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FINAL FOUR

A Hoosier through and through

BY WILL WILLEMS
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INDIANAPOLIS — One of the greatest basketball players in Zionsville history is going to be one of the central figures in this weekend's Final Four.

Brad Stevens, a 1995 Zionsville Community High School graduate, has led the Butler Bulldogs (32-4) to their first Final Four appearance in school history. Still, some of his fondest basketball memories come from his time in Boone County when he was part of Rosey's Roundup — a group of players who talked basketball with the late renowned coach Jim Rosenstihl over lunch.

"Some of my better memories were going to the basement of Jim Rosenstihl," Stevens said Tuesday in a Final Four press conference. "I used to go in Rosey's basement and watch reels of Rick (Mount) when I was in high school. And Rick would shoot from 40-feet out, and if they had a three-point line he would have shattered every record. Jim Rosenstihl was a great friend. And one of the great coaches in, certainly, Lebanon's history, but also in Indiana basketball."

Stevens, 33 years old, has an 88-14 record since becoming the head

coach of Butler after the 2006-07 season when Butler head coach Todd Lickliter left the school to become the coach at Iowa.

In his three years at Butler's helm, the Bulldogs have won all three Horizon League regular season titles, two Horizon League Tournament titles and the Great Alaskan Shootout. They are 5-2 in NCAA Tournament games.

Stevens said that he could not have imagined the success Butler has achieved in the last three years.

"Not because the guys we had or the guys we have weren't capable of doing great things," Stevens said. "It's just because it's hard to imagine just 14 losses in three years. The problem is you remember the 14 losses more than the 88 wins and the Final Fours. It is just the way we operate in the coaching profession. It has been a great group (of players). I knew that the first group would probably be a pretty good basketball team if I didn't screw them up. And they ended up being a very good team that ended up losing to a great Tennessee team. ... But that was a really good team that year, and then the key was to recruit the right guys to replace them, and we already knew we had good guys here."

Although the Bulldogs are 1.5-point favorites against Michigan



PHOTO BY JULI DOSHANFOR THE LEBANON REPORTER

Zionsville graduate Brad Stevens will lead his Butler Bulldogs into the school's first-ever Final Four appearance. Butler takes on Michigan State beginning at 6:07 p.m. Saturday.

Slate Saturday night, Butler enters the Final Four as the media darling, a hometown favorite and the Cinderella with national powers Duke, West Virginia and the Spartans.

Because of the fact that Butler plays in Hinkle Fieldhouse, site of the final scene in the movie "Hoosiers," the natural comparison between the Bulldogs and fictional Hickory has been a story line this

week. While some coaches may have scoffed at the notion, Stevens has embraced it.

"I am an Indiana kid that grew up

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20 minutes away," Stevens said. "The worst thing in the world for me to say would be to not call us 'Hoosiers.' That is a good thing to me. Being the underdog is a good thing compared to being a team that over-achieved."

Playing in the Final Four fewer than six miles from Butler's campus has created a unique environment for the Bulldogs.

Local newspapers, radio and television have been swarming campus to get stories about the Bulldogs. All of the attention hasn't seemed to faze Butler or their coach.

With the exception of having a couple thousand people greeting the team when they arrived back from Salt Lake City, Stevens said he hasn't heard much of the buzz around Indianapolis.

"The only thing I have seen this week is the direct path from my house to Hinkle Fieldhouse," Stevens said. "With a slight veer to the gas station. Other than that I haven't seen anything. But you do hear the buzz and you certainly feel it. And if anything your text message box and your e-mail inbox tells you what's going on. It is neat for me because I have gone to the Final Fours in Indianapolis — I haven't been to the games but I have been around the Final Fours and it is already a vibrant atmosphere, so if we can add to that it is great."

And the Bulldogs have a good chance to add to it,

thanks to their coach.

Butler point guard Ronald Nored had originally committed to Western Kentucky. But after he was granted his release from the school when then head coach Darren Horn went to South Carolina, Stevens drove from Indianapolis to Homewood, Ala., to recruit Nored to Butler.

Nored committed that day and has started all but two games in his first two seasons.

"That is the kind of person he (Stevens) is," Nored said. "He is willing to sacrifice to help other people. And I am doing my best in my life to follow his example. He has been my biggest role model and I am lucky enough to spend six days a week with him. He expects a lot. He is very calm, very collected, very poised at all times. But he expects a lot. And he can be poised because he has high expectations, and because he does think we can be a certain level. And if we aren't at that level, he will let us know. This year, more than last year, he has been really on us when we don't do things the right way, when we don't focus."

With all the success Butler has had, national media speculation is that Stevens will leave for a higher paying gig in the near future.

But with his deep Hoosier ties, Stevens insists he isn't going anywhere.

"I guess (I'll leave) when they kick me out," he said. "As long as the administration stays in place the way it is and supports the team the way it has, I don't know why I wouldn't (stay)."