

OTHER COLLEGES

# From former Evangel hoops stars to now leaders of the program, brothers Bert and Jackson Capel are enjoying the ride

*A year after reaching the national quarterfinals, Evangel men begin another postseason as underdogs*



by Mary Ellen Chiles

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Evangel head coach Bert Capel (left) and associate head coach, Jackson Capel, look on during a timeout against Kansas Wesleyan on Saturday, January 18, at AGFinancial Arena in Springfield. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles).

Evangel went on a Cinderella run a year ago, entering the NAIA national men's basketball tournament as a 15-seed before **advancing to the Elite Eight**.

The school prohibits gambling, so this year's Valor — a team that narrowly qualified for the Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference Tournament — will have to create its own luck.

“We just haven't been able to be consistent, whether starting the game, or finishing a game, or playing hard,” head Coach Bert Capel said.

Now they begin anew.

The KCAC No. 8 seed Evangel (13-15) faces top-seeded Oklahoma Wesleyan (22-6) in Bartlesville on Wednesday. The Eagles won by 32 and 33, respectively, in their two regular season matchups.

Capel and his associate head coach and younger brother, Jackson Capel, are scheming for another string of postseason upset wins.

## **Family Matters**

Bert, 43, and Jackson, 38, both starred at Evangel. Their five-year age difference helped curb any sort of sibling rivalry.

“Maybe if we were closer in age, it'd be a little more fighting over the same stuff in basketball practice, or girls, but it just never was close enough to do that,” Bert said.

“The competition wasn't there for me,” Jackson joked.

Jackson holds the Evangel scoring record with 2,337 points, more than doubling Bert's 1,060.

“Five times as many shots, too,” Bert quipped.

Of course, Bert helped lead the team to the 2002 national title.

Both played for the late Steve Jenkins, a local coaching legend who led Evangel hoops for 39 years before Bert Capel took over in 2021.

Their parents were alums — their dad played baseball with Jenkins — but Bert said he went to the Springfield school because he wanted to play both baseball and basketball. His siblings soon followed.

The middle child, Kristi, played volleyball at Evangel and studied broadcasting and public relations. She was a reporter and weekend weather anchor at KSPR-33 in Springfield. She co-hosts a morning show on the Fox affiliate in Cleveland.

## On the straight and narrow



Evangel head coach Bert Capel (left) and associate head coach, Jackson Capel, instruct their players during a timeout against Kansas Wesleyan on Saturday, Jan. 18, at AGFinancial Arena in Springfield. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles).

The Capel brothers attended school roughly eight hours away from their hometown in Kentucky, but they each behaved. Evangel students and employees are required to follow a code of conduct.

Still, the brothers said Coach Jenkins didn't rule with an iron fist.

"He just expected you to do what you're supposed to do," Bert said. "You knew what the rules were, and if you broke them, then you got in trouble for it."

Jackson said he didn't want to disappoint his coach.

"You just had a respect for him because he treated you well, and you wanted to return the favor," Jackson said.

Instead of tossing a chair, Jenkins just threw a glance.

Jackson said he was able to fulfill his athletic potential under Jenkins, once they got to understand each other.

"I always felt like I needed to prove something," Jackson said, "And he kept pushing me to do better and better."

Jenkins trusted his players on the court as much as anywhere else.

“Coming out of high school, we just had a bunch of sets and things that the coach told us to do,” Bert said. “(Jenkins) was a coach who would let you do what you wanted to do.”

## **Coaching Carousel**

Bert Capel didn't plan to take over for Jenkins. He was an assistant at EU for a few years after graduation but he wanted to coach Division 1 hoops. He had to keep moving.

He also had a wife, Stacey, a fellow Evangel alum who played volleyball at the school.

Fortunately, she was game.

“I told my wife, ‘Hey, there’s gonna be 3, 4, 5, 6 years where we have to work as hard as we can just to make it,’” Bert said.

He worked as a grad assistant and recruiting assistant at Florida State, then took an assistant coach job at a junior college in Texas.

“I was only there for a year before I got to move back up, but I could have been there for 10 years,” Bert said. “I don't know that I could have coached at that level for that long.”

Luckily, he landed another assistant job, but this time at a Division I Stetson in DeLand, Florida.

Bert might have stuck around and found out, but his head coach was fired, and he needed a job. The family decided to return to Springfield for a year – Stacey is from Willard – and Bert offered to help Jenkins for free. Then COVID-19 hit, so the Capels stayed a second year.

But Bert needed a paying gig, preferably at Division I. He and Stacey have three kids – Myla, Kinzli, and Dru. That's when Jenkins said he was considering retirement, and that maybe Bert ought to stick around.

## **Sibling partnership**

Jackson Capel didn't necessarily plan to coach. After graduation, he played professionally for nine years in Europe, spending time in Spain, Germany, and Switzerland. He was thinking of retiring when he went home to see his folks – and he also met his future wife, Leah. The couple attended Evangel together but didn't hit it off until years later.

Now the two have a little girl named Cola – a tribute to the Capels' late mother – and a little boy with the enviable name of Action Jackson.

Still, Jackson didn't really think about coaching until he stopped playing, and he realized he wanted to stay in the game, so to speak.

He picked up experience by assisting at Cincinnati Christian, Indiana University-East, and Palm Beach Atlantic.

Then Bert got the head coaching job at their alma mater. The brothers had wondered about coaching together, and now they could see it.

Today they go by Coach Capel and Coach Jackson.

## Remembering Jenkins



Steve Jenkins, head basketball coach for 39 seasons at Evangel University, died on Nov. 7. He was 72. (Photo by Evangel University Athletics)

They often think of their old Evangel coach, who died last November at 72. Just like him, they don't follow their players around, looking for mistakes.

"We don't cuss at the guys or put our hands on people," Bert said. "We just try to treat them like adults but at the same time, we try to find people that want to be a part of the school."

Every coach in the country has team rules, but all Evangel students must attend chapel and Bible classes, too.

"One thing we ask (players) is, 'Hey, listen, you might not love every rule here, or love everything that Evangel has to offer, but you gotta respect it,'" Bert said.

"I've had a lot of coaches, and the ones that gave me the most rules weren't the ones I listened to the most," Jackson said. "The ones I respected were an example of how I should be acting, too."

That's why they loved Jenkins.

Plus, the Capels remember what it's like to be student-athletes. They found that it's a lot more fun to play hard than to go through the motions, especially when the season isn't what they wanted.

So, they play on.

Evangel's tips off at 7 p.m. on Wednesday at OWU. [\*\*You can stream the game here.\*\*](#)



## **Mary Ellen Chiles**

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