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Photo courtesy SCCC sports website

Former Seward coach Jim Littell and then assistant Toby Wynn work with their team that finished fifth in the nation in 2005. At the end of that year, Littell announced he was accepting the associate head coachin position at Oklahoma State University to work with his friend and incoming head coach Burt Buddke.

Littell discusses Wynn's 100th, cowgirls, son

By EARL WATT

• Daily Leader

EDITOR'S NOTE — The Daily Leader sports department is starting a new feature called the Tuesday Interview. This will be done in a question-and-answer format. The first interview is with former Seward County Lady Saints coach Jim Littell.

Q: Your former assistant just won his 100th game quicker than any coach in Seward County history. What are your thoughts on Toby Wynn's achievement?

A: "It's not a surprise that he has done it in such a short time. His work ethic and passion for the game makes him a special coach.

"Toby's ability to recruit and knowledge of the game will make him a success his entire career.

"I know Seward County and the community of Liberal recognize that Toby is an ultimate winner."

Q: What was Toby's role for you when he was your assistant?

A: "Toby was very involved with that team. It was a team that probably overachieved. He did a great job in working individuals, and developing young players in a short period of time.

"I wanted somebody that would be vocal and would coach, and he just

jumped in and was very aggressive, and that was the way I liked it. "Being a young coach starting out, he wasn't intimidated to jump in and be very active."

Q: Toby finished third in the nation in 2007 with only seven players. How tough is that?

A: "You have to be very intelligent about how you practice with seven players. Toby did all the right things — knowing when to shorten practices, to get days off. He didn't have the luxury when you were up by 30 to take people out. He had to be very smart how he worked his players.

"I thought they were paying their best basketball of the year at the national tournament. His loss was to the eventual national champions. When they played Odessa (in the Final Four), it was the national championship game."

Q: How tough is it for a coach to follow and maintain a successful program?

A: "I don't think it's real easy following a program that has been highly successful. Coach Buddke followed the legend at Louisiana Tech. "Whether it is fair or unfair, you will be compared to previous programs. It does make it difficult at times. I think Toby has handled that as good as anybody can handle it.

"He has his own stamp on that program, he's playing his brand of basketball. We talk some Xs and Os, but make no mistake, that is his program and they continue to be very good over last four years."

Q: Seward recently lost at CCloud. How tough is it to play on the road in the Jayhawk Conference?

A: "Cloud was a tough place. Barton was difficult place to play. There were years where there there weren't many easy stops in the Jayhawk.

"Cloud's always a good opponent for the fact that they are well-coached and a veteran in there that his teams won't beat themselves."

Q: After playing in the tough Jayhawk West, what's it like at Oklahoma State this season?

A: This is a difficult conference. At one time you had four teams, OU, Texas A&M Baylor and Texas all in top eight of the nation. We have to play them eight times. I don't think there's any question the Big 12 is the No. 1 RPI conference in the country, in particular the Big 12 South.

"It's fun, it's competitive, but you better bring your best game, and do the little things every night.

"We struggled first year and went 6-22, the next year we won 20 and was the No. 1 turnaround program in the nation. Last year we won 27 and went to Sweet 16."

Q: How is Seward transfer Tegan Cunningham doing?

A: "Tegan is our second leading scorer but been in a slump in conference play.

"She's getting better all the time. She's really improved her game and continues to work.

"It is big transition from the Jayhawk. That is a great league, but going to the Big 12, whether as a junior college or high school player, there is a transition to go through. She will get through it, but it's not easy playing best players in nation every night."

Q: What kind of crowds do you draw at Oklahoma State?

A: "We've steadily improved. We were probably drawing 1,200 to 1,400 when we got here. Now we draw 3,000 to 4,000 on a consistent basis.

"It continues to get better. The people in the area know Buddke will always put a competitive team on the floor. As the program grows, the crowds will as well.

Q: Your son Jeremy had a great season in football for Stillwater High as a freshman. What was that like?

A: "It was a great year for Jeremy. Here in Stillwater, and a lot of leagues he plays in, junior high is eighth and ninth. High school is 10-12. He doesn't even go to the same building.

"They moved him up and told him he would be the JV quarterback. Early in the year, they were starting to play him at wide receiver. In the second or third game of year, the senior quarterback went down with concussion. Jeremy went in and won six straight, they made the playoffs and beat the No. 5 Muskogee team.

"Then they were in the quarterfinals at Midwest City, ended up losing in last minute of the game.

Jeremy threw for just under 1,000 yards in seven games. Coaches here did a great job of bringing a young player along in a hurry. I think he has a great future.

"John(Littell's younger son) is a seventh grader now, and he starts at quarterback. I think he'll probably take over after Jeremy is done. I think he will start then."

Q: What does the future hold for you in coaching?

A: "I enjoy it here. I work for a good coach who understands family. Coach Buddke has always made it available for me to watch my kids. That is important to me.

"You never say never. We enjoy Oklahoma State and Stillwater. There are times I get an itch to be a head coach again. Whatever presents itself will happen in time. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

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