

## A league of their own

Cornerstone school created a league to serve its kids — and the community's

By Calvin Bratt  
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LYNDEN — This started out as Darryn Kleyn's way to get some athletic competition for the kids at Cornerstone Christian School. As principal and athletic director, he didn't want to have teams traveling to Seattle and the San Juan Island to be in a WIAA small-schools league.

So the Northwest Youth Basketball League was born.

That was eight or nine years ago. At first Kleyn had to work to drum up awareness and sign-ups for the league. No longer.

"We don't have to advertise anymore. Kids know about it through their schools," he said.

The Cornerstone school gym at 8872 Northwood Rd. is the place where the games are played on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and evenings. Admission is free, and bleachers can seat a crowd.

Cornerstone, with 36 high school students this year, contributes its varsity and junior varsity boys teams and at least one girls team to the mix. That leaves plenty of room for community youth teams to fill in the roster, and it's definitely happening.

This year, there are 15 teams across three divisions — each paying their \$390 fee to play and lining up a coach at least age 21 — and Kleyn believes he could handle even a couple more.

Games of the Northwest

ing consistently high-caliber state-level results — a choice might be made.

"I think it's a pretty great opportunity because some of the girls were not seeing the playing time they wanted," Handerson said of her team. "They love the game and they know how to play. It's just not at such a competitive level."

The format gives each team eight games from December into February. Then there's a single-elimination playoff week, with each of the division winners — boys A and B, and girls — receiving a trophy.

"So each team gets at least nine games," Kleyn said.

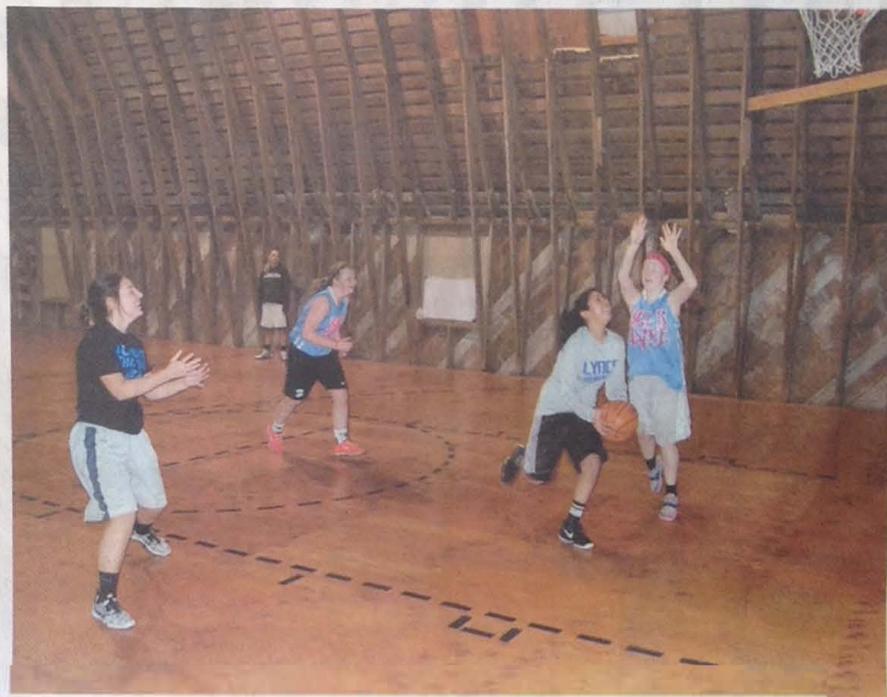
Eighth grade AAU teams are also welcome to sign up for the league.

An active website at <http://www.nwyouthbb.com> keeps everyone in the loop with game results, player stats, updated standings, upcoming schedule and more.

Kleyn said he has been blessed to have several faithful referees doing their job almost from the start of the Northwest Youth Basketball League.

The whole effort pays for uniforms for the Cornerstone players, the power bill and not much more — it's meant to be about break-even, he said.

In basketball-rich Lynden, it's a chance for another tier of young players who "enjoy the game" to form a team, get on the court and test themselves in a competitive yet fun environment, the organizer said.



The Ball Iz Lyfe girls team practices Monday in a created barn loft court of the VanderHaak farm. (Calvin Bratt/Lynden Tribune)

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Colby Flint is on the Splash Bros, team of players from Lynden Christian. "We like to play basketball, but

we aren't super-competitive when we play. We like to have some fun when we play," said the junior.

With practice a few times a week (if they can find a gym) in addition to games, it never gets to feel like a "grind," he said.

Players are involved from the Lynden, Nooksack Valley and Mendocino districts, too.

Although one team won for three years running in the Boys A division, the winning is usually spread "pretty-even" and does not get too "lopsided" year to year, Flint said.

### Remaining schedule

Basketball games are played at the Cornerstone Christian School gym, 8872 Northwood Rd., Lynden, from 7 to 10 p.m. on Tuesdays and 4 to 9 p.m. on Thursdays. Two



Youth Basketball League have become their own popular attraction.

Often now, not just families, but teachers, friends, classmates and even varsity players of other schools will be at games to cheer their buddies on in a fun-focused atmosphere.

Sherry VandenBos, mother of Lynden Christian High School junior Ketta, said she was "shocked" at how much excitement is created in the Cornerstone gym for the hardwood action.

Ketta is involved for the first time this year. Her Ball Iz Lyfe team is coached by Brooke Handerson, who herself played in the league when she was in high school.

Participants cannot be on any other high school teams, according to the Cornerstone league rules. For those who can foresee warming a bench too much for a Northwest Conference school — deliver-



Individual names can be added on uniforms for the basketball action in the Cornerstone Christian School gym. (Courtesy photo of Steve McGilley and Mary Flint)

rounds of 2015-16 games are now completed. Remaining games are on Jan. 5/7, 12/14, 19/21 and 26/28, and Feb. 2/4 and 9/11. The next week is single-elimination playoffs.

### Junior high level

Cornerstone Christian School also operates a basketball league for students in grades 7 and 8. It is made up of grades from Cornerstone, Bellingham Christian, Ebenezer Christian and Skagit Adventist schools.

### Spring volleyball

And there is a high school spring volleyball league with both boys and girls divisions. Registration continues to Feb. 19, 2016, or until the slots are filled. Fees are \$360 per team.

Games will be played on Thursdays March 10 through April, then May 3 followed by a single-elimination playoff week.

Contact dkleyne@cornerstoneschool.us or set up an account at <http://nw.youthvolleyball.com>.