



# HARRISBURG ACADEMY SPARTANS

## THE BIRTH OF ATHLETICS RIVALRIES THROUGH THE



When Claire Mackin '16 takes to the court as the Girls' Varsity Basketball team's starting point guard, she has one thought in mind — contributing to a win that, ultimately, will advance the team to PIAA District playoffs. Although intense high school sports rivalries often ignite this competitive drive in an athlete, Mackin and her teammates' taste for victory started years ago, when they competed in — and twice won — the Central Pennsylvania Basketball League's (CPBL) championship as Middle School students.

But before 2010, this championship experience did not exist for Middle School basketball players at the Academy or any other school in the area. John Martin, Middle School director of athletics and Middle School Girls' Basketball head coach, had a bold vision and a plan.

"In the spring of 2010, I had just finished coaching my second season," he said, "and I wanted our basketball players, both girls and boys, to experience something more than what they were getting at the time. I wanted to give them an experience really unique to this level of competition and to our school; I wanted them to have the opportunity to play within a league, develop rivalries, and play for a championship."

Martin worked out preliminary details and approached the Jewish Federation of Greater Harrisburg, Carlisle Christian Academy, and Grace Baptist Christian School about forming a new Middle School league with Harrisburg Academy. He believed that although different in methodology and pedagogy, these four schools shared many similarities; and he knew their athletics personnel had the same vision as he. The group met and moved forward with excitement, creating the CPBL, committing to scheduling each other twice during the regular season, and organizing an annual playoff series to conclude the year.

"I think that the parents, administrators, and kids understand the teams in our league are in it for the same reasons, the right reasons," said Terri Travers, sports and fitness director at the Jewish Federation of Greater Harrisburg.

"This league gives the kids something to play for.

"But while everyone loves to win, there's a real emphasis on sportsmanship and improvement, both on and off the court," she continued. "The like-minded mission of all four of our athletic programs is to see the betterment of these kids and to teach them the right way to do things."

In its three seasons of existence, rivalries have indeed grown, but competition has remained balanced. Only two of the league's eight teams have not played in a championship game, and in 2013, three of the four schools had a team competing in one of two championship games in front of a packed crowd in Louis Lehrman Gymnasium.

Of the CPBL games to date, Martin recalls his favorite: his 2011-12 Middle School Girls' championship game versus Grace Baptist.

"We split the wins with Grace Baptist during the season, beating them at home without Addison Kirkpatrick, their best player on the floor and later, losing to them away with Addi playing," Martin said. "Addi was taller than our girls and very athletic. In the championship, we had to score on this team's tough defense and shut down this key player to win — and we did it! It was close the entire game, but we pulled away at the end. Lauren [Kusic '18] played really tough defense on Addi. Having Lauren, a 6th grader at the time, step up and play such a vital role in winning a championship... you can't find that anywhere else.

"This is exactly what I was hoping to create when I initiated this league," Martin continued. "I don't think when we started it, I had any idea how great it would be. When the greater community thinks about Harrisburg Academy athletics in general, I hope this is just another demonstration of our competitive program that teaches students about the greatness of winning, the agony of defeat, and the importance of winning and losing with character.

"Having this experience at the Middle School level, in particular, is priceless," he said.



*Lauren Kusic '18 plays defense against  
Grace Baptist during the 2011-12 season.*

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