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**An in-depth look at the area boys  
basketball teams for the 2022-23 season**

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# Wealth of talent exists throughout this area

**Y**ou are on the clock. It's the first-ever Muddy River Sports all-star draft and you have the first selection.

So who do you take?

Is it Danny Stephens, the 6-foot-7 all-state forward from Southeastern who will be a preferred walk-on at the University of Missouri?

Maybe it needs to be Bradley Longcor III, the smooth sophomore point guard at Quincy High School who is already turning heads of NCAA Division I coaches?

Does Jake Wallingford stand out, being 6-foot-8 with the ability to score inside and out even if the Quincy Notre Dame forward has to sit a majority of the season after undergoing hip surgery at the start of football season?

Do you want a shooter like Macomb's Connor Watson, who buried 71 3-pointers last season and can stretch defenses?

Is there a breakout star in the mix like Canton's Preston Brewer or Camp Point Central's Breyhar Wiskirchen? Could an emerging talent such as Brown County's Cole Behymer or Palmyra's Bear Bock be the kind of player to build around?

The options seem limitless and not a single one of them could be considered wrong. That's a credit to the depth of talent and the offseason commitment of so many players throughout this area.

Basketball season is officially upon us, and it hasn't taken long to see

what's in store.

Three teams won Thanksgiving tournament championships. Two area players were named tournament MVP. And one became the ninth player in area history to score 50 or more points in a game.

That all took place before all area teams had stepped on the floor.

It makes you curious what to expect once the wear and tear of football season fades and the student-athletes adjust to being in basketball mode. Could there be more high-flying, high-scoring moments to come?

Bet on it.

Success in the summer for many players — Quincy High School's Camden Brown picked up offers from NCAA Division II programs because of his strong play on the AAU circuit despite missing all of last winter with a knee injury — was merely a catapult to what lies ahead.

These players will continue to develop, while dazzling and delighting fans. And the players at the forefront now might not be at the top of the list come March.

It will make determining the 10 players each from Illinois and Missouri who will be invited to play in the second Muddy River Showcase at John Wood Community College on June 17 such an interesting debate.

That's a good problem for the Showcase committee to have because it means a winter to remember awaits us all.

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Quincy High School boys basketball coach Andy Douglas, center, shares a laugh with several of his players during a break in practice at Blue Devil Gym. | *Matt Schuckman photo*

# Handling the hype

Blue Devils stay humble, focused as expectations rise around them

By **MATT SCHUCKMAN**

MuddyRiverSports.com Editor

QUINCY — As the Quincy High School boys basketball team trudged through another preseason practice, those responsible for the sound system in Blue Devil Gym tested the acoustics, the decibel levels and the clarity for pregame introductions.

“They started playing everything and I got chills,” senior guard Reid O’Brien said.

The Blue Devils also were treated to the final production of their hype video.

“That will get you going,” O’Brien said. “That was pretty cool.”

There is an air of anticipation inside the venerable facility and encapsulating this community that hasn’t been felt in a while.

That’s a challenge for a still relatively young team to embrace and handle without getting swept up in the excitement. Should the Blue Devils budding maturity take hold and this talented corps show consistency, the type of success they envision is possible.

“The expectations are as high as we make them, as hard as we work in prac-

tice, as well as we do in games, as much as we want to put into it,” sophomore guard Bradley Longcor III said.

Yet, it’s up to the Blue Devils to hold each other accountable and stay grounded so the expectations don’t create a false sense of ego.

“We lean on each other,” junior guard Ralph Wires said. “People have high expectations for us because of how much hard work we’ve put in. Everyone knows we’re committed and working hard. We bond together as a family. We’ve been playing together for who knows how long. That’s a bond most people don’t see.”



**Quincy High School junior swingman Camden Brown missed his sophomore season with a knee injury but is expected to be a multi-faceted factor this season. | Matt Schuckman photo**

It's the backbone of a team willing to chase and meet any expectations, especially their own.

"Expectations are good," O'Brien said. "We kind of welcome expectations because it means you're doing something right. You don't want to come into a season where people think you're going to lose every time.

"But with the amount of expectations we're facing, we have to stay within ourselves. We're not trying to think about the state tournament, because that's what everyone else around town is thinking about. So we really take it one game at a time."

So how does the coaching staff keep them humble?

"Watch film," QHS coach Andy Douglas said with a chuckle.

"We had the chance to do that after the Blue-White Scrimmage. We're flying around listening to what the public says and how good everybody thinks we should be. That hasn't been our program. Our program is built on progressing and improving every day. That has to be our focus with this group.

"We have a lot of guys who can play and we have some talent out there. If we're not working as hard as we need to in practices, if our focus isn't there in practices, we're playing behind the eight ball."

Still, the expectations are understandable.

The Blue Devils return three starters and seven key contributors total from a team that enjoyed the most success of any QHS team in the past decade. They finished 13-1 in the Western Big 6 Conference, winning the league title outright, and followed it with Class 4A regional and sectional championships.

They were a quarter away from a final four berth, ultimately losing to Bolingbrook 49-42 in the super-sectional at Illinois State University's Redbird Arena to finish with a 28-6 record.

It was the most victories by a QHS squad in four decades.

"We know what it takes to win now," Longcor said.

That's a critical piece to the puzzle.

"We've been through everything there is," O'Brien said. "The whole season we had close games where we had to battle. So we've been in every situation we can go through. We have to let that benefit us this year.

"Knowing how to win basketball games is huge. There are a

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bunch of talented teams who when it gets close don't know how to win. Everything we went through last year helps a lot because we know how to win those games."

The fact different players made crucial plays at different times is invaluable.

That comes back to trust.

"We play really well as a group together," said Wires, who hit the game-winning shot against Collinsville in the sectional semifinals. "None of us are selfish. No matter which five are on the court, we're all going to communicate and be loud."

Sharing the ball is a must with the variety of weapons the Blue Devils possess.

Longcor set the QHS freshman scoring record last season with 454 points, which translated to 13.4 points per game. He made 56 3-pointers, which ranks among the 10 best single-season efforts in program history, and he led the Blue Devils with 106 assists.

Several NCAA Division I programs have visited Blue Devil Gym already to get a look at the 6-foot-3 first-team All-WB6 selection.

He was one of three freshmen to see extensive minutes last season, along with 6-foot-5 forward Keshawn Thomas and 6-foot-1 shooting guard Dominique Clay. Thomas became a starter by the end of the season and averaged 6.8 points and 5.4 rebounds per game.

O'Brien averaged 4.1 points and was second on the team with 82 assists. Wires came off the bench last season, but he played substantial minutes and averaged 3.2 points while dishing out 67 assists.

The glaring omission when discussing productivity is that of Jeremiah Talton, the first-team all-stater and 3-point record



Reid O'Brien is the lone senior in the Quincy High School boys basketball team's starting lineup. | Matt Schuckman photo

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**The Quincy High School starters get introduced prior to a game in the 51st QHS Thanksgiving Tournament following the pregame Devil ceremony.** | *Matt Schuckman photo*

holder who graduated after averaging 18.5 points and 6.3 rebounds and making 104 3-pointers.

The return of Camden Brown helps compensate there. A 6-foot-5 junior forward, Brown missed last season because of a knee injury, but he played on the varsity as a freshman, already has scholarship offers from NCAA Division II schools and has the ability to play inside and out and above the rim.

Getting him integrated into the attack will be part of this team's growth process.

"They're fun to be around and they compete," Douglas said. "We're taking coaching, which isn't easy with everything going in and all of the stuff we're putting it. But they're taking coaching really well and they are competing every drill and every play we put out there.

"It's been fun to watch the progression thus far. This group understands and is learning we're not anywhere close to where we need to be right now. That's

**“Make sure we stay as a team and stay humble. Keep working and keep our heads down. The work will show. If we let it get to our head, it won't. We have to stay focused, stay humble and let the work we put in show.”**

— Quincy sophomore guard Bradley Longcor III

great because we have a lot of room to grow.”

The good ol' standby throughout that process will be the Blue Devils' defense, which allowed 44.7 points per game last season and held opponents to 38-percent shooting from the field.

"We defend," O'Brien said. "We're energetic and we defend. We share the ball like we did last year. We communicate.

Everything. But in the end, we defend and we have to defend.”

And the Blue Devils cannot allow the expectations to create overconfidence.

"Make sure we stay as a team and stay humble," Longcor said. "Keep working and keep our heads down. The work will show. If we let it get to our head, it won't. We have to stay focused, stay humble and let the work we put in show.”

# All for one, one for all

Chemistry, togetherness, trust will enable to Raiders to build off last season's success, continue school's winning ways

By **MATT SCHUCKMAN**

MuddyRiverSports.com Editor

QUINCY — What do the Three Musketeers, DJ Khaled and the Navy SEALs have in common?

They each could be the inspiration for the Quincy Notre Dame boys basketball team this season.

Start with the Three Musketeers. In the legendary novel by Alexandre Dumas, the Musketeers stick together with the motto "Tous pour un, un pour tous," which translates in English to "All for one, one for all."

It's a fitting motto for QND's seniors, who typically hang out together and are often inseparable.

"It shows how much we trust each other," senior point guard Jake Hoyt said. "We're willing to follow each other anywhere. It translates to the floor in how when someone says something we're all going to listen and follow them into it."

The camaraderie creates instant chemistry.

"It's like playing with your best friends," senior guard Jackson Stratton said. "There's a lot of chemistry and a lot of trust there. ... There's a lot of love and a lot of trust."

That existed before they took the court together.

"We have a really good bond outside of basketball," senior forward Josh Bocke said. "It's been our friend group for pretty much our whole lives. We all just happen to play basketball, too."

The Raiders play with purpose and freedom because of their friendship.

"You know they're going to have your back and you're going to have theirs," Bocke said. "It's just more fun, too, when you're playing with people you like."

Those bonds led to success, which is where DJ Khaled figures in.

The ultra successful record producer



**Quincy Notre Dame seniors Jackson Stratton, back, and Jake Hoyt bring experience, chemistry and camaraderie to the court after winning 21 games a season ago. | Matt Schuckman photo**

and rapper released his single "All I Do Is Win" in 2010, but it could be the theme song for this group when you look at how success follows them from sport to sport.

Last season, the Raiders went 21-12 and

reached the Class 2A sectional championship game. In the spring, the QND baseball team went 32-3 and played for a sectional title. This fall, the QND soccer team won the Class 1A state championship and the football team reached the



**Quincy Notre Dame coach Kevin Meyer calls out instructions during a practice at The Pit. With six seniors returning — three of whom have been starters — Meyer and Raiders will rely on experience to get through any adversity.** | *Matt Schuckman photo*

Class 4A playoffs.

Those four teams combined for a .750 winning percentage.

“We know how a team works to win,” Stratton said. “That’s our biggest advantage with these guys. It’s going to be awesome putting us all together.”

None of them are willing to settle for second best.

“Winning is contagious and losing is contagious,” QND coach Kevin Meyer said. “This is a group of guys that loves to compete all the way across the board. There is a great mindset about competition when it comes to this group. They’re driven. They want to be successful.

“If it’s the classroom, they win. If it’s chess, they want to win. So I firmly be-

lieve when they get out here between the lines that their mindset is win. I love that competitiveness.”

No circumstances will change that.

That’s where adapting a mantra from the Navy SEALs could be beneficial. The Raiders need to ignore and override.

They open the season without their top returning scorer and rebounder as Jake

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Wallingford, a 6-foot-8 senior drawing NCAA Division II recruiting interest, underwent surgery for a torn labrum in his hip early in football season. His return, if possible, isn't known.

But he's maintaining a presence with the team, attending practices and being voted one of three team captains along with Hoyt and Stratton.

"Jake's a tremendous player," Meyer said. "To have him out puts a little pressure on the other guys. It also lets them create an identity as a group. They just don't have Jake sitting back at the rim blocking shots. They just don't have Jake in the middle to score. It's going to take all of them, and they are more than capable of doing it."

Braden Sheffield, another senior who started last season, chose not to play this season.

"This team knows how to adapt," Stratton said. "This team had some struggles last year and a number of different starting lineups until we finally found our fit. So missing guys won't affect us as much as people think. We know how to adapt."

"If Wally comes back, that's great. Right now, we have to prepare without him. So we're putting in new stuff that helps us with a smaller lineup."

That's the silver lining. If this team finds a way to be consistent without Wallingford, it gives them more options and more versatility should he return.

"We'll be ready for Wally whenever he comes back," Hoyt said. "But it might make the rest of us better learning how to play without him, since he was such a big part of this team last year. It's going to force some guys to get better."

First and foremost, that's Bocke. The 6-foot-4 senior came off the bench last



**Senior forward Josh Bocke will take on an expanded role this season with 6-foot-8 Jake Wallingford sidelined following hip surgery in August.** | *Matt Schuckman photo*

season, but he will start this year and will need to be a presence in the post.

And he knows what he has to do. "Be physical and stay strong," Bocke said. "Just work really, really hard."

That has to be the case on the defensive end.

"We can really get into people defensively," Bocke said. "It's a bit more of an effort thing. We don't have the big guy back there to block shots. We have to work more on our positioning. We have to step in and take charges."

The Raiders are more than willing to be physical and aggressive.

"Playing really good defense," Stratton said. "It's what we go off of."

It's the "all for one, one for all" that will carry them the furthest.

"What will make us or break us is our team chemistry," Meyer said. "We have to get to come together as one 13-man team. Building that brotherhood, that family we always try to do will be the key to everything. To be special, they have to get to that 'we over me' mentality."

"They have lofty goals. Those goals shouldn't change because one person is out. We just have to adjust how we're going to get to those goals."

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Southeastern senior forward Danny Stephens is considered the top player in the state in Class 1A and has signed to be a preferred walk-on at the University of Missouri. | *Muddy River Sports file photo*

## With Stephens leading charge, Suns will face challenges at every turn

By MUDDY RIVER STAFF

AUGUSTA, Ill. — The game plan, Southeastern boys basketball coach Brett Ufkes said, is pretty simple.

“We have the best player in the state in 1A, so we have to use him correctly,” Ufkes said.

In 6-foot-7 senior swingman Danny Stephens, the Suns do possess a talent like no other small-school team in the area (or state) possesses. With his 163rd point this season, Stephens will become

Southeastern’s all-time leading scorer, passing 2010 Southeastern graduate Regan Bruenger’s total of 1,779.

Southeastern is coming off its best season in three decades. Last winter, the Suns finished 30-5 and won their first sectional crown since the 1992 Suns finished fourth in Class A. It took the eventual state runners-up from Liberty to eliminate Southeastern 49-42 in the Jacksonville Super-sectional.

While Stephens, who averaged 28.1 points and 10.5 rebounds per game last

season, returns, the Suns will lean on a lot of new faces this winter.

Southeastern lost a talented senior group, which included current John Wood Community College player Ramsey Fry.

“Not only do you lose an 18-point-per-game scorer in Ramsey, but you lose your No. 1 defender who was a game changer in how he guarded the other team’s best player,” said Ufkes, who enters his ninth season at the helm of the Suns. “We’re going to have to go back to basics and

grind.”

That isn't dampening expectations.

The Suns are ranked No. 1 in one Class 1A state poll and opened the season by going 4-0 and winning the championship of the Beardstown Tiger Classic. Stephens was named the tournament MVP, while junior guard Owen Rigg was named to the all-tournament team.

Rigg is the only other returning starter for the Suns.

“Owen will set the tone defensively for us with his hustle and competitiveness,” Ufkes said.

Ufkes said the team will lean on sophomores Aiden Akers and Griffin Tippey to step into the starting lineup. Ufkes said junior Mason Fry, senior Josh Kaltenbach and juniors Jesse Johnson and Carter Hitz also will be counted on to aid the Suns.

But Suns still revolve around Stephens, who has committed to be a preferred walk-on at the University of Missouri and scored a single-game record 52 points during the season-opening Beardstown Tournament.

“We are going to have to try to get him 20 shots a game,” Ufkes said of Stephens. “We'll have to try to find a way around the crazy defense I anticipate he'll see.”

Southeastern will once again play a challenging schedule. In addition to their regular stops at Beardstown and the Hancock County tournaments, which they will host this season, the Suns will move to the Macomb-Western Holiday Tournament at Christmas. They previously played in the Mississippi Valley Invitational Tournament in Mendon for many years.

The Suns will also play in shootout events at Quincy High School, Quincy Notre Dame, Abingdon and the JWCC Rumble on the River.

Ufkes knows there is a target on his team's back, but the Suns understand what they are up against.

“On paper, our roster is not as good as last year on paper,” Ufkes said. “How we do really depends on if the kids do as I ask.”



**Southeastern guard Owen Rigg is expected to make shots and become a secondary scoring threat this season.** | *Muddy River Sports file photo*



# Changing pace should help Panthers seize opportunity to win close games

By **MATT SCHUCKMAN**  
MuddyRiverSports.com Editor

CAMP POINT, Ill. — James Barnett’s wife is the voice of reason.

While recently watching a college basketball game being played at a sloppy tempo, the Central boys basketball coach expressed concern his team, with a limited number of practices due to the football team’s state championship game appearance, would play at its own turn-over-filled pace.

His wife subtly reminded Barnett he chose to let the Panthers play a more run-and-gun style and with that he has to accept a certain amount of turnovers.

“I know,” he said. “But, man, it’s tough.”

That’s the control freak inside of him

“It was more basketball conversations instead of plays and sets. We’re doing more basketball concepts.”

— Central coach James Barnett

talking.

“I’ve always been the type of coach where I really liked to control things,” Barnett said. “We like to get out and go, but we also have a lot of sets. We’re very defensive oriented. We know what the opposing team is going to do. And we’re going to do A, B and C to get to D.”

With a more experienced group with an abundance of talent, Barnett willingly

has loosened the reins.

“We had a meeting at the end of last season and the boys talked about how they wanted to open it up, they didn’t want as many sets, they wanted to get out and go,” Barnett said. “And we did that this summer. I found myself sitting and watching a lot this summer. We’d call timeouts or have a break and we’d discuss what was going on, what they saw, what I saw, what they think we can do, what I think we can do. Then we’d go out and go.”

“It was more basketball conversations instead of plays and sets. We’re doing basketball concepts. It’s kind of like, ‘You’re coming off a ball screen and you’re going to have A, B, C and D you can do. You have to see the floor and make the decision and do it.’”

That’s only doable if there is trust on both sides.

“With this group, they know the game,” Barnett said. “Three years ago, they were the same group of kids, but they didn’t




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**Camp Point Central guard Breyhar Wiskirchen, left, is one of the key returnees who can help fuel the Panthers' get-it-and-go attack this season. | Photo courtesy Mike Pritchard**

have enough basketball under their belts to do this. Now we're on that trust level with each other."

The challenge now is simply getting up to speed.

Central's success in football — the Panthers played for the Class 1A state championship the day after Thanksgiving — meant the basketball team spent nearly three weeks with just five players in practice.

"It's getting monotonous for those guys," Barnett said.

With the football season having wrapped up, the Panthers can get everyone in the gym and work toward finding cohesion and consistency. There will be an adjustment for many of them, but

Barnett believes their experience and love of the game will speed up the process.

"It's a big group of basketball guys," Barnett said. "Since I've been at Central, it's the first time I've had a team full of basketball players. A lot of them over the years play football and play baseball and basketball is just their secondary sport. This whole group of guys, they just love basketball. They've grown up with it. They play it in the summer. They play it in the offseason."

For many, like senior guards Breyhar Wiskirchen, Isaac Genenbacher and Dean Hibbert, this is the opportunity they've prepared for after winning less than 10 games their first two seasons combined.

"We had to play a bunch of those guys when they weren't ready," Barnett said. "They took their lumps for a couple years."

Last winter, the Panthers won 19 games, while losing eight games by single digits, five of those by one possession.

"I'm just hoping we turn the corner and instead of losing eight games by single digits we're winning those eight games and instead of 19 wins you've got 25 wins," Barnett said. "A lot of the teams we played right with last year and saw what they did, that raises our excitement a little bit more. One of the things we talked about in the offseason is, 'Guys, we're right there. We just have to take that one last step and we're there.'"

# Fully restocking cupboard will make for challenging times for Eagles

By MUDDY RIVER STAFF

LIBERTY, Ill. — The greatest season in the history of the Liberty boys basketball program is now in the rear-view mirror.

So too are the pieces that made it possible.

That means Eagles coach Greg Altmix and his staff are rebuilding from bottom up, starting with only five players who have varsity experience and combined to score 68 total points last season.

Not a single returnee has more than eight career made field goals.

However, they saw what it takes to win, riding the bench as the Eagles went 31-6 and finished as the state runner-up in Class 1A. That team featured all-state forward Breiton Klingele as part of a three-headed frontcourt that including 6-foot-5 Logan Robbins and 6-foot-6 Devin Klauser.

Those three combined to average nearly 32 points per game. Throw in the backcourt trio of Cannen Wolf, Clayton Obert and Jackson Tenhouse, who averaged, who combined to average 22 points per game, and the Eagles need to replace nearly all of their scoring.

In fact, Liberty graduated 96.6 percent of its scoring and 97 percent of its rebounding from the first team in school history to play for a state championship.

"There's work to do," Altmix said.



**Greg Altmix is entering his ninth season as the Liberty boys basketball coach.** | *Muddy River Sports file photo*

The Eagles lost all four games in the Pittsfield Turkey Tournament, but they were able to find consistent scoring from juniors Gavin Fessler and Tanner Gimm and showed the competitive fire expected from an Altmix-coached squad.

Fessler scored in double figures in all four games and gave the Eagles a perimeter threat. Gimm, a 6-foot-3, 230-pound force, scored a career-high 22 points against Payson Seymour and has the size and footwork to be solid on the block.

His athleticism and strength help, too. Last spring, Gimm qualified for the Class 1A state track championships in the shot put and likely will be favored to reach Charleston for the state meet again.

Finding complementary pieces to Fessler and Gimm is critical. Junior forward Levi Hoener, who scored eight points in the season opener against Pittsfield, is an option as Altmix experiments with different combinations in the backcourt to complement the frontcourt.



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# Basic beginnings set stage for Saukees to chase extraordinary success

By **MATT SCHUCKMAN**

MuddyRiverSports.com Editor

PITTSFIELD, Ill. — Dialing it back doesn't mean dialing it down.

Having graduated seven seniors and returning only a handful of players with any varsity minutes, Pittsfield boys basketball Brad Tomhave knew better than to move too fast in implementing a full offensive arsenal or defensive game plan.

"Every year, you feel like you have a certain starting point in practice," Tomhave said. "This year, that starting point was a little bit more basic. Keeping it simple and paying a little more attention to detail has been our focus. That has seemed to help."

The result was a solid start to the season as the Saukees went 3-1 in the Pittsfield Turkey Tournament, had five different players score in double figures and saw the balance Tomhave expects to be this team's hallmark.

"We had a really solid two weeks of practice," Tomhave said. "It transitioned into Monday night and they were able to play with a lot of energy. This group has a lot of energy and a lot of excitement with each other when they get on the court."

They communicate at a high level as well.

"It's a group that loves being in the gym," Tomhave said. "It's a group that is a little bit more vocal, which creates more energy and excitement within our practice and creates that higher level of play just by themselves. We don't have to create that enthusiasm for them."

Nor does the coaching staff have to remind them to share the basketball.

That's an inherent quality that comes from playing with such a diverse group.

Junior forward Eli Mendenhall offers the ability to score inside and out and provide some size on the block. Junior guard Brennan Tomhave hit a growth spurt and creates mismatches with his length and ability to shoot the basketball. Junior guard Connor Allen is athletic and tough. Senior guard Nolan Daniel has experience and craftiness.

And junior guard Adam Musgrave emerged as a player who can cause fits with his athleticism.

"He really found himself this summer with athleticism that is just off the charts," Tomhave said. "I don't think he knew how athletic he was."

It makes the Saukees tough to defend and difficult to prepare to play.

"We don't have one guy who is going to be on an opponent's scouting report that says, 'Hey, we have to contain this guy first,'" Tomhave said. "We can come at it in different ways. The other night, we had three guys in double figures and another who hit a couple threes to stretch the defense.

"So I don't think it will be one guy we rely on. It will be a collective group we feel we can go to."

It's a group willing to share the ball, the minutes and the credit.

"We've identified some roles within the team that makes the body of the group stronger," Tomhave said. "There's a lot of different ways we can attack things."

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# Mix of frontcourt depth, backcourt scoring gives Mustangs good vibes

By **STEVE EIGHINGER**

MuddyRiverSports.com Correspondent

MENDON, Ill. — Keith Carothers has a quiet confidence the Unity boys basketball team will be able to turn the proverbial corner.

“I’m fairly excited about the season,” Carothers said. “We’ve got a good mix of experience and promising underclassmen. We should also be pretty deep.”

The Mustangs have gone five straight seasons without a winning record, including last year’s 9-22 finish.

“If we can defend a little this season, I think we’ll be pretty solid,” Carothers said.

Feeding Carothers optimism is a veteran frontcourt that includes a trio of 6-foot-4 performers — junior Melvin

McMillen, plus seniors Ethan Lucie and Gavin Koenig.

“We have three guys with a lot of size,” Carothers said. “This may be the biggest team I’ve ever coached. There will be a lot of things we can do with that kind of size.”

McMillen and Koenig are both adept in and around the paint and will be counted on to stretch opposing defenses. Carothers thinks McMillen is an excellent candidate to be one of the area’s breakout players this winter.

It’s a valid assessment after McMillen made the Beardstown Tournament all-tourney team as the Mustangs.

Lucie will enter the season as an unknown. He wound up with the Mustangs after his family moved into the Unity district from Warsaw. Lucie did not play

basketball last season.

Another frontcourt contributor figures to be junior Ethan Voss, a 5-foot-11 offensive lineman from Mustangs’ football team.

Cody Shaffer, a 6-foot junior who averaged 10 points per game, could emerge as Unity’s leading scorer.

“Cody is a good 3-point shooter and slasher,” Carothers said.

Seniors Ryle Duke and Nick Maynard should also be key members of the rotation.

Duke is a double-figure scorer who, despite being just a 6-footer, led the Mustangs in rebounds last season. The 5-foot-10 Maynard is arguably the top defender on the club.

Carter and Caleb Kasparie, who are 5-foot-10 twins, plus 6-foot-2 Ben McClelland, will also be in the mix.

Unity’s emphasis on pressure defense allows for the entire roster to contribute.

“We spend a lot of time working on full-court pressure and creating buckets out of transition,” Carothers said. “We’re deep enough to do that.”

Carothers feels momentum is finally beginning to swing in Unity’s favor after a five-year stretch has seen the Mustangs go a combined 38-97.

“After a few down years, we started to turn the corner last season,” Carothers said. “I’m looking for that upward swing to continue.”



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# Setting right tempo critical for Hornets as they look to score in transition

By MUDDY RIVER SPORTS STAFF

MOUNT STERLING, Ill. — What the Brown County boys basketball team will lack in size this winter, the Hornets hope to make up for in speed and hustle.

“We are going to run,” Hornets fourth-year coach Eric Jones said. “We’ll get most of our points in transition. We did that last year, too, but we are going to up the tempo even more this year.”

“We’ll use a lot of full-court pressure depending on the situation. We’re going to try to speed everyone up that we play.”

Last year, that fast-paced style of play led to a 22-win campaign. However, one of the main stalwarts for the Hornets, 1,000-point scorer Tate Fullerton, has graduated. Also departed are four other seniors who saw time in the starting lineup for Brown County.

Jones said he’ll lean on seniors Cole Behymer, Colby Wort and Sam Carr to lead the way this season.

“If we are going to do anything, they have to have solid years,” Jones said.

Jones expects Behymer to pick up where Fullerton left off as the Hornets’ primary scorer. He said Behymer is an adept

outside shooter and can attack the rim as well.

Wort will be counted upon to be the team’s defensive stopper. Jones said Wort will be assigned the top player on the other team most nights. Carr, who at 6-foot-3 is the team’s tallest player, will be counted on to play both inside and outside.

Two sophomores are likely to join those seniors in the starting five - Tyce Fullerton, who is Tate’s younger brother, and Maverick Henry.

Jones, who has a 50-30 overall record at Brown County, pointed to juniors Angel Duarte and Jagr McGath as two players who also will factor into the Hornets’ playing rotation.

The Hornets will have to face another tough Western Illinois Valley Conference schedule this season, Jones said. Jacksonville Rount is the league favorite, followed by Triopia and Winchester West Central.

Brown County will test itself at the Beardstown Tournament to open the season where it will face Southeastern in its season opener. The Hornets will spend the Christmas holidays at the Macomb-Western Holiday Tournament at Western Illinois University and will be part of the 100th anniversary of the Winchester Tournament to start the new year.



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# Indians hope smaller, younger lineup is ready for tough schedule

By MUDDY RIVER STAFF

PAYSON, Ill. — In his first season as Payson Seymour boys basketball coach last winter, Tyler Duschinsky had a luxury. “We had a lot of depth,” Duschinsky said of this 2021-22 team that finished 19-13 overall. “It wasn’t about who to play, it was how do I get these guys minutes. That really helped me on my learning curve as a coach and gave some of our younger guys a chance to develop on the junior varsity.”

With six seniors, including three starters, gone from that team, the Indians will lean on players who will see their first significant varsity action this season.

Senior forward Bryan Dieker returns as the Indians’ top scorer after averaging around nine points per game last season. He’s joined by junior Wyatt Niesen as the lone returning starters.

The Indians will have a new look on offense after primarily running their offense through departed post players Riker Triplett and Trey Johnson last season. Duschinsky sees Payson running a lot of five-guard sets, which will put a premium on outside shooting.

Enter sophomores Wayne Barker and Blake Schwartz, who

“I’m here to give them good, steady coaching. They know they can rely on me and that I’m going to be here for them.”

— Payson Seymour coach Tyler Duschinsky

Duschinsky expects to play key roles.

“We are counting on them to make shots and take some pressure off of Bryan and Wyatt,” Duschinsky said.

The Indians are short on experienced players as Richie Martin is the only other senior on the Payson roster with previous playing experience.

Payson will once again play a tough schedule. The Indians will open at the Pittsfield Thanksgiving Tournament. They’ll spend the Christmas holiday again at the Mississippi Valley Invitational Tournament at Mendon and then ring in the New Year at the always-tough Winchester Invitational Tournament.

The Indians are scheduled to face Quincy Notre Dame as part of the KHQA Superfan Shootout in early February and then will make a trip the same weekend to play in a shootout at Evergreen Park near Chicago.

“I know we have a tough schedule and face a lot of state-ranked teams throughout the year, but that is part of playing at Payson,” Duschinsky said. “You are going to play tough competition. It will come down to how well our new guys adapt to the pace of the game and the physicality of varsity basketball. If that takes time, it will eat into the win-loss record, but if they can adapt we are good to go.”

“I’m here to give them good, steady coaching. They know they can rely on me and that I’m going to be here for them.”

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# Youth movement shouldn't keep Tornadoes from progressing

By **STEVE EIGHINGER**

MuddyRiverSports.com Correspondent

GRIGGSVILLE, Ill. — On paper, a first glance at the Griggsville-Perry boys basketball roster might bring a shake of the head.

A second look will likely include a “whoaaaa ...” type of reaction.

The Tornadoes will be attacking the upcoming season with what politely might be called a severe lack of experience.

There will be no seniors donning the Griggsville-Perry livery this season. Nada. Zilch. Nyet.

Hoist the white flag and start the “we’re building for the future” talk?

Not hardly.

Third-year Tornadoes coach Garrett White is surprisingly optimistic his club can equal or better last year’s 15-17 finish.

“This team can shoot, and we hope to spread teams out,” White said, his voice filled with a surprising level of confidence. “We’ll be guard and perimeter-oriented. Are we a year away, or already there? That’s a good question.”

Defensively, the Tornadoes will again be accenting their quickness with a pressure-oriented approach. Look for a lot of zone presses.

“I’m against sitting back playing an ‘old-man’s zone defense,” White said.

Griggsville-Perry’s 12-man varsity roster features a combined six sophomores and freshmen, plus a half-dozen juniors.

Arguably the most experienced player will be 5-foot-9 junior guard Wyatt Lipcaman, who averaged 6.4 points and three assists per game as a sophomore. Junior Michael Myers, a 6-foot-2 small forward who has battled injuries the past

two years, averaged 4.4 points per game as a sophomore could be a prime breakout candidate..

“Wyatt is a rock-solid guard and a leader, and Myers should have a big season,” White said.

After those two, White will watch how the Tornadoes’ lineup develops early in the season.

“Our kids were 29-8 in summer play, which was a good sign,” White said. “They play well together. I’m excited. It’s a new era, if you will.

“We lost a lot (from last year), but everyone is looking forward to taking the bull by the horns to see what we can do.”

White has worked with the players on the Griggsville-Perry roster since they were young. He has been involved with the program at various levels for a number of years.

“I’ve known the kids since they were in grade school,” said White, 30-22 during his first two years as Tornadoes coach.

White will try to mold the rest of his varsity from a cast that also includes juniors Lane Lipcaman, Dayne McCallister, Rory Phillips and Eli White, plus sophomores Wade Lipcaman, Logan Fencik, Garrett Woodward, Flint Kirk and Bradyn Lister and freshman Jaxon Dorsey.

Wade Lipcaman (6-foot-3), Fencik (6-foot-4) and McCallister (6-foot-4) are expected to provide size up front. McCallister, who eventually figures to be a force at both ends of the floor, needs “to develop consistency” to take the next step of development.

The 5-foot-8 Lane Lipcaman is penciled in as the floor leader.

“We’re very young, but we’re very hungry,” White said.

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# With Watson pointing Bombers in right direction, success will follow

By MUDDY RIVER SPORTS STAFF

MACOMB, Ill. — The ball is going to be in Connor Watson’s hands and everyone knows it.

How the rest of the Macomb boys basketball players react to what defenses do to contain Watson will determine just how successful the Bombers will be.

Early indications are the Bombers will figure it out.

Macomb went 3-1 in the Bushnell-Prairie City by getting multiple players involved offensively. Watson, the senior combo guard, scored in double figures in only two of the four games, netting 20 points against Illini Bluffs and 24 points against Illini West.

In fact, Watson was the fourth leading scorer in a victory against Bushnell-Prairie City. Braden Holthaus made four 3-pointers and finished with 19 points. Lindsey May added 11 points and Nolan Kerr chipped in 10.

The Bombers

Kerr, a 6-foot forward, was consistent in scoring between six and 10 points and gives the Bombers a secondary option to

rely on. Holthaus should be able to complement Watson on the perimeter, as could Watson’s younger brother, Drew.

Watson averaged 16 points per game last season and finished with 71 3-pointers. A three-sport athlete who excels at golf and baseball, he has been part of winning programs his entire career and will be the catalyst this season.

Jeremy Anderson took over as Macomb’s head coach in 2012 and has built a consistently successful program. The Bombers went 14-0 during the COVID-19 shortened in 2021 and followed it up with a 20-9 campaign last season.

The reason? He guides the Bombers into playing a strong half-court game where their athleticism and strength give them an edge. Langdon Allen, Lindsey May and Jack Duncan are perfect examples of that.

They helped the Bombers win 10 consecutive games during football season — the most victories in program history — and will play physical as well as quick.

The Bombers’ schedule will be challenging, with a road trip to face Quincy Notre Dame looming the first weekend of December and a strong field assembled for the Macomb-Western Holiday Tournament.

Watson’s leadership, on-court savvy and ability to stretch defenses will help the Bombers navigate those challenges and give the remainder of the roster time to develop into their roles. It’s going to make the Bombers tough to beat come February because they will have depth and a wealth of interchangeable parts.

# Wolves need to take limited experience and watch it blossom

By **STEVE EIGHINGER**  
MuddyRiverSports.com Correspondent

PLEASANT HILL, Ill. — Steve Rylander is realistic. The Pleasant Hill boys basketball coach knows this will likely be another year of growth for the Wolves' program. "We're all excited, and our only real goal is to improve throughout the season," said Rylander, beginning his second year at Pleasant Hill.

The Wolves are coming off a 2-19 season that included a 1-7 finish in the Western Illinois Valley Conference South Division. While obviously hoping for improvement in both of those records, Rylander knows the fruits of the program's labor probably won't be seen until next season.

"We only have one senior on our roster," he said. Plus, there's a promising class of junior high players also on the way.

The biggest struggle this year will likely be on offense until some of the team's younger players become more comfortable at the varsity level.

Anchoring the Pleasant Hill lineup will be senior Dae Corion Colbeare, a 6-foot guard who is quick and can drive, according to Rylander.

"He can also shoot the three," Rylander said.

Dolbeare is the top returning scorer after averaging 7.5 points per game as a junior.

Another key element will be the continued improvement of 6-foot-3 junior center Aadyn Myers, who was a part-time starter as a sophomore. Myers is expected to be a strong presence in the post who can also contribute from the perimeter.

"To have any kind of success, we're going to need to play strong defense," said Rylander, who says his players "have bought into" that approach.

Rylander feels much of that defensive pressure the Wolves will be applying will come compliments of a strong sophomore class. At the head of that group is 5-foot-6 guard Jaren Lawson, who will also be the club's chief ballhandler.

"Jaren makes up for a lack of size with some real hard-nosed play," Rylander said.

Fellow sophomores Lane Hubbard, Brody Dolbeare and Carter Jones should all have important roles.

In particular, Jones could be a name to watch. He saw considerable varsity time as a freshman and should develop into a strong inside presence. Rylander says he is an excellent rebounder.

Pleasant Hill opens its season with a pair of home games, Nov. 22 with Louisiana (Mo.) and North Greene, before hitting the road for five straight games.

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# Patience necessary as youthful Wildcats still building for future

By **MUDDY RIVER SPORTS STAFF**

BARRY, Ill. — Curtis Stout’s challenge as the Western boys basketball coach won’t be much different than it was a year ago.

He has to practice and preach patience. The Wildcats will be led by sophomore guards Mason Smith and Casen Tobias, who were the team’s leading scorers as

freshmen when they averaged 10.4 and 6.4 points per game, respectively.

The 6-foot-1 Smith and the 5-foot-10 Tobias picked up where they left off. Smith scored in double figures in all four games in the Pittsfield Turkey Tournament, averaging 15 points per game. Tobias scored in double figures three times and averaged 12 points.

The more they mature — physically and in basketball IQ — the more Western will

be able to compete.

Having limited size is as much of a challenge as the Wildcats’ youth.

A pair of 6-foot-2 forwards — Ethan Dixon and Cayden Fesler — graduated and the Wildcats will rely on 6-foot senior Andrew Wilson to be a mainstay in the post.

Senior guard Zach Rucker and sophomore guard Dylan Ross will see playing time in the backcourt as the Wildcats will try to emphasize defense and ballhandling to make an impact.

The ability to spread the floor and stretch defenses should allow the Wildcats to attack off the dribble and create mismatches. It’s going to take all five players on the court to contend for rebounds to make up for the lack of size, but it could led to transition baskets because of the Wildcats’ quickness if they get the ball and go.

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# Titans quickly showing Dahl's reason for optimism is warranted

By **STEVE EIGHINGER**

MuddyRiverSports.com Correspondent

HAMILTON, Ill. — Admittedly, Jeff Dahl is optimistic about the upcoming boys basketball season.

“We have a lot of potential,” the West Hancock coach said.

“We have the potential to do some things.”

At the height of that optimism?

“We’ll score some points,” Dahl said. “I’m excited.”

West Hancock is coming off a 13-18 season, but returns a wealth of experience, anchored by seniors Alec Hymes, Lewis Siegfried, Luke Jacquot and Bryan Gerhardt, plus juniors Gage Scott and Parker Quinlan and sophomores Nolan Hurt and Gavin Grothaus.

“We have a lot of good, multi-talented guys, and they’ve worked hard,” said Dahl, 263-136 in a career that includes two stops at West Hancock and a stretch at Keokuk, Iowa. “I think we’ll be able to handle whatever adversity we run into.”

The Titans did so the opening week of the season, winning Bushnell-Prairie City Spartan Tip-Off Classic with Hymes, Jacquot and Gerhardt all making the all-tournament team.

The 6-foot-3, 200-pound Hymes, who will be counted on to be a force inside, also possesses an effective mid-range jumper that Dahl feels will help him improve his 10.9 scoring average as a junior. Hymes will likely be West Hancock’s principal threat on the boards after averaging 7 rebounds per game a year ago.

The 6-foot-2 Jacquot should be another threat along the baseline. Dahl says Jacquot has improved both his shooting and rebounding.

Dahl is confident of productive seasons for Grothaus and Hurt. Grothaus is a 6-foot wing who the coach says “plays bigger” than his size. The 6-foot-2 Hurt “is athletic, quick and a

good defender.”

In the backcourt, look for Gerhardt to add on to his six points and three assists per game he averaged as a junior. He’ll likely control the offense at point guard.

“(Gerhardt) is also a tenacious defender and an adequate 3-point shooter,” Dahl said.

Scott is also a 3-point threat for what should be a nicely balanced offense. He’s also an solid defender and an above-average rebounder for a guard.

Quinlan, at 6-foot-1, should see ample playing time as a swing man.

Dahl said the Titans will be playing more man-to-man defense this season — for a reason.

“We want to make teams uncomfortable, we should be strong and quick,” he said. “We also want to put pressure on teams with our offense. We’ll be attacking, shooting threes.

“We’ll be focusing on competing every possession.”

# Deitrich's perimeter accuracy is crucial to Chargers being competitive

By MUDDY RIVER SPORTS STAFF

CARTHAGE, Ill. — Nolan Deitrich's ability to drive a golf ball down the middle of the fairway consistently and accurately enabled the Illini West boys golf team to fashion the most memorable season in program.

Carrying over the same consistency and accuracy to the hardwood could lead to success for the Illini West boys basketball team.

One of the most promising scorers in the area, Deitrich got off to a sizzling start, averaging 20 points per game through the Chargers' first six contests. He's been deadly from 3-point range as well, knocking down five or more treys twice.

How the rest of the Chargers feed off Deitrich's play and how they react when opposing defenses clamp down on him will determine how successful Illini West will be.

The Chargers went 20-10 last season, losing to Quincy Notre Dame in the Class 2A regional semifinals. Max Richardson, a forward with a large presence, pushed Illini West to the 20-victory plateau with Deitrich as the team's No. 2 scorer.

Richardson and the rest of the senior-laden lineup graduated,

leaving the Chargers looking for complementary pieces.

Drake Mudd offers a counterpoint on the perimeter with his ability to knock down jumpers and force defenses to not overplay on Deitrich. He scored in the four- to six-point range last season and is the only other returning player with much varsity experience.

Gannon Bergman can be the power in the post that balances the offense this season and helps continue the successful progression under fifth-year coach Justin Ellison.

A Canton, Mo., native who was an all-area performer in high school, Ellison led Illini West to a combined eight victories in his first two seasons, but the Chargers responded by winning nine games in the shortened COVID-19 season in 2021.

Last winter, the Chargers found their groove after the holidays and won nine times in a 10-game stretch before facing QND in the regional. The offensive success centered around being able to score inside and out and set up 3-point shooters by first getting the ball to the paint.

It's the same philosophy being employed this season with Deitrich and Mudd also being able to score off the dribble, which forces defense not to overplay the perimeter.



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# Pirates to experiment with combinations to find right lineup

By MUDDY RIVER SPORTS STAFF

HANNIBAL, Mo. — Having lost a majority of his team’s scoring and rebounding due to graduation, Hannibal boys basketball coach Marty Hull sees the first few weeks of the Pirates’ season as a bit of a learning experiment.

Hull, entering his sixth season at Hannibal, has eight upperclassmen on his roster, but the majority of those players are short on varsity playing experience.

“We’re going to use a lot of different lineups early,” said Hull, whose team is coming off an 11-16 campaign. “We’ll probably play eight to 10 kids early on and see who fits best with each other.”

Hull said the team will rely on seniors Drew Porter, Haden Robertson, DaeShon Glasgow and Kasen Sherwood. Porter, Robertson and Glasgow all have starting experience, while Sherwood returns to basketball after sitting out last season.

The Pirates’ junior group includes Mason Hull, Thomas Janes, Brody Douglas and C.J. Anderson. Marty Hull said Anderson will help pick up the scoring slack left by the graduation losses.

“He can be a difference maker,” Hull said.

Hull said sophomores Clayton Neisen and Jared Locke also will figure into the Pirates’ plans at the varsity level, while freshmen Nick Thomas and Trey Hoskins could eventually be part of the mix on the varsity level.

With the Pirates being a bit short in stature, they’ll try to play an up-tempo style.

“We are not very big, so we’ll try to throw some different presses out there,” said Hull, who is 64-59 at Hannibal and 103-



Senior guard DaeShon Glasgow is part of a strong group of upperclassmen for the Hannibal boys basketball team. | Photo courtesy Mathew Kirby

80 overall in eight seasons. “We’re trying to figure out what is best for us and see what we can do to force the tempo.”

Hull is hopeful the Pirates can take another step up in the competitive North Central Missouri Conference. He pegged Mexico as the league favorite with Kirksville and Fulton also among the league’s top teams going into the season.

“If you go .500 in our league, you’ve done something,” Hull said. “We went .500 last year and that’s the goal at a minimum for us this season.”

Hull said he’ll learn a lot about the Pirates in a short time early in the season as they play in the Winfield Tip-Off Tournament at Thanksgiving. The Pirates will spend the Christmas break at the U.S. Bank Holiday Classic in Rolla.



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# Offseason spent getting cultured in basketball to benefit Panthers

By **MATT SCHUCKMAN**

MuddyRiverSports.com Editor

PALMYRA, Mo. — Brian Rea is still learning.

Heading into his second season as the Palmyra boys basketball coach after spending the previous 12 seasons at Payson Seymour, Rea is figuring out which games and which victories resonate with the Missouri fanbase.

One of those occurred in the season opener when the Panthers beat Elsberry by three points.

“People were excited, talking around town at lunch and stuff like that,” Rea said. “So it’s a good thing.”

Coming off a 14-12 season in which their four losses the final month of the season came against 20-win teams, the Panthers showed significant progress adjusting to Rea’s system and coaching. He felt the leap forward Palmyra during the offseason was substantial.

“They are really good kids,” Rea said. “I know coaches say that all the time, but they really are. They’re really good kids. They work hard and want to be coached. They’re learning. That’s the best thing. They learn something new every day and they take it in and you can see flashes of it daily.”

“Where we were at the end of the season, they’ve doubled that as far as knowledge and comfortability. They’ve picked up on things quicker than I thought they would.”

Being committed to the game helps.

Junior guard Bear Bock had a do-everything-I-can-for-my-team type of sophomore season, averaging 13 points, eight rebounds, four assists, three blocks and two steals per game while earning second-team All-Clarence Cannon Conference honors.

Others have followed his lead and were committed to basketball in the offseason.

“We had a good summer, spent a lot of time together,” Rea said. “They weren’t used to going a lot of places or going out



**Brian Rea’s second season at the helm of the Palmyra boys basketball team will feature a defensive-minded, unselfish team.** | *Matt Schuckman photo*

of state. We got to play the defending Class 3 state champion in Charleston and schools from Mississippi and Arkansas. We got to do a lot of things, play a lot of teams and get cultured in basketball. That really, really helped.”

It reinforced the idea the Panthers will only be as good as their defense.

“Hopefully we’re going to continue to play really good defense,” Rea said. “That’s going to be our calling card. Sharing the basketball and our defense are what we will do well.”

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# Tigers look to create advantages with size Frazier, Brewer possess

By MUDDY RIVER SPORTS STAFF

CANTON, Mo. — One look at the Canton boys basketball team’s roster makes it easy to see the Tigers will have one inherent advantage over most Class 1 teams in Northeast Missouri.

You just can’t teach size.

The Tigers return 6-foot-8 senior forward Kyle Frazier, along with 6-foot-3 sophomore swingman Preston Brewer, allowing them to throw bodies in the paint and attack the glass with size and force most teams won’t be able to match.

Complementing them with strong backcourt play will be crucial.

Frazier, considered a future breakout star at the end of last season by KHQA Sports Director Chris Duerr, has the makings of being a centerpiece for the Tigers. He averaged 12 points and eight rebounds per game last season, catches the ball well and has quality footwork.

Most importantly, he grows more and more comfortable scoring with his back to the basket. Frazier has some bulk to go with his length, which makes it tough to push him off the block or move him while rebounding.

Brewer is built in the mold of former Canton standout Lance Logsdon, the Quincy University baseball standout who has worked out with Brewer in the offseason. The sophomore can score inside and out and will balance the floor playing opposite of Frazier.

Getting the ball in their hands might be the biggest challenge.

Dalton Berhorst, a strong 3-point shooter and the team’s leading scorer at 15 points per game, graduated, as did tough-as-nails guard Brady Hoewing. It opens the door for Zach Sparrow and Caleb Cox to emerge and have an impact.



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GUIDING YOU TO BETTER

# Hannibal Regional



# Panthers need to restock, reload to continue reign in Clarence Cannon

By MUDDY RIVER SPORTS STAFF

MONROE CITY, Mo. — Payback time?

That might be the way teams in the Clarence Cannon Conference view the Monroe City boys basketball team. Significant graduation losses have left the Panthers with little varsity experience, which could spell the end of Monroe City's reign.

Maybe. There remains a depth of talent in the program, albeit unproven at this point. When you factor in all of the success the Panthers have enjoyed in football and track and field, as well as basketball in recent years, they know how to win and how to reload.

That's what Monroe City coach Brock Edris is being forced to do.

The Class of 2022 won four consecutive district championships and four straight CCC championships while going 28-0 against conference foes. Last season, Monroe City finished 22-5 with a loss in the Class 3 sectionals to Dushesne, which scored the winning basket with 1.2 seconds remaining for a 45-44

victory.

Joshua Talton was named the Class 3 Co-Player of the Year by the Missouri Basketball Coaches Association, along with the CCC Player of the Year. Talton, his brother, Josiah, Jaeden Robertson and Kyle Hays all represented Missouri in the inaugural Muddy River Showcase.

They have graduated, along with 90 percent of the Panthers' scoring and 95 percent of the rebounding. The Talton brothers are currently playing for John Wood Community College.

So this truly will be a new team with a new look.

But don't confuse that with a lack of talent or athleticism. Monroe City is never void of that.

Junior guard Reece Buhlig and Waylon DeGrave both saw action in every game last season and bring some stability to the backcourt.

The Panthers were ranked No. 4 in the Missouri Basketball Coaches Association Class 3 state poll based on reputation and past success. Could Monroe City find itself worthy of such lofty expectations by the end of the season?

Don't bet against it, at least not with Edris' track record.

Monroe City has won 22 or more games each of the past six seasons, while finishing second at the Class 3 state tournament in 2021 after taking third in 2020.

Overall, Edris has a 208-98 career record since taking over the program in 2011.



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**Hannibal Regional**

# Tigers expecting more consistency from their senior-laden lineup

By **RON KINSCHERF**

MuddyRiverSports.com Correspondent

CENTER, Mo. — The Mark Twain boys basketball team returns all five starters from last year's squad that finished 7-16, including four seniors.

Tigers coach Jared Akright believes that should lead to more consistency.

"There were games (last season) where we played really well one half and in the second half exploded or vice versa — played really bad in the first half and dug a hole too deep and then come back and we played a really good second half," Akright said. "There are only a couple games where we played awful. We showed glimpses how good we could play and how good we could be."

Akright felt there was a snowfall effect. Once a few things went wrong, they couldn't right the ship.

"When stuff did not go our way, we couldn't overcome it," he said. "We didn't have that leadership. Hoping this year, we have a couple of kids that will step up and take on that role. You know, when stuff starts going bad, stop and regroup."

With so much experience, Akright

hopes leaders naturally develop.

"Last year's juniors, they will have to be my leaders and they've been playing together for a long time," Akright said. "Sam (Northcutt) was a freshman last year. He didn't say a whole lot. He's starting to become a leader now that he's a sophomore and understanding that he is a big part of this team."

Northcutt averaged a little more than eight points per game and Akright expects the same, if not more this season.

"His effort is unmatched," Akright said. "He doesn't get tired, and he goes 100% full time on offense and defense. He can rebound. He can guard anybody on the floor. He's a guard that can play a post. It helps me out a lot on offense. I can plug him in any position."

Having 6-foot-5 senior Josh Brothers for a full season will help as well. He averaged nearly a double-double after missing the first two-thirds of the season. Top scorer Connor Eckler returns also. The senior averaged 12 points per game and led the team in 3-pointers.

Success this season will come down to belief in themselves that they can compete with anyone.

"You go to certain games — we haven't beat this team in six years — and then you look at them and you're like, 'We have the same talent. We're just as good as this team,'" Akright said. "We just have to get through to these kids it's not the same team we played last year that beat us. We're a different team. They're a different team. We can play with them, compete with them and beat them."

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# New faces create new excitement as Mustangs look to reload

By **RON KINSCHERF**

MuddyRiverSports.com Correspondent

PHILADELPHIA, Mo. — It’s no secret the Marion County boys have struggled recently, including going 6-16 last season.

But the 2022-23 edition of the Mustangs features four returning starters and their top scoring threats.

So is there light at the end of this tunnel? Marion County coach Reed Plunkett believes so.

“We bring back our leading scorer. We bring back our leading rebounder. So yeah, we’re actually looking to take a step forward with our boys and we’re really excited about where we’re at,” Plunkett said. “This is a year that we think we can make a jump and be really, really competitive night in and night out all

winter.”

The top two scorers return in sophomore Joey Lagemann and junior Wyatt Goldinger. Plunkett expects leadership from senior Root Cheney.

Plunkett understands when a program hasn’t had success for a while, it’s easy for players to remain in the same losing rut. And he knows early success could be vital.

“The beginning of the year I think is going to be key for us,” Plunkett said. “And I think we have the ability to be really excited. So we’re just ready to get going.”

A winning attitude starts with confidence.

“The old adage is you have to believe you can win to win,” Plunkett said. “Thankfully this summer, we had a really good summer. We spent a lot of time together. We played a lot of shootouts. We won way more than we had won in any previous summer.”

With that summer success, confidence began to grow.

“I think they started to taste that and started to realize that you know, if we come together as a team and do execute the game plan and work hard in practice, we have a chance to be a good team,” Plunkett said. “To not just be a team that can show up on a Tuesday night and maybe surprise somebody and win a game, but be a team that can win multiple games in a week and be a team that can be .500 or better.”

And Plunkett feels the excitement bubbling in the community.

“It’s been pushing seven, eight years since we’ve had a real competitive boys team,” he said. “I think there’s some excitement that we have a chance to have that. I tell the guys we haven’t proven anything. We have to go out and do it. But regardless, when it comes to community support, I know we’re gonna have that.”



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# With new head coach getting back in game, Cougars set to rebuild

By **RON KINSCHERF**

MuddyRiverSports.com Correspondent

EWING, Mo. — After a long career with various stops throughout the state of Missouri, Dave Devaney felt it was time to share his love of basketball with another generation.

Last year, he visited a recreation center in the Kansas City area and ended up coaching a group of fifth graders. The experience reignited his desire to work with young people.

It's what has led him to Highland, where he takes over as the head boys basketball coach.

The Cougars played for a Class 3 district championship last season, but graduated six seniors and will rebuild around seniors Devin Stutsman and C.J. Eaton and juniors Brayden Logsdon and Brady Campen.

"(The experience) just reinforced that this is what I can do," Devaney said. "And this is what I want to do. I really wanted to coach again. I needed to do something. I've tried other stuff, volunteering, different things, and nothing really excited me like this. I'm extremely excited and enthusiastic about the start of the year.

"Everybody needs a purpose in my life. That's the way I feel. Everybody may not feel this way, of course. I feel like I need to be helping other people. And I wasn't. So one of the few things that I can do, I think is teach and coach. So, the opportunity was open, and I applied, and they hired me. I'm thrilled and humbled that they would hire me to coach their basketball team."

Devaney retired from teaching in 2016 after 30 years at various stops in Missouri. The Fayette, Mo., native spent the last 16 years at a middle school in Grandview, Mo.. He coached at Westminster College in Fulton, Mo. from 1976-81, compiling a 54-86 record.

Devaney describes his style as "old school."

"I have a certain way I want the game played," he said. "And

I'm hoping their abilities will meet my style. And if it doesn't, fine. I'm not crazy enough to try to make them play in a way that I would like to play. So, if we can, I would like to play a little up tempo on offense, and press-defense. But if we don't have the players that can do that. Do those sorts of things. Then I'll adapt to them."

With the many miles traveled, the first-year coach has learned it's all about the kids.

"Through the years, I've learned a lot of things and it's 'our' team. It's not me," Devaney said. "It's more about them. Way more about them than me. This is not a stepping stone for me. I just want to have a lot of fun with it. I want the kids to learn how to play hard, because by playing hard you can overcome any athletic deficiencies they may have. But 'Play Hard, Play Smart and Have Fun' will be on the locker room chalkboard before every game, and that's how I want to approach it."

Devaney's philosophies have been influenced by legendary UCLA coach John Wooden.

"You know, basketball is life, but life isn't basketball," Devaney said. "So, basketball is a small part of your overall life. But you can learn so many things from basketball that will help you in the future. At school, in your relationships, at your job. There's so many things that carry over from basketball to these young men's lives. And I want them to have a positive experience which will help them in the future."



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