National Basketball Association star Yao Ming has played on these basketball courts. So has Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Legendary former UCLA coach John Wooden has walked the courts and provided instruction to young players.

Jake Cavens, 14, and Brady Feasel, 12, have also run up and down these basketball courts. The variety of people who have enjoyed basketball on these courts is one aspect that makes them unique. Their isolated setting in the timbered Cascade Mountains 47 miles east of Eugene, Oregon, also is unique. There are no distractions a city location might offer. Basketball is the only attraction for those who visit, coach and play at the United States Basketball Academy (USBA).

The courts are open to all ages and all skill levels: from Yao Ming, a standout 7-foot-5 all-star center for the Houston Rockets to 5-foot-6 or so youngsters like Jake and Brady who are playing at the middle school level.

“There’s a big poster there that lists all the people who have been there,” Jake says of the USBA facility. “To think of all the legends who have been there, it’s kind of amazing.”

Jake has been to a weeklong USBA basket-

A Dream Camp for Shooting Stars

By Craig Reed

A Sign of The Season

This sign at a slippery hillside intersection near Ester, Alaska, provides a humorous warning about the peril of stopping on ice and then trying to get started again.

Photo submitted by Jerry Hassel of Ester, Alaska.

Trophy cases at the United States Basketball Academy are filled with mementos left by some of the sport’s greatest players.

Paul Brothers, director of basketball services at USBA, helps a middle school basketball player with his free-throw skills.

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This sign at a slippery hillside intersection near Ester, Alaska, provides a humorous warning about the peril of stopping on ice and then trying to get started again.

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Trophy cases at the United States Basketball Academy are filled with mementos left by some of the sport’s greatest players.
ball camp each of the past three summers. He also has attended a couple other basketball camps in his hometown area of Roseburg, Oregon, each summer, but his preference is the USBA camp. “It’s the nicest camp I’ve ever been to,” he says. “I like how the camp is set up and how the coaches run things. They teach you a lot. It’s more intermediate or advanced stuff. The local camps are geared more toward basic stuff.”

The USBA is the fulfillment of a vision by former college basketball player and coach Bruce O’Neil. His vision was “to create an academy where athletes and coaches could concentrate solely on basketball without ‘big-city’ distractions.”

“We wanted to develop a very high-end basketball camp for all ages,” says Bruce, 58, founder and president of the facility.

Basketball has been a big part of Bruce’s life. He was a four-year varsity player and three-year starter in high school. He then attended and played basketball for the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Oahu.

Upon graduation, he moved right into coaching, assisting with the Hawaii team until becoming the head coach in 1969. He coached the Rainbows for eight years, then became head coach of a Continental Basketball Association franchise, the Hawaii Volcanoes.

After a stint with that team, he left coaching and went into business, starting

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**Pint-Sized Paintings**

Two Arizona women have a talent for miniature art

By Pam Blair

Imagine drawing a detailed scene on something the size of a postage stamp, or on a single ivory piano key.

Betty Leithead of Willcox, Arizona, has done both.

She is adept at creating works of art on such tiny canvases, regularly contributing pieces to the Willcox Miniature Art Show.

An estimated 30 to 50 works ranging in size from 20 to 35 square inches will be on display late January through February at the 10th annual national juried art show.

“Half of the entry fees are given in prize money,” says Sylvia Turner, director of the show.

Sylvia and Betty crossed paths in 1979 during a workshop at Sylvia’s art studio in Cochise.

“I fiddled around with drawing all of my life,” says Betty, who loves painting landscapes, clouds and ocean scenes. “I got serious after the kids were raised and we got down to this area.”

“Half of the entry fees are given in prize money,” says Sylvia Turner, director of the show.

Betty’s first big foray into the art world came when someone asked her to do something far grander than she had ever attempted before: paint a mural.

“I knew Sylvia had done one in Michigan, so I said, ‘Help!’ ” Betty explains. “Five of us did a mural at the Rex Allen Museum.”

That led to many more murals—at banks, the hospital, the library, private homes and even a carwash.

“I hadn’t intended to start a business,” Sylvia says. “It just happened.”

For more information on the Willcox Miniature Art Show, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Art League of Willcox, P.O. Box 1074, Cochise, AZ 85606. The entry deadline is January 28.
a video production company, Westcom Productions, which specialized in making sports training videos. He sold the company in 1991, leaving him free to pursue his basketball academy dream.

With a team of investors, Bruce broke ground on the basketball complex in 1993 on 46 acres nestled in the foothills along the McKenzie River.

The first basketball camps were held at the complex in 1997.

Six basketball courts had been built outdoors, but because of rain, two of the courts were covered in 1998. They were resurfaced with hardwood floors the following year.

Paul Brothers, USBA vice president and director of basketball services, and Darrell Imhoff, vice president and director of sales and marketing, joined Bruce in developing the academy in its early years.

They encouraged more than 100 people to invest in the privately held stock corporation that was building the facility, which also includes five dorms with 34 beds each; five three-bed, two-bath condos; two executive lodges with six bedrooms each; and the Great Hall with a kitchen and dining room. A ropes course that provides challenges for team building and bonding also was set up and is run by certified people.

As the size increased with each building, Bruce and his advisory committee realized they would have to market the facility for more than just basketball to help pay the bills.

In 1997, the name was changed to McKenzie River Conference Center, Home of the United States Basketball Academy.

Corporate, church and government meetings, conferences and retreats, weddings and family reunions brought in revenue in the early years, while the basketball side of the business was establishing itself in Oregon and then internationally.

In addition to basketball camps for junior high and high school boys and girls, Bruce made contacts with foreign national basketball teams and contracted them to use the facility and receive the best in coaching.

The last several years, men’s and women’s teams from China, Korea, Japan and Lebanon have flown into Eugene, driven up the McKenzie Highway and spent time at the USBA to concentrate on basketball.

“The vision is changed,” Bruce says. “It’s much bigger than originally envisioned. But we’ve adapted as we’ve gone along. This year teams from Venezuela and Europe will be here. 2003 was the first year basketball got over the top. It was the first year basketball more than paid the expenses. The future looks bright with all the national teams coming in.”

“We provide a great camp for kids,” Paul says. “What we want to do, and we tell every kid this at the beginning of camp, is to provide them with a lot of tools. But then the burden of utilizing them to become a better player and person is up to them.

“I know every kid that walks out of here is better than when they came in.”

Bruce has plenty of family help in operating the USBA. His son Braidy helps in sales and marketing of basketball. Son Matthew manages the facility site and All-Star Rafting Service, which provides trips on the nearby McKenzie River. Daughter Jennifer supervises the Together We Stand Foundation—a nonprofit arm of the USBA.

The foundation is a way for athletes to give back to society. It provides scholarships and opportunities for international and U.S. youngsters to meet, teach and learn about each other’s cultures.

Plans for the USBA include another gymnatorium complex that Bruce says will “probably be arena-like,” and development of more upscale housing for use during both basketball and corporate gatherings.

“We want to provide a place where basketball can be played with no distractions,” Bruce says. “People love it because they can focus totally on the game.”

For more information, write to United States Basketball Academy, 1623 21st St., Suite B, Springfield, OR 97477, call (541) 736-7513 or (800) 844-4947, or log on to www.usba-inc.com.