "And I have had great support from the kids, the community, and the program under me. There is so much support from the people."

WEM teams have won an average of more than 20 games a year since Waterville-Elysian and Morristown combined more than 20 years ago. Before then, basketball did not have much success at Waterville-Elysian.

Wagner remembers when he started coaching in the the

early 1990s there were teams that won only a game or two. Waterville-Elysian was known for its outstanding wrestling, not basketball.

Wagner said in 1994 this changed, with the Buccaneers winning their first Gopher Conference Championship, first Sub-Section Championship, and advance to the school's first Section Championship.

Since then, Wagner-led teams have advanced to State twice, placing second in 2000 and third in 2011. They have also claimed nine Gopher Conference Championships.

It was hard for Wagner to acknowledge one team as his favorite. But he did mention the 2000 team which won a pair of games in the Class AA State Tourney and placed second to undefeated Litchfield that year.

DeLaSalle was the Buccaneers' semifinal opponent and WEM defeated this team which featured three Division 1 football players, a Division 2 basketball player, and a player who spent many years in the National Basketball Association.

Wagner talked about the many great players he has had a chance to coach. He didn't want to specifically point them out because he has fond memories of all his teams and players. But he did make mention of one player who reminded him of that first year he coached.

Waterville resident Jeff Frodl, who coaches one of the school's elementary basketball teams, was a member of the team that scored Wagner his first win.

"I am proud to be a part of this milestone," Wagner said. "But that many wins really dates me. This isn't about me. I is about everything that gets to me and me not screwing it up."

Top active Minnesota boys' basketball coaching records

1. Ken Novack (Hopkins)	861-150
2. Dave Galovich (Crosby-Ironton)	718-338
3. Jeff Wall (Anoka)	635-295
4. Steve Phillion (Red Lake County)	574-462
5. John Oxton (Lakeville North)	573-300
6. Dave Cresap (Perham)	566-250
7. Mark Klingsporn (Tartan)	565-251
8. Vern Johnson (Win E Mac)	537-370
9. Terry Knothe (St. Charles)	535-381
10. Mark Torgerson (Morris)	516-291
11. Mike Devney (Duluth Denfeld)	508-188
12. Jeff Evens (Bloomington Jefferson)	502-290
13. JEFF WAGNER (WEM)	501-191
14. Tom McDonald (Ely)	493-196
15. Mike McDonald (Cambridge/Isanti)	462-428
16. Gregg Preston (Hillcrest Academy)	457-192

Forty-five coaches have reached 500 career wins. Robert McDonald (Chisholm) is the leader with a 1012-428 record. Robert Brink (Rocori) is second with a 936-327 record. Novack is third, Ziggy Kauls (Mounds View) is fourth with a 739-357 record. Galovich is fifth. These five are the only coaches with more than 700 wins.

Big-time cars in little Kilkenny

Lisa Ingebrand
Montgomery Messenger

Classic cars from across the nation are rolling into the little town of Kilkenny, Minnesota.

Their destination? Knish Kustomz, a small, two-person shop on the edge of town.

The custom upholstery business is owned and operated by 2005 Waterville-Elysian-Morristown graduate Dan Knish, whose intricate work has been featured at car shows, in magazines, and on television.

"I've always been a car guy, and enjoy doing what I do," Knish stated. "It's both challenging and rewarding."

After graduating from high school, Knish studied automotive trim and upholstery with collision and refinishing at WyoTech then worked seven years at an auto upholstery shop in Savage. In 2012, he opened his own shop at his home.

"I was doing side jobs for people in my parents' basement while I worked in the cities. Pretty soon, I got so busy with side jobs that it made sense for me to start doing it on my own, full-time," he explained. "I worked in a one-stall garage/shop for a few years, then expanded that and finally after 10 years of working in the field, was able to build a 5,250 square-foot shop, which has now been in operation for two years."

The shop comfortably holds up to seven cars. Knish has one full-time employee, Bill Schriefels, and a part-time employee, Karen James.

In addition to creating custom seats for motorcycles and reupholstering boat and snowmobile seats, the team builds entire custom interiors, including everything from the dash and seats down to center consoles and arm rests.

"We're busy. There are about 10 cars on our waiting list," Knish explained. "Most people don't understand how



Craftsmen Bill Schriefels (left) and Dan Knish design and create everything that comes out of the shop.

much time it takes to design and build a full interior from scratch. It doesn't come together all at once. There's a lot of design time, taking things apart, and trying it again--making sure everything fits and looks right."

Often times, the cars come in looking great on the outside, but completely gutted, waiting for the Knish Kustomz team to work their magic.

"Sometimes, people know exactly what they want, which is fine, but we're mostly known for custom stuff, so most people just tell us to do what we think is best," Knish explained. "If a customer is unsure of a design or an idea--or if I'm concerned about their color choice--I'll draw up a couple designs or sew up some samples to show them. Usually, they go with what we suggest."

Knish's first big job was designing and creating a new interior for a 1939 Chevy sedan for a gentleman in Waterville.

"I was still working in the city when I took that job. I worked on it when I could--

all winter, really," he explained. "The car has been sold since then, but I still see it around every once in a while."

As more people saw Knish's work, the more business rolled his way.

"We recently had a Chevelle that we redid the whole interior on sell at Mecum, a televised car auction. Soon after that a guy who had seen the car on T.V. called in saying he wants the exact same interior in his car," he stated. "That's the business... One car guy talks to another or you see something you like on another car and go from there."

Knish created another fully custom interior for a man from Oregon. The customer arranged for a transportation company to haul the car to Kilkenny then flew in periodically to check on the progress.

Among the long list of custom interiors--and the farthest traveling project--was an interior of a Starsky and Hutch replica car for a man in Australia.

"We meet a lot of interest-

ing people, and see a lot of cool cars. You never know what's going to show up next," Knish stated.

One current project is the upholstery of new seats for a 1956 Ford station wagon. "The guy said, 'It's a hot

rod,' so we're going with bolstered red and black seats. We tried something new as well, double-piping in red. I think it looks great!" he commented.

Another project in Knish's shop is the reupholstering of two modern GTO seats for a 1966 GTO. It will take approximately one hide of leather per seat to finish the job. The car will get four bucket seats and a custom-built, center console that flows from the dash all the way through the car's interior.

After deciding on a design, the old seats will be disassembled, new leather will be selected and patterns will be cut and pieced together.

"It's not as time consuming as actually building the seats, but it's not quick work," he stated. "It's pretty much all hands-on."

The Knish Kustomz team uses in-house industrial sewing machines, a CNC router table, a 3-D printer, welding and wood working equipment, an engraving laser, and other in-house equipment to

achieve their final designs and products.

Knish has now been in business long enough to notice trends. For the last five years, crocodile and ostrich seats were in high demand, especially for motorcycle seats. Now, it's more about the details--diamond stitching and sharp, clean lines.

The addition of cup holders and charging ports are also popular requests.

"Most of these old cars didn't have cup holders, but we rearrange things and make sure to get them in if they want them. Who doesn't want a cup holder these days?" Knish added with a laugh.

As spring approaches, the Knish Kustomz team is gearing up for their busiest season.

"Any day it's warm or sunny out, our phones go crazy with calls for jobs," Knish stated. "Everyone wants their projects done--big or small--so they can enjoy them, and so do we. We take pride in our work."



Intricate diamond stitching created by Knish Kustomz.

Houlihan from 1

of land is 182 Ridge Road NE.

* Houlihan was appointed to the Economic Development Authority. Jim Tatge was named the Emergency Management Director and Derek Westby was named the Assistant Director.

* The council approved the purchase of a new city truck at a cost of \$26,802.93 after a \$10,500 trade value

for the city's current truck.

* The bid of \$190/acre by Rich and Pam Fischer for the lease of approximately 12 acres of tillable land owned by the city was approved. The lease for this land runs for three years.

* The city-wide clean-up day will be Saturday, May 18.

* The council will be reviewing information about

the Tobacco 21 Ordinance.

* A request by the Waseca County Hockey Association for a lawful charitable gambling license for gambling at Tucker's Tavern was moved to the March meeting. The Association did not present a plan for this meeting but should have one ready by the March meeting.

Best from 1

Sarah, who is the daughter of David and Cherie Best of Elysian, plans to attend the University of Minnesota, Morris, and pursue a degree in Mathematics.

Best is an honor student. She currently carries a perfect 4.0 grade point average. She has been a State

Champion in Speech and is a three-time State Speech entrant. Best also participates in one act play, choir, cross country and track and field. She is a two-time cross country in league-sponsored athletic and fine arts activities.

Established in 1988, the Academics, Arts, and Athletics Award (Triple "A"

Award) is sponsored by the Minnesota State High School League. The award goes to high school seniors who have a "B" or better grade point average and who participate in league-sponsored athletic and fine arts activities.

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