



THE TURNAROUND COACHES: R-P's Lance Johnson, OV's Nick Bronsema, Ravenna's Justin Johnson, Hart's Adam Jerry.

from his father, Jim Bronsema, and grandfather, John Bronsema, who were both outstanding athletes.

"The game of basketball has always been gospel in my family," Bronsema said. "The greatest times I had as a kid were going to open gym with the old guys.

"My dad never let me feel sorry for myself when things did not go well. He always said 'Nick, don't ever give up.' Now when I address each player individually, it's basically the same thing. I don't talk to them about where we're at, but where we're going.

"We were very happy to start out 7-0, but we realize it's a process. At any time you can experience adversity, and you have to overcome it. We've already had a lot, but it's made us stronger."

Bronsema said there have been other important factors, as well.

He keeps an unusually large group of five assistant coaches - Doane, who has some great years as the head coach at Saugatuck High School before coming to OV, as well as Bill Bowen, Lotrel Watkins, former Orchard View standout Brandon Keur, and Fletcher Payne-King.

Bronsema also said it's a matter of developing very young talent, even if that means struggling for awhile. Two years ago he called up two freshmen - Edmari Mitchell and Dayton Rose - to build toward the future.

Those two are now juniors who have a lot of varsity experience and provide leadership for the team.

He's continued that trend by calling up other talented freshmen, like Keontae Barnes last year and Darius Williams this season, as well as several sophomores. Barnes is currently averaging about 18 points per game, and Williams leads the team in offensive rebounding, despite being only 5-feet-4.

Besides Barnes and Williams, the other starters are senior Davion Lane, who averages double figures in scoring and rebounding; senior Dietrich Thornton, who runs the offense as the point guard; and senior Brady Bowen, a skilled shooter.

The key to it all has been a lot of hard work on the part of the players, according to Bronsema.

He had a group he called the "fantastic five" who showed up for every team work out over the summer of 2018. Their work ethic has spread to the rest of the team, and all the effort is paying off in wins.

"The more you invest in something, the more it means to you," Bronsema said. "These guys have put the time in, and when they go

out there, they want to get something out of their investment. I really think that has been the difference."

Ravenna isn't just about football anymore

Ravenna has always been, first and foremost, a football school.

With legendary teams over the years, and numerous state championship trophies in the case, thousands of fans turn out every Friday night for home games.

Boys basketball has traditionally played second fiddle at the school, as the fan support - or lack thereof - demonstrated over past years.

For years the Bulldogs would play in front of half-filled gyms, because few people were very excited about a team that usually went nowhere.

But that's starting to change at Ravenna, because the boys basketball team has turned into a contender over the past two seasons, and the community is responding.

"That's something that us coaches talked about when I first started," said Ravenna coach Justin Johnson, who's in his fifth year with the team. "We said that someday we would like to see the kind of crowds we get for football. In the past there was pretty small attendance.

"Now we're definitely starting to see the crowds showing up, and even the last few road games this season we had tons of fans there. It was great. The kids are starting to hear (the support) and feel the atmosphere. To have them experience that is awesome."

Johnson inherited a program with a losing mentality, and it took some time to chase that away. In his first season, 2014-15, the Bulldogs finished 4-16. Over the next two years they went 6-14 and 6-16.

But last season Ravenna started turning the corner, finishing with an 11-9 record. While that would be considered mediocre at many schools, it was a big accomplishment for a program that last won a district title in 2002, and last won a share of the West Michigan Conference title sometime back in the 1970s.

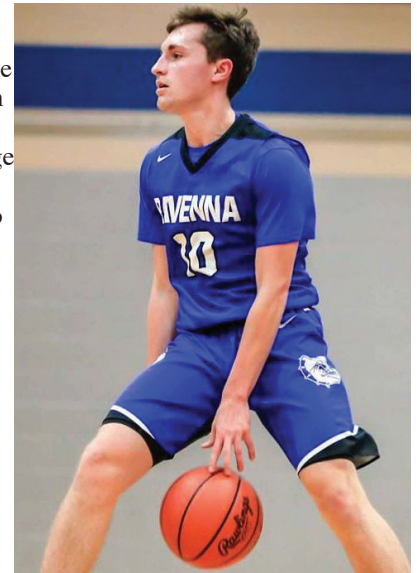
This season the turnaround seems complete. Ravenna entered the 2019 portion of its schedule with a very hopeful 7-1 record and tons of confidence.

The Bulldogs' only loss came in late December to powerful conference rival North Muskegon, the unanimous pick to win the league crown this season.

While the wins took time to start coming, Johnson said the change in culture actually began under his predecessor, Mark Vanderwall.

"We were definitely moving in the right direction," Johnson said about the former coach. "He was here two years before I was, and he did a good job of trying to get the kids excited about basketball again and jump-starting the program.

"After two years he stepped away, I took over the varsity, and continued the work he did. I think we've done a good job of getting kids excited and wanting to play. Every year the kids have worked hard and played hard. Some of them maybe haven't had as much bas-



Ravenna's Josh VanderWoude

RAVENNA	
2014-15:	4-16
2015-16:	6-14
2016-17:	6-15
2017-18:	11-9
2018-19:	7-1