

February 27, 2003

## Sports Commentary

## Psychologist teaches team to visualize its potential

Once a week, sports psychologist Andrew Jacobs breaks from his private practice — The Winning Edge — in Kansas City, Mo., and drives to Lawrence.

It's not an unusual trip for Jacobs. In fact, he used to make the 43-mile trek from his office to Allen Fieldhouse more often. Back in the early '80s, Jacobs became Kansas' first-ever sports psychologist.

In 1984, he assisted the U.S. Olympic Cycling team, using his experience in mental preparation to springboard the squad to nine medals. Over the years, he's worked with the Kansas City Royals and far too many professional athletes to name them individually.

Now, he's back in Lawrence at the request of two women he befriended some 20 years ago.

Those two — women's basketball coach Marian Washington and assistant coach Lynette Woodard — remembered the quality of Jacobs' work and the mental inspiration and guidance he provided. They also, before this season, knew the 2002-2003 basketball campaign could challenge them beyond their capabilities.

They are great coaches. Washington won her 550th game earlier this year, but delving into the mental aspect of basketball is not their specialty, nor is it expected to be. And to be blunt, this year's squad absolutely needed direction in that area.

So much goes into coaching a successful basketball season, far more than the simple X's and O's on the court, and Washington should be commended for searching outside help.

After all, it's not easy to guide a proven scorer when she spirals into a shooting slump; or introduce players to one another and expect them to trust each other immediately; or advise a player on an academic or personal problem; or work on visualizing success.

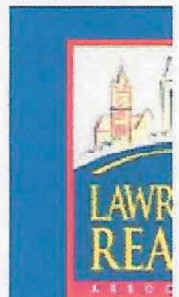
Washington reigns over most of the country's coaches in those departments. Her recruits and players echo each other about how Washington doubles as a quasi-mother in addition to their coach. But even Washington was overwhelmed at the start of the season. So

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Lawrence  
is a great idea





Washington called Jacobs, hoping he would work with her team part-time. He enthusiastically accepted.

"I went in with goals of helping the young ladies develop on the court and helping them improve issues that may be affecting their performance," Jacobs said. "Also, a lot of the girls had not dealt with losing before, so that was also an issue."

And though in-state rival Kansas State beat the Jayhawks by 23 points last night, the team has taken large strides in improving its mental makeup. Jacobs has operated on a consistent schedule, speaking weekly to every player individually before addressing the entire team.

He speaks of maximizing talent by trusting teammates, attacking school work with the same ferocity as the basket and seeing before doing. He suggested a new approach to free throws that included relaxing, deep breathing, visualizing and, finally, releasing the ball.

At first, the players were apprehensive. How much can this mental mumbo jumbo really work? But slowly, they've come along. Now, they embrace their weekly time with Jacobs, picking his brain for new ways to better themselves.

"As one of a lot of freshman coming in,

we really didn't know how to play with each other," freshman forward Tamara Ransburg said. "He was real honest with us, told us the truth about our team and how we needed to get better. Now we trust him with everything, basketball and our emotional feelings."

What Ransburg feels speaks right to the heart of Jacobs' work. He most wants to see his effort pay off. He longs to see Kansas in the NCAA Tournament for years to come.

And once the Kansas players' minds catch up to their talent levels, those tourney appearances will make Jacobs a proud man.

### **Malashock is a Omaha, Neb., senior in journalism**

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