

Head Coach Derek Bunting:

Fifth-year mentor has Skyline playing a rare, but proven, basketball style

By Bruce Smith
Matchup

In the mid-1980s, Derek Bunting walked on to play basketball at the Ivy League's Dartmouth College.

For a while, the coach couldn't remember his name, but he did recognize that he could play. In Bunting's junior year in 1988, he was the inaugural recipient of the team's John Dilorio (a player in the 1950s) Award for "hustle, drive and determination."

Now, almost a quarter-century later, Bunting's attitude is being passed on to the basketball players at Skyline High School.

"The kids look at their need to step up as an opportunity," said the 46 year-old Bunting. "Our team will be balanced and unselfish, and if we can learn to be consistent, we will be pretty good."

Bunting has come a long way. He grew up in New Hampshire, and went on to be part of coach Paul Cormier's Dartmouth teams in the late 1980s that were some of the most successful in school history. He was a steady contributor all four years and known for his "court smarts." That experience, as well as the team's opponents, still affect him today.

"We played against Princeton twice a year, and their offense was the most difficult to defend," he said.

Princeton was coached by Pete Carril, and employed what was known as the "Princeton offense." Dartmouth was the preseason favorite in Bunting's senior year, but they finished 10-4, one game behind Princeton. Later, Princeton drew heavily favored Georgetown in the NCAA Tournament's first round and lost just 50-49.

The game drew national attention, and so did Carril's playing style. Bunting has spent countless



Part of playing basketball at Skyline is learning its style, making classroom work as important as performing on the court.

At a glance

- * - **46 YEARS OLD**, newly married to Cynthia
- * - **GREW UP** in New Hampshire; Youngest of two children. His sister lives in Alaska.
- * - **B.A IN ENGLISH** from Dartmouth; Masters degree in Education at Stanford.
- * - **NOW IN HIS FIFTH YEAR** here, he considers himself a teacher first; then a coach.



hours since then studying it.

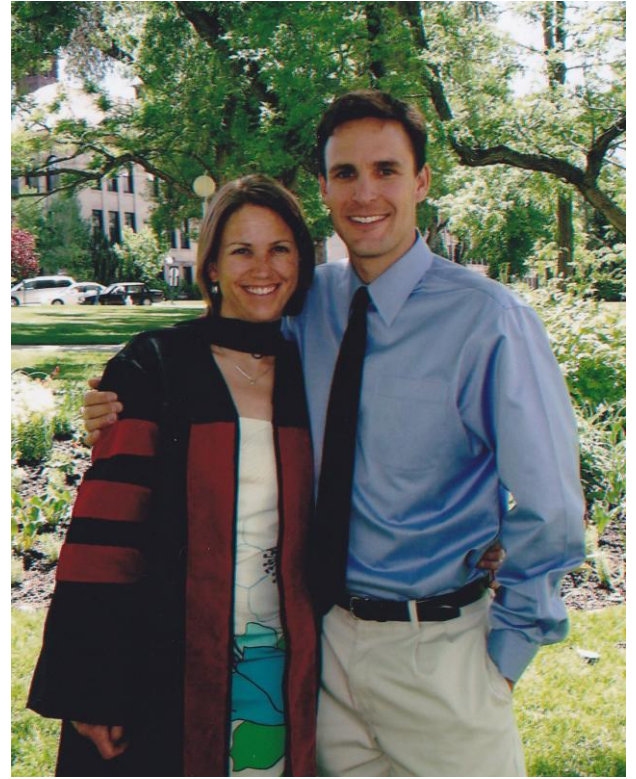
"I'll never forget it," Bunting said. "We had more talent, but they took better shots, played great 'help' defense, dictated the tempo, and won the league without a single player averaging more than 15 points per game.

"The offense requires that every player be able to dribble, pass and shoot," he continued. "We have to be able to move our kids around, utilize space and create driving lines."

Bunting earned an English degree at

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Dartmouth and followed it with a Masters in Education at Stanford. He was an assistant basketball coach at the University of Maine and also has taught and coached in Hawaii, Connecticut, Colorado and Massachusetts before coming to Utah, where he first accepted a job at Rowland Hall-St. Mark's School. In his third (and final) season there, the team finished 15-6 and advanced further in the 2A state tournament than any time in school history.

Skyline recognized him for his exemplary teaching skills, as well as his coaching success, and now every Eagle opponent has to be ready for what is known here as "Bunting Ball."

In four seasons, Bunting's record has been 55-32 (.638). That's second-best in Skyline's 50-year history. Only Neil Roberts, who won two state championships here in the 1970s with future NBA player Danny Vranes, has fared better.

"It's the style of play," Bunting said. "It works well for us because we have intelligent kids who understand the game."

Bunting replaced Paul Jeppesen in 2006 and, after an 8-11 inaugural season, hasn't had a losing year since. In 2008-09, the Eagles got local attention for winning their first 11 games and a No. 1 ranking in 5A for over a month en route to an 18-4 season. That year, their tallest player was 6-foot-4.

Bunting resigned shortly afterward when his wife-to-be, Cynthia, accepted a pediatric emergency medicine fellowship in Portland, Ore. and then back to the Boston area. Last year, however, he returned and Skyline administrators were happy to grab him.

Bunting was also happy to be back and ready to replicate the success of his previous teams.

TOP LEFT: Coach Derek Bunting offers instructions to DeSean Miller last year.

TOP RIGHT: Bunting and his wife, Cynthia.

LOWER RIGHT: Bunting drives to the basket during his playing days at Dartmouth.

