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## Parkland boys basketball's unsung hero never leaves the bench



Contributed photo/Connor Johns

Student-manager-turned-coach Antonio Dell'Aguzzo poses with the rest of the Parkland High staff. From left to right, Austin Beidelman, Eddie Ohlson, Paul Stewart, Dell'Aguzzo, Andy Stephens and B.J. Dugan.

By **KEITH GROLLER** | The Morning Call

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Parkland boys basketball coach Andy Stephens enjoyed doing that Saturday night at Easton Area Middle School after his team beat Liberty for a second straight District 11 6A title.

But as he went through the line, one of the most special medal moments came when he got to Antonio Dell'Aguzzo. That's because Dell'Aguzzo has been a part of the program for four years, and came back to be a part of the team even after graduating in 2021.

This was his last year involved because he will be a student at Penn State's main campus next school year.

His value to the Trojans isn't measured by points, rebounds, assists or steals, although he charts those stats for the coaching staff, among numerous other tasks.

Dell'Aguzzo is one of those unsung heroes every successful program needs, a guy behind the scenes who does whatever he can to help without ever receiving any of the limelight.

"This is a great way to leave ... on top," Dell'Aguzzo said amid Saturday's postgame celebration. "I knew after last year that I couldn't leave. I know the guys on this team, I love this team. It's always fun to come to work with them after I have class. I knew we had it within us to win a championship."

Dell'Aguzzo was the team manager as a junior and senior at Parkland and he is now part of the coaching staff while attending Penn State-Lehigh Valley.

Stephens loves having him around as does assistant Eddie Ohlson, star player Nick Coval and others.

"I first taught Antonio in his sophomore year in my social studies class and he talked to me about helping the team out and becoming a manager," Stephens said. "He was a very good student, too, so I took him on as a manager and he was great. He did such a good job.

"When he graduated from Parkland, he stayed local and is going to the local Penn State campus. I talked to Bill Dreisbach [Parkland's athletic director] and the rest of the coaches and we found a way to keep on the staff."

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“He wants to learn, he wants to become a coach and has a real passion for it,” Stephens said. “He has always loved basketball, but he knew he wasn’t good enough to make the team. He still wanted to be a part of it. He was great to have in class because he loves talking about sports and he loved talking about our team.”

That love of basketball has only grown for Dell’Aguzzo, who handles the team’s social media content as well as the stats. Stephens said he is able to get Dell’Aguzzo some money for the work he puts in, but knows that Dell’Aguzzo doesn’t do it for the money.

“He even does some individualized workouts with some of the guys, coming in before school,” Stephens said. “Other coaches would come too but he’d come in by himself with a player or a couple of players and just take them through a workout. He has really developed a good relationship with all of the guys on the team.”

Dell’Aguzzo is originally from New York, but has become ingrained in the Parkland community. At Penn State, he’s majoring in marketing and plans on obtaining a certification in sports administration.

“I have realized over the years that it’s a lot about networking and finding the right people in your life,” he said. “Over this past summer I got to work with a Nike EBYL team [the New Jersey Scholars] and got to travel and work with the No. 1 team in the country. That was a great experience. I have already made connections with a bunch of coaches and I want to do whatever it takes to be around the game.”

Coval considers Dell’Aguzzo to be his trainer.

“I love him to death because he does so much for me,” said the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference’s most valuable player and a prime Division I recruit. “He sacrifices so much for me and I can’t say enough about him. He comes down with me to DeSales and we work out and put a lot of time in together. He knows the game so well. My prediction is that he’s going to be an NBA GM one day.”

Ohlson believes that’s possible as well.

“He came into our program as a manager with the idea of becoming a coach,” Ohlson said. “He listened to us and heard what we had to say. He helped us out wherever we needed it. He’s our go-to guy. He fills in with some drills. He works with the JVs. He knows the game and he’s a student of the game as well. He runs situations by me all the time and asks what I would do. He has really built a lot of respect and we’re happy he is a part of our coaching staff. He’s awesome to be around.”

Stephens and Ohlson both said that Dell’Aguzzo leaving for Penn State next year will create a void on the staff, and it will be emotional for Dell’Aguzzo as well but he will stay in touch as much as possible.

Of course, there’s more work to do. Parkland will begin play in the PIAA 6A tournament at 3 p.m. Saturday when it hosts West Chester Henderson, District 1’s No. 10 seed. If the Trojans keep winning they could wind up playing for a state title on March 25 at Hershey’s Giant Center.

Dell’Aguzzo will do whatever he can to help the team advance. He also plans to work with the team in the summer before leaving for University Park.

Even after he leaves, he’ll always have a home at Parkland and he’ll forever be appreciative of what Stephens and the Trojans coaches have done for him.

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“When Nick Coval got his 1,000th point earlier this season, he gave me a hug and said I deserved a lot of credit for his milestone. I told him ‘This is just the beginning ... there’s a lot more work to get done.’ I got up early a lot of mornings to work with him, and people asked me why I did that. It’s because of kids like Nick that you do whatever you can. It’s always nice when the kid you’re working with wants it even more than you do.”

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## Keith Groller | Reporter

Keith Groller began working in sports at The Morning Call in 1979. He covers high school football, basketball, baseball and softball; Lehigh and Lafayette football; and major auto races at Pocono.

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