

Joy Christian teams building for future

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From an outsider's perspective, one might say Jim James has a tough job. As the athletic director for Glendale Joy Christian, a program with just 75 students in its high school, James was asked to take both the football and girls volleyball programs into their first varsity seasons this year.

Doubling as Joy Christian's football coach, James was asked to lead a team that featured 13 players who had had virtually no football experience before this season.

No sweat.

Both the football and volleyball teams won in their inaugural varsity games, and Joy Christian looks to be building the solid foundation that will make them a respectable program for years to come.

The football team pulled off a 52-32 victory against Ash Fork on Aug. 28 in a home atmosphere that James described as "electrifying." He said he estimated that about 500 people showed up for the game, and he could tell that they were ready for the season to start.

"As a community, I've never seen a group of people that have been so hungry for something in all my years of experience," James said. "I'm not sure I can even explain the excitement that's been generated through this football program and just spilled out onto our campus."

James' son, Josh, was the starting quarterback for the Ash Fork game and said he and his teammates didn't want to disappoint their passionate supporters.

"We talked about how the school and the community had been waiting for this moment since high school started," Josh James said. "And just to get out there and get the win in dominating fashion was pretty nice."

The team has hit some roadblocks since its opener, losing its next two games and seeing fullback Darius Jakab go down for the season with a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

But James said he takes pride in the fact that he can see his team improving and values that more than wins and losses.

"I've only got two seniors, so we look at this as building a program," James said.

Joy Christian's volleyball team got off to an even better start than the football team, winning its first three matches before finally falling to Phoenix Valley Lutheran last Friday.

Coach Anna Kempf echoed James' sentiment about the importance of a strong sense of community at Joy Christian, and said that the football team even comes into the gym during breaks in practice to cheer on the volleyball team.

Kempf also said she has been impressed with the talented group of girls that make up the volleyball team.

"It's a pleasant surprise," she said of the team's early success. "They're fighters, and they work hard, so I'm really proud of them."

Sophomore Kelsey Rohwer said the addition of the varsity program challenged her and her teammates to develop the chemistry they needed to be successful.

"At first it was kind of difficult because we got a lot of new girls," Rohwer said. "But we just came together, and we've all worked together really well."

With only seven seniors on campus, Joy Christian has plenty of room to grow in both football and girls volleyball, and with both teams getting a taste of success now, it wouldn't be surprising to see them become a perennial Class 1A threat.

James' confidence is unmistakable.

"We're here to build a winner," he said. "We will be a power, and we will make a splash, hopefully in the very near future.

"Give me two years with these freshmen and sophomores, and we'll be having a different conversation."

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