



5th Grade Team
 Kneeling (l to r): Katie Paterline, Ashley Hyndman, Claire App, Katherine Van Soest and Mila Garofalo.
 Standing (l to r): Coach Loren Cole, Gianna Kral, Gianna Saxton, Milly Cole, Gia Garofalo, Olivia Iacoboni, Faith Sever, Coach Mike Garofalo and Coach Bethany App.

Making History

The FRAA girls basketball teams finish their season strong, as all four travel teams qualify for States.

BY NICOLE TAFE



3rd Grade Team
 Front Row: Peyton Kozar.
 Back Row (l to r): Coach Mike Garofalo, Nicole Hyndman, Kendall Retzer, Cora Masten, Mila Garofalo, Riley Roberts, Clara Rothermel, Julia Hyndman and Coach Scott Rothermel. Not Pictured: Rahini Kad, Leher Misra and Fatimah Sandhu.



4th Grade Team
 Front Row: Valencia Ponko.
 Back Row (l to r): Coach Amanda Bauer, Madeline Murtha, Ayla Josefowski, Annabelle Giugliano, Annie Lynch, Emily Seese, Evianna Bauer, Martina Bertucci, Amelia Evans and Coach Nat Tedesco.
 Not pictured: Zahra Anzaar, Nora Copeland, Maria Furry and Adalyn Sloan.



6th Grade Team
 Back Row (l to r): Lucy Helbig, Isabella Roberson, Gabby Oshetsky and Cassidy Gizler. Kneeling (l to r): Amelia Bertucci, Abby Lynch, Mckenna Walter and Megan Kavo. Not pictured: Nadia Orndoff, Coach Andy Lynch and Coach Joe Bertucci.

The Franklin Regional Athletic Association (FRAA) is a nonprofit youth sports program that offers leagues for boys and girls in basketball, softball/baseball and—new for 2023—cheerleading. FRAA is operated by volunteer board members who oversee the programs. The board is comprised of a president, treasurer and secretary. There are also vice presidents for each of the five sports within FRAA. This year, Maria Sever is serving her first year as the VP for girls basketball.

FRAA girls basketball is open to any girl who lives within the Franklin Regional School District area—attending Franklin Regional schools is not required. The program offers two league options based on commitment and skill level. Thanks to the support of the Franklin Regional Athletic Department, both leagues practice at school district gymnasiums.

The first league offered is recreational and open to any skill level and any girl who wants to play, from kindergarten through sixth grade. The season is typically October through December/January with a one- or two-day commitment per week. This year, the program had 15 in-house teams across all grade levels.

The second league is for players who are looking for a more competitive environment. Girls in third through sixth grades can try out for a travel team that plays against local schools and similar programs, usually within a 30- to 60-mile radius. Travel teams usually have two practices a week and one or two weekend games. Travel players (third through fifth grade) are also required to play in the above-mentioned in-house program. Sixth graders have the option to skip the in-house requirement in their final year. The travel season starts in October or November and games usually go from December through March.

“All four of our travel teams played in multiple tournaments and leagues, bringing home many first- and second-place awards,” says Sever. “Historically, each grade only had enough participants to form one travel team per grade—however, with a growing interest in the program, we are expecting to be able to form two travel teams per grade for the 2023-2024 season.”

This was the first year that any FR girls team made it to the Pennsylvania State Championship and all four travel teams earned a spot. To qualify for the state championship, teams must place first or second in a qualifying tournament.

“Our fourth and fifth graders accepted their invitation, our sixth grade team had to unfortunately decline, and even our third grade team earned a spot to compete at States by winning in a fourth grade B tournament,” says Sever. “For the third and sixth grade teams, even earning their ticket is a big achievement to be proud of.”

The fourth grade team competed in the Gold Division at States—a big honor and a great experience for them. The team was coached by Amanda Bauer and Nat Tedesco. Not all the fourth grade players could attend, but luckily some of the third grade players filled in to help the team.

The fifth grade team was placed in the Silver Division and held an undefeated record in the state tournament to bring home the championship. This team of hardworking girls was led by coaches Mike Garofalo, Loren Cole and Bethany App.

The state champs were welcomed home by a crowd of supporters, including Murrysville Medic One and the Murrysville Volunteer Fire Department. “The day of celebrating will be one these girls will never forget,” says Sever. “Their team trophy will be the very first to be displayed in the new Intermediate School trophy case. In the end, the girls will tell you, the best part of going to States was simply the experience with their friends.

“This year, we had more volunteers than ever before,” she added, “allowing the organization to sponsor additional programs for our players, including taking part in a women’s University of Pittsburgh basketball game, hosting a basketball camp, open gyms and an end-of-season party at the Murrysville Sportzone. We also received a lot of support from the JV/varsity Lady Panthers, who allowed FRAA members to be ‘water girls’ during games and for the travel teams to participate in scrimmages during their halftime shows.”

Sever is particularly appreciative because the program went through such a difficult time during the pandemic. “During and after COVID, the girls basketball program really suffered,” she explains. “This was very eye-opening to our families who realized a lot of effort would be needed to bring this program back stronger than ever, and there were a lot of parent volunteers who signed up to make this happen. The level of excitement and enthusiasm from our families has reached unprecedented levels. We know this program has a bright future. Our teams have the full support of the Franklin Regional Middle School/High School coaches/teams, elementary principals, teachers, custodians, and more. There are a lot of people who worked hard to see this program start thriving again.” ■

Want to Join?

If you know a girl who would like to participate, mark your calendars! Next season’s registration deadline will be September 17, 2023. Ahead of the deadline, families should be on the lookout for registration emails, yard signs and Facebook posts—be sure to like the FRAA Facebook and Instagram pages to see updates!