



HCH photos by Darlene Dela Cruz

The St. Francis School Saints boys basketball team gather around its 2013 championship trophy. First row, from left: Head coach Solomon Batoon, Austin Ursua, Kaohu (Keola) Kealoha, Ranan Mamiya, Shabir Lynton, Kyle Lau, head of school Sister Joan of Arc Souza. Second row, from left: Justin Sarsuelo, Keoni-Ray Tom-Millare, Sosia Havea, Blayne Won, Nayton Koki, Matthew Nuuma-naia, Kai (Daron) Sun, Janson Kupa-pau, Layne (Kalani) Akana, Lachoneus Tautuaki.

Making hoop history

The St. Francis boys basketball team emerges from nowhere to hop to the top of the state's Division II heap

By Darlene J.M. Dela Cruz
Hawaii Catholic Herald

"Awesome!" "Amazing!" A Catholic high school that five years ago didn't even have boys, now has a state championship boys basketball team.

The St. Francis School boys basketball team notched a historical milestone last month, winning over several of the Islands' best high school hoops squads to take the Division II state championship, Feb. 23.

It's the first boys basketball title for the Manoa Catholic school, which, after 87 years as an all-girls institution, only last year fully transitioned into a co-ed campus.

How did they do it? Focus.

The St. Francis Saints entered the Hawaii High School Athletic Association boys basketball championship tournament last month as the No. 1 seed, with an undefeated record in the Interscholastic League of Honolulu Division II conference. The team beat Waianae High School 64-34 in the first round of the tournament, and later went on to a down-to-the-wire, second-round win over Ha-

waii Preparatory Academy, 55-53.

The Saints met Kailua High School in the final championship game. They were victorious over the Windward Oahu Surf Riders, 39-34.

"I think it's awesome," said Sister Joan of Arc Souza, head of school at St. Francis. "To take a state championship in that short a time, it's amazing. It's just amazing."

Sister Joan of Arc, a Sister of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities, was the driving force behind the school's co-ed transition. She oversaw the inaugural enrollment of boys at St. Francis in 2006 and the beginning of the boys basketball program at the intermediate level.

The Saints made the leap into local varsity athletics when the boys became high school sophomores roughly three years ago. In the 2011-2012 season, just their second year as an ILH Division II team, they qualified for a berth in the state basketball championship tournament. They fell short of the title, however, after disappointing losses to Seabury Hall School of Maui and Hanalani School of Mil-



Mini-basketball signed by the team members.

lani.

Basketball coach and St. Francis School athletic director Solomon Batoon said the boys were sparked with determination by that first taste of the playoffs. Calling last season's missed championship opportunity "unfinished business," they rallied together for what ulti-

mately led to a dramatic title run.

"Every year we kind of sit down at the end of the season and plan our goals as a team," Batoon said. "Although it's been a longstanding goal for every team to win a state title, these guys had much more of a focused mission to be able to do that."

"When you have a focused mission, then you're able to sacrifice more, by giving of yourself and not being selfish," he added. "That's been pretty much our theme at every practice session and every game."

Adding to the excitement of this season was the opening of St. Francis' Clarence T.C. Ching Music and Athletic Center. The boys basketball team played all but one of their home games at the Manoa District Park gymnasium this season as they awaited the completion of the new center on Feb. 4.

Shabir Lynton, one of six seniors on the 14-member squad, said the championship win was "a start of something new" for the school. The shooting guard — who made the game-winning drive in the match against Hawaii Preparatory Academy — said it's an honor

to bring the title to St. Francis just as the school celebrates its new athletic facility and will be sending off its first co-ed graduating class in May.

"It feels good," he said. "We're the first boys class to make history." Sister Joan of Arc, a St. Francis School alumna, is excited about the progress the school has made in its athletics program. From the days when she played half-court basketball as a student, to the myriad sports available today, she continues to encourage athletics as an integral part of Catholic education.

"Sports in any education is essential," Sister Joan of Arc said. "It teaches them (students) teamwork, which just fits right in with Catholic philosophy, caring for each other. You start with the team, and then hopefully that stays with them through adult life, whether they go off to work or their families, it'll just grow."

Another Catholic School, Maryknoll, also fared well in the high school basketball Division I tournament. They finished in second place, losing in overtime to Kalaheo High School in the championship round.