

## Girls' JV basketball team ends with a win over Harrisonville

By Briana Coen



*Mahalia Lewis, sophomore JV girls' basketball player, dribbles around her opponent.*

JV girls' basketball team ended the season February 21 with a 42-34 win on the road against Harrisonville. The girls finished the season 9-5 under the direction of Randy Florence.

Florence, who has coached for 23 years, said the girls played well as a team and improved on free throws, offense and executing plays throughout the season.

The team's weakness, according to Florence, was their defense.

"They just didn't play defense as well as I wished they would," Florence said.

Excelsior Springs was the team's toughest opponent, according to Florence, because they were young, meaning the team will have several returning players next season, and they were big. Even though they were a tough team, the girls defeated them 35-32 on January 31 on the Tiger's turf. The girls also defeated the Tigers 53-42 on February 19 on their home court.

Kennedy Kleoppel, sophomore guard, said the practices were difficult, but it helped prepare them in the long run.

"I think we've come a long way as a team, and we have also gotten closer as friends."

Kleoppel's favorite game was the December 17 game at Holden.

"We lost (39-43) against Holden, but it was a great game, definitely one to remember."

Kleoppel said they went into overtime, and Brittany Affolter threw up a shot and made it at the last second.

"I love Coach Florence," Kleoppel said. "He knows his stuff. He has a lot of passion for the game, but he's also really easy to talk to. He helps me when I have problems in or out of basketball."

"I love the sport and my team," Kleoppel said. "They've made this season my best so far."

"I absolutely adore Coach Flo," Mahalia Lewis, sophomore guard/wing, said. "He knows how to get along with every single girl on the team, but he still gets the respect he deserves as a coach."

Lewis's favorite game was a 42-29 win on the road against Oak Grove on January 18.

"It felt so good to win against our rivals, and everyone was just so ballistic the entire game," Lewis said.

Lewis believes their team has developed throughout the season by communicating more and working to understanding each player more.

"Those two things," Lewis said, "helped us win our games."

Lewis said she believes she has improved as a player this season by not getting as frustrated as she used to get and by not getting as mad at herself when she would make a mistake.

"I've learned that I need to move on and forget that mistake," Lewis said.

Florence, who is assisted by his daughter, Tori, said he enjoys coaching with her, and it is a "totally different experience" than when he was coaching her as a player. She is currently enrolled at UCM.

"When she was a player, I used to yell at her when she did things wrong, but now as a coach, it's more about teaching her how to coach," Florence said. "It's a great opportunity."

Florence, who also coaches varsity girls' softball, said he loves coaching for Odessa. He said it is sometimes difficult to coach and not work at OHS. Florence is a sheriff's deputy at the Lafayette County Jail.

"The downfall is that I'm not able to see the kids everyday that I coach," Florence said.