OSCAR SAKAMOTO

Oscar Sakamoto took over as Castro Valley High varsity basketball coach in 1966 after three years at the freshman and junior varsity level and remained in that position until his retirement after the 1997-98 season. Often his teams lacked the talent of some of the powerhouses in the Hayward Area Athletic League, but the Trojans (formerly Spartans) were usually competitive and always fundamentally sound.

Castro Valley won two league championships under Sakamoto – 1975 and 1988. The coach considers the 1975 team his best ever. The Spartans that year went 14-2 in HAAL play and 22-4 overall. They were led by junior point guard Mark Mastrov, who later founded 24-Hour Fitness and is currently part owner of the Sacramento Kings. The other starters were Dave Thoni, Steve Fraga, Kevin Weaver and Steve Realph.

In addition to coaching basketball, Sakamoto served as head of the CVHS physical education department during his last 15 years at the school.

Sakamoto emphasized the teaching aspect of coaching. “Most of the teaching was at practice,” he noted. “Once the game gets going it’s mostly strategy and pulling strings. I liked both parts, but maybe I enjoyed the teaching a little more.”

“The skill set I received from Oscar prepared me well for the next level,” said Wesley Howell, who played at Castro Valley in the 1970s and went on to star at Chabot and Cal. “Positioning on defense, footwork, how to prepare for a game – he gave me a good foundation.”

Sakamoto’s teams were known for their disciplined, methodical play. “We were old school,” the coach said. “We liked to set up our offense. We usually didn’t have the athletic type player to play fast.”

But there were exceptions. “Oscar was flexible,” Howell said. “As a senior, we had some guys who could run up and down the floor pretty well and he let us run more. I always appreciated that.”

Sakamoto has traveled four times to Funabashi, Japan, Hayward’s sister city, to give basketball clinics for players and coaches. “Basketball has been good to me,” he explained. “and I wanted to give something back.”

Sakamoto and his wife, Noriko, live in Fremont. They have three sons and four grandsons. Their oldest son, Doug, is the girls’ varsity basketball coach at Mission San Jose High.