

Jan. 6 Girls Basketball

With resignation of Mahon, new coach Kelly survives after whirlwind day

By Rich Fisher

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Jan. 6: The alarm clock went off and Lauren Kelly got out of bed to prepare for another typical Friday at Nottingham High School.

Four periods into the morning, that notion got derailed and Kelly was thrust into a day like no other.

In a matter of five seconds, she learned that she would no longer be the freshman coach for the Northstars girls' basketball team. In one of the quickest climbs up the coaching ladder you'll ever see, the former Nottingham standout soccer and basketball player was told she would be the varsity coach, at least through the end of this season.

Katy Vitale will continue as JV coach, Milo McGuire will help on the varsity bench and John Castaldo Jr. moved from the boys program to take over the girls freshman squad.

That was all a result of today's resignation by first-year head coach Leo Mahon, who quit after six games due to the fallout that resulted after he recently dismissed two players from the team. It was a two-day chain reaction that led to Mahon's decision – the result of a long and unfortunate story that is best left between the parties involved.

And while Kelly is not allowed to discuss the events leading up to her "promotion" she had plenty to say about one of the most unique days in her young life.

"You wake up at 5 in the morning . . . this was the last thing I expected to happen," Kelly said with a laugh. "It was one crazy day."

Kelly was called out of her fourth-period class at approximately 10:30 a.m. and told of her promotion. It was the first she knew of Mahon's resignation.

"I only had a couple of minutes to digest the whole thing and then went back to class," she said. "That kept my mind off it, knowing I had other things to worry about. . . like my (students)."

Kelly said the fact she was teaching most of the day kept her from getting too nervous. With assistance from former boys' basketball coach/athletic director Nate Webber, she got some prep advice and was able to meet with a team captain.

"We went over what the plays were, because I was in the dark," Kelly said.

Thus, she relied on captains Imani Alston and Dalia Lopez for help when she took the bench for tonight's home game against Notre Dame.

"They are great girls," Kelly said. "I feel bad for them that they're in the middle of this whole adjustment. I feel bad for all the girls. They were really buying into the (new) system put in front of them and now it's a another complete adjustment.

"I can't say enough about how they played their hearts out. They stepped up tonight."

Nottingham ended up losing, 47-36, to the Irish, as its record dropped to 1-6. But that was a mere sidebar to what went on today.

Kelly survived, however, and now looks forward to doing the best she can in what has to be considered a no-lose situation. She is taking over in the middle of the season with a depleted team, as neither of the dismissed players are being re-instated, and they are two of the top players on the team. No one can expect anything more from Kelly than her best effort.

"This landed in my lap and I didn't have a choice in the matter," Kelly said. "Today was more survival than anything else, getting through this day for the girls and the coaching staff.

“I told them in the lockerroom we start fresh tomorrow. A lot of the things Leo implemented will remain. We’ve got half the season left, I’ve got a different coaching style than him. I have to do things now that will work with team under the leadership of myself, Katy and whoever we have left.”

She is just thankful to have McGuire left as a volunteer assistant.

“He’ll stay on, which is good, it gives the girls some continuity,” Kelly said. “He’s familiar with the stuff Leo ran. Today he was a life saver for me.

“We got through the hardest part – the unknown the unexpected. Now it starts all over again at practice tomorrow at 9 o’clock.”

Provided of course, that when the alarm goes off the day really will go as planned.