

# Veteran coach with state championship win to lead Falcons

By Kellen Smiley

New head basketball coach Mark James wears his cowboy boots to every game — ever since he started coaching 41 years ago, minus the one game he couldn't fit a boot over his was broken ankle.

"They're pretty old boots," said James.

Call it superstition; it is just something that stuck with him. The boots have been resoled twice in his career, and now he says he's just going to let them wear out.

After winning a state title with Ben Davis in 2017, James has brought his basketball expertise to Perry Meridian High School. Last year the boys' basketball team ended the season with a 4-18 record under Coach Brent Keck who resign after eight seasons.

**"We will work on attitude, effort, and fundamentals."**

**- Coach James**

The school board voted unanimously to approve the hiring of Coach Mark James as a teacher and coach on April 9.

"The athletic department expects Coach James to bring the attributes of his reputation as a veteran coach," said Athletic Director Doug Schornick "Those attributes include hard work, discipline and integrity."

James graduated from Martinsville High School in 1973 and was a starter at the forward position every year under Coach Sam Alford, a member of the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame with 452 wins and 245 losses. Alford's son, Steve, is the UCLA men's basketball coach. He was an Indiana Mr. Basketball and an IU standout player.

James talks in general terms about coaching at Perry.

"We will work on attitude, effort, and fundamentals," he said.

He points out that it's up to the boys to ultimately demonstrate the skills needed to win.

"I can't score points, can't score rebounds," he said. "My thing will be to facilitate and give the kids opportunities to be the best they can be on and off the court."

James coached at Franklin Central for 26 years, 5 years at Carmel High School, 3 years at Covington High School, and 7 years at Ben Davis.

Despite all those years of games,



**New Perry Meridian head coach Mark James coached seven seasons at Ben Davis, leading the Giants to the Class 4A title in 2017. Photo courtesy of IndyStar.**

James' family is the biggest part of his life.

When not coaching, his favorite activities involve spending time with his wife, Pam, who is retiring from her job this year; and their children, Jessica, Derek, Nicole, and Kyle.

His family comes to his games and cheer. They're enthusiastic and happy to offer their own ideas about ball handling, plays and teamwork.

"They're all better coaches than I am," he said.

And now, thanks to the Perry job, he can spend more time with them and less time in his car.

"My wife has been married to me for forty-some years and she doesn't deserve to wait at home for me until 9 o'clock when I can be home at 6," he said. His commute time is only seven miles now compared to 23 miles to Ben Davis.

When it comes to the veteran coach's proud moments for his players, they don't center on breaking records or

winning championships.

He declared that his proudest moments as a coach have been watching his players go to college to become successful adults. Some of his players have become doctors and lawyers. Basketball values are good life lessons too, such as: no lying, no cheating and no stealing.

He shared a simple philosophy for games: "Beat everybody you're supposed to and a few people you aren't."

**Coach James' definition for a winning team:**

- 1. Try the best you can**
- 2. Care about yourselves and others**
- 3. Be motivated to reach the end goal.**



**Coach Brent Keck resigned after eight seasons. His best seasons were 2012-2015 when the team had a record of 45-41. His last season ended with 4-18. (Photo/ PMHS Athletic Department)**

**A good-bye, thank you from former coach**

By Brent Keck

I feel blessed to have had an opportunity to coach in Marion County (the best high school basketball in the world). It has been a real privilege and honor to teach and coach with great kids, faculty, and staff. Basketball didn't finish the way we had hoped but I am very proud of what we were able to accomplish during our 8 years.

The journey to Perry Township has helped bring my beautiful bride and an awesome son into my life. I have been very fortunate and blessed to have the opportunity!

The future, as of now has me teaching at Southport High School next year and just enjoying time with my family. If the right opportunity presents itself with coaching, and it is a good move for our family, we will pursue it.

Best wishes moving forward to PMHS & to the Falcon basketball program. They return with some very good players and great young men.

Coach James is the best! He will bring Falcon Basketball to new heights!