

# Christ the King School hosts hoops invitational

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For an hour, the gym floor at Christ the King School was awash with a sea of yellow and red jerseys as Christ the King battled St. Gregory the Great for the sixth-grade girls basketball championship. Ponytails flopped around as the girls marched up and down the court, passing, stealing and shooting the ball hoping to win Christ the King School's 42nd Annual Invitational Basketball Tournament.

Held from March 3-13, the tournament pits area Catholic elementary school basketball teams against one another in boys and girls divisions from grades four through eight. The tournament is the longest consecutive running elementary school tourney in the state. It is traditionally the final basketball tournament of the season and teams love to return year after year, saying it is a great way to end their season.

"The basketball season ends pretty much the end



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Christ the King's George Kunz drives to the basket against St. Christophers during the boys sixth-grade championship game at the Christ the King gym. CTK defeated St. Christopher to capture the title.



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St. Gregory the Great's Anna Ratchuk (#30 in red) prepares to shoot the ball as the Christ the King team guards the lane during the sixth-grade girls championship game of the Christ the King School 42nd Annual Invitational Basketball Tournament.

of February, so our tournaments cap off the season; sort of the last hurrah," explained Sal Caterina, tournament vice chair and athletic director for Christ the King School in Snyder. "It's an invitational tournament. We get a lot of people year after year asking to be involved. It's almost to a point where we have to turn people away. We put about 2,000 people through the door over the course of the 10 days. It's really fun."

The games include everything a sports fan would want, from Christ the King's badger mascot, to third-grade cheerleaders, to hot dogs and popcorn sold at the concession stand. There is even "God Bless America" sung by the school's young students.

While primarily a fundraiser, the tournament also provides a fun way for kids to interact with each other and learn teamwork. "We think it puts the school in a good light, it's a community service, and it brings to light the great sport of basketball, Christianity and Catholic education," said George Kunz, chairman of the tournament.

Elise Cusack was a third-grade cheerleader

mascot at the very first tournament 42 years ago. Now she's on the board of the Sports Booster Club. All four of her kids have played in the tournament at one time or another. She said Christ the King is "notorious" for basketball.

On Saturday, March 9, six games were played at all age levels. During the finals for the sixth-grade girls, both Christ the King and St. Gregory the Great's teams were equally matched in height and tenacity. In the end, the home team sunk more baskets winning 28-13.

"It feels really good," said Fiona Cusack after picking up her trophy. "I put a lot of effort into this, but I also have fun."

Teammate Amelia Carr finds that playing sports teaches collaboration skills that she can use on other school projects. "I enjoy working together as a team with everybody and having fun," the 11-year-old said.

Most impressive on the team was Nile Burgin, who despite missing her right arm past the elbow, sank a couple two-pointers. "I just take the shot," she simply said of her efforts.