Lady Norse
Connect with elementary students

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GILBERT — Friday was clearly a special day for the School Readiness students in Brad Matuszak’s class at the Nelle Shean Elementary in Gilbert. The eyes of the young children were lighting up as they listened to Mesabi Range women’s basketball players read to them and later play with them. “I thought since I was coaching at the local college (Mesabi Range), it would be a good idea to get the girls to come here. We’re a community college, so we want to get into the community as much as we can,” said Matuszak, who also coaches the Lady Norse. With February being “I Love to Read Month,” the teacher and coach figured Friday was a perfect opportunity for the kids and his team. “I haven’t had the opportunity to do it much, so this was a great opportunity. I’m glad it worked out,” he added. The Lady Norse players got just as much enjoyment out of the reading and other free time activities as the kids did. “I loved today’s activities. Coming in I was tired and they helped me wake up right away. I had lots of fun,” said Tori Johnson, a sophomore playing on the team for her first season. Playing babies and house with the students stood out for Johnson. “I put my baby down for one second and she said I had to pick it right back up because it’s my responsibility. Because it’s my baby.” The youngsters were “taking responsibility at a young age.” Sophomore Shawna Wiese could tell the kids were having a good time. “You can really see the impact that we have with the kids. You can see their smiles light up and their faces light up. You can tell they really enjoy us coming. “It’s something new in their week. Some of them may not have siblings at home. It’s good to have older kids come in and work with them.” Wiese’s favorite moment was “just when we walked in seeing all the kids look at us and get a big smile on their face.” Matuszak, a second year teacher, said his class didn’t know the basketball team was coming, although at least some of the other classes they visited did. “They just knew they had some special guests coming,” he said. “Every time they walked into the room, the kids got big smiles and kind of some gasps in the air. I think it was exciting for them too.” In addition to just adding something new to the day, Matuszak said the visits had educational value, as well. “Every day we do reading in our classrooms. Instead of me reading the book like I do every day ... It’s nice to get somebody different in here. That causes excitement too when somebody different comes to read” and increases the students’ interest in reading. “They love reading,” he added. “It’s neat to see.” At the same time, combining reading month with the Lady Norse visit could help the basketball team through team building and camaraderie, Matuszak commented. “It’s nice to do things as a team, too.”