By DAN HAWTHORNE
Sports Editor

Mark Alexander knows a thing or two about basketball.
He can recall every Division I national champion from 1979 in his sleep. Even better, he'll tell you where each Final Four was held and the starting lineups for all four teams.
He loves the game so much, he gave up his non-regular day job as a sports writer to become a coach and now four years later, he's rebuilding the boys basketball program at Manchester Academy.
"Basketball has always been my first love," Alexander said. "Anybody that has ever known me will tell you that I love the game. Ask me a question about politics, global warming or anything like that and I can't help you."
The job will be just the second head coaching position for the 42-year old who decided to pursue his dream after 10 years of covering sports at the Clarion-Ledger, including eight as the beat writer for Jackson State University. Alexander got his first break as the sports editor for the Starkville Daily News just weeks after graduating from Mississippi State in 1991.
"One month out of college and here I am laying out seven pages and coming up with information" he said. "It was crazy. I had fun traveling and getting paid to go to games and I thought to myself, 'man this is good.'"
That good feeling lasted a few years, even more than he probably would have liked. Alexander wanted to see what life was like from the other side of press row.
"You always wonder," Alexander said. "(As a writer), your covering the story and I wanted to be in the fire and really give it a try. I always felt like I could do it."
Born and raised in Mississippi, the Forrest Hill graduate never thought he would leave home until he moved nearly 400 miles to Chattanooga, Tenn., and took his first coaching job at Silverdale Baptist Academy.