



Mexico sophomore Claire Hudson (above) and senior Lexie Willer are expected to lead the scoring this season after averaging totals behind graduated Mya Miller and Riley Thurman last season.

[Jeremy Jacob]

Mexico girls finding identity this season

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Mexico girls basketball has to figure out what it is in 2022.

The Lady Bulldogs were a solid rebounding team from girls such as Mya Miller and Riley Thurman but will rely on others this year to step up.

Head coach Ed Costley has led Mexico to three straight winning seasons, with last year's campaign of 16-10 being the lowest win total. The Lady Bulldogs lost all three North Central Missouri Conference players in Miller, Thurman and Taylor DeMint to graduation, but several players graduated to bigger roles this season, including senior point guard Lexie Willer and sophomore guard Claire Hudson.

"Claire and Lexie are probably our true outside precision shooters," Costley said. "Lexie and Claire also kind of bounced back and forth (for the third-leading scorer). They both averaged right around five or six points."

While Mexico lost about 21 rebounds per game from last year, there seems to be more skill this year when it comes to passing.

"McKenzie Taylor's a sophomore and a really good passer as a post player," Costley said. "I think we'll have more floor spacing. I think the floor spacing will come just because of their nature is more ball handlers and more 3-point shooters on the floor."

"I think we're just trying to grow and figure out who we are early. We got some players. We've got some girls that are returning for us, and we've got some girls who are looking to be ready for the varsity level."

Some players from last year Costley hopes to have bigger leadership roles along with impact on the court this year includes junior Jo Thurman, who has starting experience from last season and learned to be a vocal leader during timeouts, senior Messiah Simpson, a role player that "always comes up with big moments," senior Capri'Ona Fountain, who played inside and will be expected to contribute more in the paint this season, and senior Kierstan Epperson, who has shown some growth as she has been challenged in different situations.

Speaking of growth, Mexico had a tough test in reigning Class 4 fourth-place St. James in its first game at the BSN Shootout in Rolla two weeks ago. With the new crop of Lady Bulldogs, Costley said they can learn from it or disappear when they play against quality opponents like that. He thinks this is the kind of group that will learn from it and be better as season goes on.

"I think we got the chance to grow from it and learn from it and will help us understand where we have to be," Costley said. "For us, we have to learn to play a little faster pace individually. As a team, we're hustling, but we've got to have some individuals understand that they've got to turn it up a notch."

Mexico boys integrating young players into culture

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Mexico boys basketball brings a young roster to the floor this season but believes it has developed some culture and a defensive mindset like the teams of the past.

The 2021 Bulldogs had plenty of that when they went 28 games deep into the season before losing their first game to state champion Vashon to end their season in the state quarterfinals.

The 2022 Bulldogs won't have all-North Central Missouri Conference players Isaiah Reams, Daeye Miller or Michael White but returns reigning all-conference senior Jordan Shelton – who was the second leading scorer at 11.5 points per game behind Reams' 17.1 – this season. Head coach Darren Pappas said he also feels like there are some talented players this season that could emerge after not having as big of a role last season.

"Jordan Shelton is a returning all-conference, all-district player for us," Pappas said. "(Junior) DJ Long, a junior guard, started a handful of games for us last year, averaged 7.7 points per game. Look for him to be our point guard and floor general this season. (Seniors) Dante Kelley and Anthony Shivers are back for their senior campaigns. Anthony gave us good minutes off the bench last year and Dante as well.

"We're a fairly young group as far as varsity experience goes so I feel like we're developing a good mindset – a defensive-minded culture," Pappas said. "I think they understand the expectations, not only by the community but by us as coaches. They want to continue on what last year's team did."

A key portion of the team that will determine how much depth the team will have, Pappas said, is the group of juniors and sophomores that have like junior Donye Nunnely, who had some minutes late last season in the post and should shoulder more playing time this year. Jaydon Eldridge is a sophomore that has a "really good skillset" that includes perimeter scoring.

Pappas said junior forward Grant Broeker, junior guard Aidan Knipfel, sophomore PJ Perkins, who can operate inside and outside, and sophomore Holden Aulbur are some more of those players that could have vital roles with the team, barring any freshman that emerge.

Much of the scoring Mexico had last year – at



Above, Mexico senior Jordan Shelton earned several postseason awards during the Bulldogs' historic season last year and is expected to lead them this season. Left, junior DJ Long is projected to have a bigger season this year.

[Jeremy Jacob]

about 67 percent – is gone, but Pappas feels like this year's Bulldogs can be stronger from the perimeter, stay tough on defense as they aim to keep opponents under 50 points per game like has been the case the previous two years and win the rebounding battle. They still have their speed as well.

"We're not the biggest group, but we're really, really athletic and quick,"

Pappas said. "Hopefully, that can create some havoc against teams we play against and generate some turnovers."

Mexico the last two years has won at least 20 games, winning conference and district titles in the process. Pappas said the Bulldogs should aim for the same goals this season. Focusing on team goals takes care of the individual goals

and trusting in the system the coaches has established should lead to more success.

"I just think this group has been in the system long enough now we can start fine-tuning some things," Pappas said. "We don't have to reteach a whole lot. We can just add some new things to it. Overall, they have a good base of what we're trying to do on both sides of the ball."

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This year's Lady Trojans want to continue trend upward in success

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

For nearly the last decade, Community R-6 girls basketball has built up high expectations.

The Lady Trojans of the past have won seven district titles, four straight conference titles going from 2018-2021, and two third-place state trophies. Seven 20-win seasons have been achieved during that time, with the program in a current streak of five consecutive.

But that is the past, and head coach Bob Curtis believes this year's team is capable of that kind of success.

"This team's been together for a while and is battle-tested so I'm excited for this winter," Curtis said. "They've played in a lot of big games so they've been very successful at a high level. Mentally, I think they're ready to win."

The seniors, including a pair of reigning Central Activities Conference first-team players Sarah Angel and Olivia Kuda and Kayla Jett, were freshmen during Community's most recent trip to the state Final Four in 2020 and has earned several individual accolades like being all-conference in the Central Activities Conference. Angel and Kuda each appeared on the team alongside the graduated Alexis Welch, conference MVP, and Shelby Clark.

Curtis said not having good players Welch, Clark and Paige Meyer from last year's 23-4 team stings but hurts less

since the Lady Trojans will have Angel at the point and some talented players she can distribute the ball too.

"Sarah Angel is definitely one of the best point guards in the area," Curtis said. "Olivia Kuda really came on in the post last year and she had a great year. (Junior) Brooklynn Glasgow, (junior) Kylie Brooks, and Kayla Jett, they all got a lot of time last year so I expect them to really try to fill the void from the three that graduated. I think they'll step in and do a nice job."

Curtis believes the Lady Trojans this year are a "very quick" group that can operate in the full court well and create havoc on the defensive side of the ball for opposing teams.

Community will need to step up as a group against some talented teams in the area that includes conference rival Cairo, a reigning 24-win team that defeated the Lady Trojans in the district championship last year, CAC foe New Franklin, who was a 14-game winner, and Silex, who won 15 games a season ago.

"I believe there will be a lot close nail-biters and hopefully we can come out on top," Curtis said. "There will be some nights where there will be a lot of lead changes with teams in the area."

"They're very hungry to see just where they stack up. We won a conference title a year ago and that was very exciting. We played for a district championship. I think they set their sights very high – as they should. They put the work in."



Above, Community R-6 senior Sarah Angel will once again have an important role for the Lady Trojans this season as the point guard and is a reigning first-team all-conference along with senior Olivia Kuda. Left, junior Kylie Brooks comes away with a steal Nov. 22 in a home victory against Wells-ville-Middletown. Brooks is expected to have a bigger role this year.

[Jeremy Jacob]

Community R-6 boys building program in 2022-23

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Since Tad Shotten took over as head coach a year ago, Community R-6 boys basketball has shown progress.

Entering his second year leading the Trojans, Shotten believes they can take another step this year as they attempt to build off an 8-18 record – an increase of three wins from the previous season.

"I haven't had to spend as much time on teaching," Shotten said. "They know my expectations and the system that we're going to run so that's really nice."

Shotten said a strength for the Trojans is they have several players that can display a lot of strength as well as athleticism, including reigning all-Central Activities Conference and all-district player Gavin Allen, who heads into his senior year as someone. Junior Mason Carroll was a "big scorer" and will be expected to carry much of the load and is versatile on the court along with the upperclassmen core of seniors Logan Johnson and Tucker Robnett and junior Eli Johnson.

The depth of the roster after that includes some bench players that Shotten is confident they will be effective and give his starters a rest and keep them healthy. Juniors Mason Rohan and Brant Cope will be key coming off the bench.

There were five games last season Community lost by single digits so Shotten hopes the Trojans can make the plays that turn those types of games into wins and ultimately continue the momentum toward a successful program.

"We'd like to close some of those close games we were in last year," Shotten said. "We just didn't make the play down the end – just those growing pains. This year, I want to see us putting more complete games together."

While Shotten said Community's roster has several players that can do "a little bit of everything," he hopes better defense is included in that everything this

season as the Trojans' points allowed per game went up about seven points to 59.9.

"We need to improve in the defensive area. I don't think we found our exact identity," Shotten said. "Hopefully we have a good year, hopefully everybody will come out to support us and hopefully we can play some good basketball for some people."



Far left, Community R-6 senior Gavin Allen will be relied on again this year in head coach Tad Shotten's second year rebuilding the program. Near left, senior Eli Johnson fades away for a shot Nov. 22 in a home win against Wells-ville-Middletown

[Jeremy Jacob]

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Thunderbirds teeming with experience

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

This could be the time the North Callaway boys make a run.

The 2022 Thunderbirds at least have brimming experience on their side in what is “one of the more veteran teams” Matt Miller has had going into his seventh year as the head coach. He said his team should definitely not look too far ahead and take it game by game and hopefully the big long-term goals like a conference title will follow.

“My goals are simplistic, but I want to get better every single day,” Miller said. “Every night, whoever we play against, you want to be 1-0. You can get a crystal ball, look ahead and say I want to win conference or I want to win district. Every team wants to do that. I don’t know how many wins we’re going to have, but I told our guys the first day of practice, ‘You come here and give great effort, great attitude and be a great teammate. You do those things, with a championship attitude, the scoreboard will



North Callaway senior Matthew Weber shoots over junior Sam Pezold during a practice. The duo led the Thunderbirds in scoring last season and are expected to have big roles this season.

[Jeremy Jacob]

take care of itself.”

From its 14-11 team a year ago, Miller said North Callaway returns its top seven or eight players, including Eastern Missouri Conference players, senior Matthew Weber and junior Sam

Pezold, who were their top two scorers at 21.2 and 12.8 points per game. Senior Braydn O’Neal has started at point guard since sophomore year and post player Trenton Jones has been on varsity since sophomore year.

Seniors Jordan Fishburn, Gavin Rasmussen and Brendan Reinhard had quality minutes last season along with junior Isiah Craighead.

Newcomers include juniors Aidan Martin and Paul Russell, who stood out on last season’s junior varsity squad to round out the 10-11 players Miller expects to have on varsity.

“We don’t have projected starters necessarily,” Miller said. “I feel like we have seven or eight guys who can start. Most times, we might be having two or three guys returning and you’re filling in with sophomores and maybe some freshman on varsity, but you’ve got a whole group of juniors and seniors that you don’t see too much at our level in high school basketball anymore, which is hopefully a strength and advantage for us.”

Miller said this roster is also proficient when it comes to shooting, quickness and ball handling. The Thunderbirds’ speed, in particular, helped them use a trap defense that forced many turnovers that saw the

ball going the other way. He said North Callaway should be building on all of that.

“We played fast last year so we want to play faster,” Miller said. “We could guard people last year so we want to be able to guard harder, guard better and trap more. Last year was a big step for our program in the right direction.”

North Callaway was able to finish high in the conference standings and were in the running for the title but were also on the wrong end of close losses to Clopton (46-43) and reigning EMO champion Elsberry (55-51). It was encouraging to see the Thunderbirds competing well with the best of the conference so Miller said they want to be in that position again in February.

“We were in a lot of those close games last year,” Miller said. “Those are our goals like any other team, but if you come into every day with a championship attitude, those goals down the road always take care of themselves.”

North Callaway girls want to take next step

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

North Callaway girls basketball isn’t certain how the early season will go this year but is sure it will be tough to beat later in the year.

Head coach Tim Turlington enters his second year leading the program and noticed the Ladybirds were further along in their development than last year during the second week of practice. He said he hopes this will lead to an improvement of the 11-14 season – a six-win increase and most in three seasons – from a year ago as many of the key players are returning.

“(Sophomore) Natalie Shryock and (junior) Riley

Blevins both started and so did (senior) Jalyn Leible, (senior) Ellie Bedsworth and (junior) Abrielle Burgher,” Turlington said. “Those five all started at different points of the season. They’ve all started multiple games. The girls know me and know what we’re doing and what we like to do.”

Shryock was North Callaway’s leading scorer as a freshman, garnering Eastern Missouri Conference and all-district team honors for her 11 points per game, 41 percent shooting from the floor and 43 percent clip from 3-point territory. Blevins, in her first season after transferring from Mexico, followed with 8.2 points per game

and brings back the most steals from last year at a 2.5 average that earned her all-conference and all-district nods.

Speaking of steals, the Ladybirds made a habit of forcing turnovers to turn them into points, averaging 12.7 steals per game. This led to a 41 points per game average, which is the most in three years, and an opponents scoring average of 41.3, which is the lowest for a North Callaway girls team in six seasons. The defense needs some work to get back to the level Turlington likes it as the Ladybirds graduated two of their top three steal leaders in Ryelle Schmauch and Kyanne Kellerman.

“I think we got a fair amount of quickness. We can shoot the ball at times,” Turlington said. “Defense is not really exactly where I would like for it to be, but it’s coming. The way I would like them to play, we are working hard on it every day. That consistency is what you need.”

Sophomores Lakyn Hartley, Faith Cash and Lia Bondurant are expected to have bigger roles this season as they step up to varsity, Turlington said, and so will junior Lauren Riecke. The junior played some varsity minutes last year and will be expected to play “heavy minutes” this year based on how well she has been “seeing things.”

Turlington said having all these girls in the fold will be important to fill out a

“solid” team if North Callaway wants to compete for a conference title this season. Montgomery County has won three straight Eastern Missouri Conference titles and only graduated one senior from a year ago so the Ladybirds know it should be another battle.

“We played them tough the first time and not quite as tough the second time in districts,” Turlington said. “We’re going over there (this season). Right now, until somebody beats them, they’re No. 1 in our conference.”

North Callaway began last season 3-11 but turned it around by winning six straight games. That streak was broken after a 10-point loss at home to Montgomery County.

Turlington said he and

the girls need to be patient and confident both offense and defense will reach levels that allow them to compete to the best of their ability. These Ladybirds make Turlington think that they will be playing well after December again and also makes him believe a good run of basketball is just beginning as 22 girls are in the program this year, which is the most Turlington said it has had in a long time.

“These girls are just good girls,” Turlington said. “They want to do well. It’s not like they’re out there messing up on purpose. They want to do it for each other and themselves, for their community and for their school, and I love coaching them. This is the best part of my day – coaching these girls.”

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Top, Van-Far senior Mara Jensen averaged a double-double last season and led the Lady Indians on Nov. 21 in a loss to Cairo at home. Bottom, junior point guard Carmen Wilburn quickly advances the ball.

[Jeremy Jacob]

Lady Indians looking to repeat double-digit wins

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Van-Far girls basketball will have much inexperience heading into this season but will have several returning players it can rely on.

Pertaining to the Lady Indians' starting five, they will be without the graduated Devyn Keller and Haley Bassett, who each have made the Eastern Missouri Conference team in the past and averaged 8 and 9.4 points per game, respectively, last year. Senior and leading scorer Mara Jensen is expected to be the leading scorer this year following her unanimous first-team all-conference season — her second straight first-team all-EMO selection — after averaging 16.1 points, 11.1 rebounds and one block. Junior Carmen Wilburn (6.7 points per game) and sophomore Dalana Gay return as Wilburn will be at the point to replace the departed Keller.

Head coach Heather Minter, who has led Van-Far to two consecutive 11-win seasons, said her three returning starters will depend on this season along with junior McKenna Engh-Hoffman.

"Mara is going to be a huge factor, we're looking to move Carmen over to the point guard, and Dalana did a lot of good things for us on defense but not much scoring-wise," Minter said. "As far as scoring, I just have those two in Carmen and Mara. McKenna is going to be a big factor for us on the defensive and the offensive end. (Freshman) Madelynn Caldwell is back with us this year so she'll be helpful too."

Minter said she maintains a smaller rotation because she doesn't want kids to be "thrown into the fire" when they are still learning the basics. If the Lady Indians get into foul trouble, then the team's three freshmen might find themselves on the floor, but Minter wants to give them more time.

"Some kids just aren't ready," Minter said. "It's just trying to get them some experience. Some kids, they don't have any other choice but to get thrown in. Since I've been here, besides last year, I didn't have to do it much. Kids just have to learn and grow."

Jensen has provided Van-Far that strong presence in the post, Minter said, and should do the same this season. However, there might be some nights Jensen will be asked to play in a different area so the Lady Indians will need to adjust to that.

"Our big strength is going to be our post," Minter said. "Since I've been here, with our post player, we've always been big in that area. I also feel like, at times depending on who we're playing, Mara is going to have to move out to play a guard and McKenna's going to be the post."

The main thing Minter has always and will continue to ask from the Lady Indians is to compete, even if they are on the losing side of the scoreboard against talented teams. She just doesn't want to question their effort.

Minter didn't question Van-Far's effort last year against Eastern Missouri Conference teams, finishing with a 7-3 record in conference games and 10-4 record if tournament games against EMO teams are counted.

That final loss was a district loss to Clopton to end Van-Far's season at 11-13. Minter believes Van-Far can win at least 11 games again this year.

"I don't think there's an easy game on our schedule just because of what we're working with," Minter said. "I believe we do have a chance that we could win 11 games if we show up every night."

Van-Far boys' fast play wants to endure deeper into season

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Van-Far boys basketball is more ready to get off and running this season.

The Indians return a junior class that led them to a second-place finish in districts a year ago in what was a 10-17 season, with half of those wins earned in five of their last eight games.

"That's what we always want. We want to be playing our best in February," head coach Pat Connaway said. "It's one of those things where, with the kids, it just started clicking (last year). It's our third year of really running that style of offense, and they just started figuring it out, making reads and playing basketball."

Running is the key word when it pertains to the offense as Connaway said Van-Far likes to run "when it can," usually through the use of a full-court press, but would also like to be "methodical" in the half court. He said the Indians have had much speed and athleticism for years and that will be the case this season as well.

At the forefront of that junior class is his son Nikos Connaway, whose averages of 19.2 points, 7.1 rebounds, 4.5 assists and 2.7 steals and 41 percent shooting average from the field earned him unanimous selections to the Eastern Missouri Conference and all-district teams and an all-region nod. Gage Gibson was the second-leading scorer at 9.9 points per game while hitting 33 percent of his 3-pointers.

Carter Jennings has grown to 6-for-3, Pat Connaway said, and is hoping Jennings grows as a player to have a breakout season. Brayden Lay brings back a 7.4 scoring average and hopes to have a breakout season of his own.

Leading the group of fresh-



Van-Far junior Nikos Connaway dribbles through the Cairo defense on Nov. 21 during the Indians' season-opening victory at home. Connaway was the night's leading scorer, stuffing the stat sheet wherever he could, and is coming off a near-average 20-point season. He is one of several juniors, including Gage Gibson, Carter Jennings and Brayden Lay, that are expected to lead the Van-Far boys to hopefully a district title.

[Jeremy Jacob]

men Connaway looks forward to introducing to the rotation this season is Evan Utterback and Pacey Reading, who is the son of assistant coach Brett Reading to bring the total of coaches' kids on the floor to two.

"We're kind of weird," Connaway said. "We don't have many seniors and we don't have many sophomores. We put the freshman in a tough spot this summer. In junior high, they're the biggest kids. They're all around 6-1 or 6-2. Well, big in junior high isn't big in high school. That's what we want to get them used to."

Connaway said he expects much of this group, which is why he has the Indians playing against tough competition in tournaments like the Centralia Invitational. Van-Far will be

in that field again, which Connaway said may cost the team wins but will ultimately pay off after having experience against teams like Harrisburg, Macon and Salisbury.

Van-Far upset the No. 1 seed Cairo in districts last season and fell short by 10 points against the No. 2 seed Clopton. The year before, the Indians played in the district semifinals so Connaway said it makes sense that their goal this season would be a district title.

"Win or lose, preferably win, when the night's over, we want that other team to say, 'Hey, that Van-Far team plays hard. They do things right. They have great character. They have great kids,'" Connaway said. "That's what we're striving for."

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Panthers more balanced in scoring department

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Centralia boys basketball has to find some new leaders this season but is confident they will be found.

The Panthers will still have seven seniors this year and a majority back who started last year, including senior Jack Romine, juniors Cullen Bennett and Boen Zimmerman.

Two starters and the top two leading scorers, Grant Erisman (15 points, 8 rebounds and 2 blocks per game) and Beau Gordon, graduated after their all-conference seasons that also saw the graduated Noah Brooks earn a Clarence Cannon Conference honorable mention.

Centralia begins the year with sophomore Logan Rosenfelder who was its third leading scorer from a season ago.

Head coach Scott Humphrey said he believes he has the players that can fill the void and even give Centralia a more balanced scoring team this season.

“I know Rosenfelder is going to be on everybody’s radar, but I think we’ll have more guys that can score this year than what we did last year,” Humphrey said. “Last year, we relied heavily early on two guys and then Logan, as he got more comfortable, gave us a third option.”

“Cullen Bennett is going to

have to carry a heavy load, especially early. Cullen’s got the ability to score a little bit outside, score a little bit inside and handle the ball. He’s athletic enough he can get to the rim and strong enough he can finish. Boen Zimmerman is going to have to find ways to score. Jack is kind of our energy guy, but he’s going to have to find more ways to put up some points and be offensive efficient.”

This is a “by committee” solution but a solution that is feasible for the year since Centralia has several younger players that could factor in, Humphrey said. Junior Noah Kropf had a good chance to be in the rotation last season but

broke his leg, sophomore Travis Brooks figures to be fighting for varsity minutes and the other seniors will also be in the mix.

Humphrey would like to achieve a winning season like Centralia for the first time since 2020 with a 13-12 record. Last year, the Panthers finished 13-14 after losing four games by a margin of at-most 10 points and also dropping five games within tournaments – all against teams with 20-win records. He calls the games where either team could win “50-50 games” and thinks there are 12-15 of those on this year’s schedule, including School of the Osage, Marshall and Moberly.

Humphrey said Centralia finished last season strong in districts by beating Moberly and then losing to undefeated Mexico in the semifinals.

“We’d really like to get back to a winning season and build off that in the future,” Humphrey said. “Last year, I really thought probably more so out of my 12 years of coaching (7th at Centralia) at the time, we got the absolute most out of them at the end that we could’ve. The way we played in districts, knocking off Moberly and giving Mexico as good of a game we could’ve, I was very proud of. Hopefully, we can get back to that point where we squeeze every last drop of our potential out.”

Centralia girls to show a new look

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Prior to last season, first-year Centralia girls basketball head coach Megan Brinkmann had led four straight teams to district titles.

First it was Bowling Green in 2018 and then Eugene for three consecutive years. There is plenty of reason for Brinkmann to have high goals and also thinks her new group of girls have high goals for themselves.

“I think the sky is the limit for them,” Brinkmann said. “Our seniors always pick a word and this word was finish. We talked about how they want to finish every drill, or the season, or finish this tournament. I think they have high goals. They’ve been extremely talented. I think they are able to compete every game, I think we can compete in the conference and a tournament.”

Just because each party has a desire to win doesn’t mean it just happens, Brinkmann said, as the Lady Panthers will need

some time to “put the pieces together” to make that possible district run at the end of the year. Part of that process is the girls adjusting to the new coach.

Brinkmann said the Centralia job was one she pursued based on the word of a friend that had worked in the school district and how passionate the students and community is about their sports.

“I thought it was a place I wanted to be, and I was lucky enough to get hired and it’s been great so far,” Brinkmann said. “I hope they continue to grow and they buy in and continue to trust me to put them in positions to be successful.”

Centralia brings back a talented roster this year that includes three members of the Clarence Cannon Conference team – junior Morgan Ross (10.7 points per game) and seniors Jozelynn Bostick (9.6 points and 2.2 steals per game) and Harper Sontheimer – and a 16-11 record, which was its second consecutive 16-win season.

Brinkmann said she has noticed that the point guard

Bostick is a really good ball handler, Sontheimer is a good defender and could score at the rim, senior Annie Robinson could be a legitimate threat in the post, and junior Raegan Anderson could see more playing time. Brinkmann views the leading scorer Ross as an even greater threat in the post while being that versatile player.

“She can shoot, but I’m trying to get her to be more physical so she has a complete game,” Brinkmann said. “Getting to the rim and attacking and also you have to guard her the three.”

Brinkmann views freshman Braylin Brunkhorst as capable of playing every position and could be a “spark coming off the bench early” due to her athleticism, intelligence and shooting ability.

Some details are understandably not fine-tuned yet, Brinkmann said, including Centralia’s commitment to a man-to-man defense and a new offensive system she is teaching her players. “A lot of implementation” will be needed

before Christmas but believes the Lady Panthers should improve later while competing in the meantime.

“We’re asking a lot for the girls – installing a new offense and playing man-to-man defense,” Brinkmann said. “When we’re playing, it’s when we reject, how to read screens and how to do certain things, which is hard because they’re harder reads. I think it fits our girls really well, it allows our shooters to get open shots, or if you’re big and athletic, it also gives us drive to go to the rim. It lets our post players touch the basketball, which I think you could pass, square up, make a post move and take people off the dribble. It puts a lot of pressure on the defense. They have to guard all five spots because I think we’re able to score from all five spots.”

“It will be rough at first, and there will be things we need to work on. I keep telling them to just keep buying in, just keep working hard and keep growing. That’s all I can ask for them right now.”

Missouri Military Academy laying out basic goals

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Like other sports at the boarding school, Missouri Military Academy is dealing with several new faces and much inexperience.

The Colonels even have a new head coach this season Roger Siwak, who was at Belle last year. It didn’t take him long to notice how different the situation would be for him.

“MMA is unique in that there’s a lot of cadets from a lot of parts of the world,” Siwak said. “We’re learning how to be a team and play together.”

Not only are there kids from countries such as Brazil and Mongolia, it’s also the first year at MMA for some of them, including some seniors. Siwak pointed out there already is some familiarity from their time in school but being on a basketball team is a different form of communication.

The Colonels won’t feature a roster this season with a majority of first-year players, but there is a good number of them, Siwak said. He also said junior Nathan Dempsey is the lone member of last year’s starting five – for a 6-13 team – that will be back this year. Seniors Albert Ogutu and Kellan Mugisha should have bigger roles for varsity after playing mostly junior varsity before.

Senior Lucas Almeida is from Brazil and senior Tsengeg Bayasgalan are a couple of newcomers players that have caught Siwak’s eye.

“Our goal is to get better every night and play our best basketball,” Siwak said. “We’re working on basics like ball handling, getting to the basket, and those kinds of things.”

Siwak said he believes the team has the athleticism to be good in transition eventually and will need to use all the allotted time of practice to improve. He mentioned how busy the cadets’ schedules are with tasks such as marching and evening Mass on top of school so he and his staff have a strict schedule to follow before they release them to the next time commitment.

It is fitting then Siwak has the plan for the season broken down into four keys.

“One is to be coachable and play hard,” Siwak said. “The second is work on winning the red zone – about eight feet from the basket – so we want more red zone touches than we give up. That would be big in transition and big in getting back on defense and pushing the ball. The third thing is the rebound so we simply do not want to get outrebounded. The fourth thing is to take care of the basketball. We’re going to work on ball handling and we’re going to work on our rotation on defense and how to keep guys out of the red zone.”

Obviously, the aforementioned goals sound like what needs to be achieved to have a good basketball team, but none of those are as important as creating a team or brotherhood, Siwak said.

“Above everything else, we want to create teamwork with coachable kids,” Siwak said. “We want kids that really like each other that can play with each other and work together and create a bond.”

Paris girls figure to be more aggressive with young roster to bounce back

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Paris girls basketball has been figuring out how to succeed small the past couple years.

The last time the Lady Coyotes had a winning season was a 17-12 season in 2020 in which they also won a district title. They had four out of five 20-win seasons prior to that but declined after current Southwest Baptist junior and 6-foot-6 Tori Hamilton and current Stephens College senior Allison Moore graduated.

Concerning last season’s 4-19 record, head coach Garrett Thomas said the team had six girls available by the end of it and had to employ a 2-3 zone defense to conserve energy. This year is a polar opposite as there are more girls out, with several coming off a competitive 12-14

softball season.

“We couldn’t really play fast,” Thomas said. “We’ll switch to man-to-man defense a little bit more and be able to press, which we haven’t been able to do in a couple years.”

Junior Kameron Arnett was the third-leading scorer at 5.6 points. Sophomores Kennedy Ashenfelter and Alyssa Webb have a season under their belts and Rachel Shoemyer is the team’s lone senior.

“They started quite a few games last year,” Thomas said. “They got a lot experience playing against pretty quality talent and have been really good leaders for us.”

The incoming freshmen, who all played softball, are Mairyn Kinaman, Emma Ashenfelter, Sophia Crusha and Reese Sutton, who Thomas said bring good defense, solid shooting and aggressiveness.

That reinforces a strength Thomas thinks this team has, which is parity.

“A lot of girls have pretty similar skills,” Thomas said. “Because of that, there’s not going to be a lot of letdown when we sub players in and out so we could play a pretty deep roster.”

Thomas said the girls on the team leaves Paris at a height disadvantage but could compensate after more experience because the Lady Coyotes are still young.

When it comes to a record this year, Thomas said he doesn’t have a certain number in mind but the more competitive games should increase.

“I think we’re going to be a lot more competitive this season,” Thomas said. “I think we’re going to be in most of the games we play. It’s going to be a good building year for things to come in the future.”

Coyotes to bring more size, hopefully patience this season

BY JEREMY JACOB
Sports Editor

Paris boys basketball didn’t have a good season last year but believes much better results are on the horizon.

Head coach Jeremy Skinner, who is in his second year coaching the team after 16 years previously coaching basketball at various levels in the school district, said the Coyotes were inexperienced a year ago and had issues scoring, averaging only 37.8 points per game in Paris’ 2-21 season a year ago.

“Hopefully, we’ll be able to score the ball better this year,” Skinner said. “Our defense didn’t kill us (57.1 points allowed per game), but it didn’t help us much either. Hopefully, going

man-to-man, it will help us out and get some easy fast break points as well.”

With an additional year of experience, Skinner brings back his top six players, including senior point guard Evan Smothers (8 points per game), senior post Colton Poddany (about 7.5 points) that go score from inside and outside, senior guard Mason Edwards (about 7.5 points), senior guard Ryan Breid, junior Walter Rucker, and junior Colton Kendrick, who Skinner hopes can return after Christmas after breaking his leg during football season.

Paris is happy to add two seniors to the program this season – 6-for-7 Alex Williams and Gunnar Fountain – which add much more size and hopefully

rebounds to the Coyotes, Skinner said. Williams hasn’t played before but is “starting to figure it out” and 6-foot-1 Fountain is someone who can “bowl around in the post.” Junior Evan Riechmann is a returning player but an improved 6-foot-4 player.

“The tough part about last year is we were very inexperienced,” Skinner said. “We brought back a freshman starter from the year before. On the flipside, where we didn’t have any experience last year, we only graduated one senior, who was probably our seventh man. They’re starting to learn how I want them to play. With the experience coming back, I’m expecting to have a lot better season.”

Skinner thinks the team should shoot for dou-

ble-digit wins this season, which Paris hasn’t achieved since its 17-10 record in 2020, but made it clear that the Coyotes shouldn’t just shoot to shoot. He has emphasized they should be patient on offense and should be more able to do so the more frequently they run the set plays.

“The goals and expectations are basically play hard and play smart and let the rest take care of itself,” Skinner said. “Obviously I want to get better at scoring and want to be disciplined with the ball. We’d just jack shots up instead of trust the next guy to do something. Hopefully, we’ll trust each other more this year and create for each other instead of looking to create for ourselves.”



“Nothing will work unless you do.” – John Wooden

MMA
MISSOURI MILITARY ACADEMY

Good luck, athletes!