

# A Unifying Force



Jessica Boisclair • Daily Times

Raymond O'Brien of Coventry's unified basketball team prepares to launch a shot from long range yesterday against Warwick Vets.



# Unified basketball teaches lessons at Coventry

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COVENTRY— Coventry Head Coach Stephen McKanna cheered on his Unified Basketball team as they played their last game of the season

Wednesday afternoon against Warwick Vets.

Unified Basketball falls under the Project Unify program, which looks to keep students with intellectual disabilities active through sports and is

endorsed by the Rhode Island Interscholastic League and the Rhode Island Department of Education.

McKanna, who teaches adaptive physical education at the high school,

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Coventry High's unified basketball team members include Joseph Conway, Aimee Flynn, Alexander Souliere, Jessica Jewett, Alyssa Sanderson, Kelsey Ferrara, Alex Bailey, Ray O'Brien, Zachary Smith, Zach Deutsch, Nick Hoskins, Dominic Poettez and Kevin Bertrand. Bertrand is in the center of the photo above.

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# Unified basketball does as name says

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explained that he has been coaching this team for four years and "it's been going great."

"I have most of these kids in my class and it seemed like a good match to become coach," he added. "It's been fun."

He said this is the fifth year the high school has participated in the Unified Sports program and Coventry offers basketball in the spring and volleyball in the fall.

The unified basketball team has eight athletes and four partners who participate in each game.

He explained that the partners are "regular education kids," who typically play

numerous varsity sports. These students volunteer to guide the athletes on the unified basketball team during the season. He explained that the only rule is, the students cannot be varsity athletes in the sport they are participating.

McKanna said the athletes who qualify to play for the team have some type of disability, and they vary in severity.

The season began on March 13 and lasted seven games; Coventry went undefeated.

Assistant Principal Brooke Macomber, along with numerous other supporters, attended the game to cheer on the team.

"I just love coming to watch these games," she commented while on the sideline.

A playoff tournament will be held once

all the teams have finished; but McKanna said he was not sure when and where it would be yet.

Because of the large demand, the league will be expanding next year into Varsity and Junior Varsity divisions, to allow for more students to play.

Zack Smith, 18, has been playing in the league for three years and began his basketball career as a sophomore.

"I love playing," he said. "I've known these students for awhile; some since elementary school. My favorite part of playing is being a team player and playing with friends."

He said he typically practices at home with his brother one-on-one to prepare for his games.