

St. Frances celebrates Wells' 500th win

He stood in his usual spot, just inside the gymnasium's glass doors, prior to the start of his varsity game. But on this day he received a steady stream of congratulatory embraces and handshakes.

While William Wells, St. Frances Academy's head boys basketball coach, geared up to face Towson Catholic, who was hungry to keep its undefeated Baltimore Catholic League drive alive, the St. Frances Academy community was putting the finishing touches on a heartfelt celebration to honor Coach Wells and his 500th victory.

Wells, who is now in his 28th season at St. Frances, is undeniably known as a man of personal integrity and dedication; he knows how to keep his cool under pressure.

At "Celebration 500," Wells was honored for his 500th win, secured just a week prior in an MIAA A Conference and Baltimore Catholic League 58-52 win over Calvert Hall College High School, Towson.

"This is a big deal, and I really appreciate people coming out, but we have to win this game first," said Wells, who is also a teacher at the school. "The bottom line is, it's about the kids; but I really like the fact that the Oblate Sisters of Providence really supported me and the program, so I'm happy about that."

Wells established the boys' basketball program at St. Frances in 1979 but was also a key individual within the East Baltimore community with his work at Baltimore City's Recreation and Parks' Madison Square Recreation Center.

Wells started the St. Frances boys' basketball program from scratch. No uniforms, no transportation and no gymnasium to practice in. As the program grew, the St. Frances Panthers became a team to be reckoned with and in 1996, earned an Alhambra Championship - an accomplishment Wells is most proud of. In addition, the Panthers have notched five BCL varsity tournament championships.

The celebration of Coach Wells started 30 minutes after the Panthers' junior varsity

win over the Owls 58-39. It began with varsity players and cheerleaders throwing out miniature Celebration 500 basketballs to the crowd. From there, it was a steady stream of politicians, former players, school administration, family members and friends who spoke about long-standing relationships with Wells and in turn, Wells' long-standing relationships with his players. It was a testament to Coach Wells' gentle spirit, open arms and basketball accomplishments.

It was summed up best by a longtime neighbor, Ben Riddick, who said, "Wells, you're a great coach, but you're a better man."

As for the game - Wells and his Panthers notched another win to knock off Towson Catholic 60-57.