Steve Schmidt Gymnasium
Dedication Ceremony

Sunday, April 5, 2009
Ballenger Field House
SCHMIDT HAPPENS

Community pays tribute to Flint hoops icon

FLINT – There’s simply not enough room. The newly-dubbed Steve Schmidt gymnasium at Ballenger Field House is more than 10,000 square feet, and still not big enough.

It’s one name and the embodiment of so many more.

“My name is on the wall, but I realize that none of this would have been possible without the tremendous effort of everyone I’ve had the privilege to coach, all the support of my assistant coaches, the Mott family and the tremendous support of the community,” said Mott Community College head coach Steve Schmidt, whose name now graces the gymnasium at the historic William S. Ballenger Field House.

The winningest coach in school history, Schmidt has won three national championships, three national coach of the year awards, six regional titles, six state titles and 11 conference championships. Many of those victories, large and small, played out on the floor of the gym that folks in Flint have been calling “The Schmidt House” for years.

“I’m extremely humbled by and appreciative of the gesture,” said Schmidt, who thanked Mott’s administration and Bruin Club for all its hard work leading up to the ceremony. “I’ve never been one to want personal accolades. I coach to make a positive impact on the people I’m around. I really can’t help but to think of the people who are the most important to me: the players I’ve coached.”

During his tenure at Mott, Schmidt has sent players to universities all over the country including most major conferences – and 10 former players have gone on to play at the professional level. His track record of player development is unparalleled at the junior college level.

Bear witness to Flint’s Kevin Tiggs, whose rags to basketball riches story was recently featured in ESPN Magazine.

Tiggs, a raw talent who grew up on the city’s rough and tumble north side, caught Schmidt’s eye in 2005. Just four years later, Tiggs was the leading scorer in the Atlantic Sun Conference and matching up with no. 1-seeded Pittsburgh in the opening round of the NCAA basketball tournament.

“Coach Schmidt means the world to me,” said Tiggs, the NJCAA national player of the year in 2007 after less than one season of organized basketball in high school. “I wouldn’t be where I am now if he didn’t give me the chance. Most coaches would have just passed me over because I hadn’t played much, they wouldn’t have given me the chance. I thank him every day for that. He has meant so much to my life.” Tiggs, who is on his way toward graduation from East Tennessee State, has become the face of the Mott program, where hard work and no excuses have turned out good ball players and great people.

Jeremie Simmons, who won two national championships under Schmidt and, like Tiggs, was the national player of the year in 2008, credits his coach for turning him into a winner. “Coach helped us win those national championships,” he said. “Personally, winning those championships had a huge impact on my life.” Simmons, originally from Chicago, made the most out of his Mott experience and is now a junior at Ohio State.

For Schmidt, there’s not a day that goes by without some form of communication with a former player. “The most important thing for me is to make a difference,” said Schmidt, who relishes the familial environment he helped create at Mott. “I strive to make a difference. Now that we have our program at the highest level, keeping it there is quite a challenge. I’m just amazed at what we’ve been able to accomplish. I appreciate it more now than ever as I’ve been able to reflect on the past 18 seasons.”

In 2006, Schmidt was inducted into the Greater Flint Sports Hall of Fame and spoke these words into the pages of the Flint Journal: “It feels kind of odd talking about the hall of fame because the career is not over, the story is not done being written. I have a lot of energy left, a lot of coaching to do and impact to make on people…” Thereafter, Schmidt’s team won another national championship; and the year after that, another. From those two teams, more than a dozen players moved on to four-year universities. “It was quite an honor to be inducted, but at the same time I knew I was striving to add much more to the story,” he said. “Hopefully this legacy is not over because we are going to continue to strive for nothing less. I have as much enthusiasm today as I did in 1991 when I first started. “And I feel that there are even more challenges ahead for me.”
Congratulations Coach Schmidt,

I will not be able to attend the naming ceremony in your honor, however, I did want to recognize your impact on this campus. I have been attending Mott Bear games on and off since the early 70's. You have done an outstanding job with the basketball program! In addition, you have done even more with developing the character of your student athletes. I have found your players to be fine young men who are dedicated in the classroom as well as on the basketball court. As a parent, I know how much that is a reflection of what you do with these men on and off the court. I feel that we are blessed to have you as a representative of MCC Athletics. Go Bears!

Regards,

Prof. Dennis M. Hughes
Coordinator/Advisor - Technology Division
What transpires following a championship season and the 2007 National Championship game (Danville, Illinois) - witnessed by Jared Field.

In the midst of a mass of Mott yellow, huddled in a room the size of a large trophy case with a drain situated in the center of the floor, it quickly became clear that a plan was afoot. Dousing the head coach after a big win was easy on a football field, but this was going to take some planning.

Lorenzo McClelland’s scheme seemed too obvious; Coach Schmidt would know something was up if the atrium adjacent to the locker room was empty and oh so quiet after the Bears just won the National Championship.

There had to be a better way.

Terrence Watson, from his post near the door, cracked wide enough to accommodate a clear view of the hallway to the gymnasium, reminded everyone in the room that if we were going to do it we had to hurry. “Ok, fellas, here’s what we’re gonna do,” I said, removing the lens cap from my camera. “You guys just pretend like I’m taking some team photos, and when he comes in here just ask him to stand in the middle and smile.”

But, since we didn’t know exactly when Coach Schmidt would return to the locker room, we had a minute or two to act the part. “Get one of me and Lamarr,” demanded Kevin Tigges, already sporting his national tournament MVP t-shirt after scoring 32 points in the clincher.

So, to do my part, I just started firing off rounds from the top of a small table in the rear of the room.

After no more than five exposures and too many cheesy grins to count, Jeremie and Terrence hotfooted it away from the door. “Be cool, be cool! Here he comes!”

Schmidt entered to the sound of an obviously contrived ovation, and passing one devilishly nervous look after another he was pointed to the center of the column for the picture.

Had he looked closer, he might have noticed that two of his five sophomores were missing. But, he didn’t, and by then it was too late. The trigger men, Lorenzo and Rob Giles, sprang their trap as soon as he turned his back.

A shiver or two later, Schmidt removed his sport coat, now saturated with two parts water and one part sweat, threw it over his shoulder and led his team into the locker room.
‘You’ll always be national champions’

Sneakers squeaked on the floor of the locker room at the Mary Miller Gymnasium in Danville, Illinois, as players settled in to listen to what their coach had to say about their 74-61 win over Monroe in the national tournament finale.

Taking his place in front of a blackboard with Monroe sketched out in chalk, circled and crossed out like an admonition against smoking, Steve Schmidt reflected on 35 wins, a national championship and 16 seasons of success.

“This was the most enjoyable year I’ve had in coaching, the most enjoyable by far because of you guys. And I said that before the game, not to motivate you because I would have felt it no matter what. You bought into being accountable and responsible. I could not have had a better group representing Mott Community College, representing Flint and the state of Michigan. We’re a class act.”

With every eye and ear fixed on him, it was almost as if in that moment he came to the realization that he would never coach this team again. And after a dream season with his five sophomores—the so-called “five that survived”—Schmidt, almost reflexively, reminded his team, and perhaps even himself, that he would always be their coach. “When you play for us, and you’re part of the Mott family, just like the guys I always talk to you about, you’re always going to be part of the Mott family.”

But Schmidt, the patriarch of arguably the top junior college program in the nation, nearly choked on his words as he reminisced about a season that might not have been. “You guys remember, back in June, when Kevin (Tiggs) thought I was gone; everyone in Flint thought I was gone and I was looking to go coach at a four-year level. (Schmidt interviewed and was a finalist for the Central Michigan University head coaching position). I want to do that someday, only because I want to coach guys like you for four years.”

Schmidt’s speech, now dashing toward a crescendo, became one of personal vindication. “But my heart told me, ‘you’re not feeling it.’ Good friends told me, ‘you’ve got to look at that…you’ve got to go…it’s a lot more money. Are you afraid to fail?’ I’m not afraid to fail, I like challenges. But my heart told me to stay with you guys, and my heart was right based on what you did tonight. A lot of times people say, ‘don’t go with your heart, go with your head.’ I went with both because of you guys. Loyalty is what I am all about. I’m happy for you guys.” Schmidt instructed his players to thank everyone who helped make the Bears champions again, and huddled with his guys one last time.

“You will remember this tournament, this game and this night the rest of your lives. You’re national champions, you’ll always be national champions and you’re special.”
“The Mott fans are enthusiastic and loyal, I have genuinely appreciated their support throughout the years.”

-Coach Steve Schmidt

The Schmidt House - The officials best friends.

Student booster group: The Ballenger Bums
“Congrats Coach Schmidt. On behalf of the current and past Mott assistant coaches, this is an honor well deserved. It has been a privilege and honor to be a part of the Mott Basketball family and best friends with the leader of the family. You have had the foresight and work ethic to make Mott Basketball the standard by which junior college programs nationwide are now judged. For you to allow me to be a small part of that success has meant a great deal. You have had an equal impact on your coaching staff’s lives as well as the players. Again congratulations, but note -- the final chapter has yet to be written.”

Carl Jones,
MCC Assistant Coach, past 12 seasons

"When I met you 11 years ago, I never imagined that you would be the godfather of my sons. You are one of the most influential people in my life. You have taught me, as well as many others the meaning of hard work, dedication, and caring. Naming this gym after you is not enough to repay you for what you have done for so many. It will have to do for now. It is a honor and a privilege to be part of your program. It's a greater feeling to have you as part of our lives. Congratulations Coach."

Nate Brown
Assistant Coach and former player (MCCAA Player of the Year)
God sons - Nate Jr. and Nehemiah (Buddy) Brown

"The true measure of the success a coach has is not in the number of wins and losses, nor in the margin of victory over opponents. Championships and records will be forgotten or broken over the course of time. But the impact, influence, and direction that a coach can have on his athletes is a legacy that will last for generations. Coach Steve Schmidt is a truly successful coach because of this. He has set the standard for all who will follow in his footsteps here at Mott. The loyalty, dedication and hard work are only surpassed by the devotion he has shown to his staff, his school and his players."

Tom Healey
MCC Athletic Director
2006 - Cecil Community College
North East, MD
7 - Mott Community College
Flint, MI.

20 years
10 losses
12 seasons
6 All-Americans
10 conference 1st team
6 state titles
5 national titles
3 finals
1 Coac
1 national title game
3 national coaches
3 national players of the year
3 national coaches of the year