

Clark, Visser lead Wash into new year

Written by Jim Ecker

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Joniqua Clark stands only 5-foot-2, but she could play a big role for the Cedar Rapids Washington girls basketball team this season.

Coach Frank Howell likes her style as a point guard who can set a fast tempo, feed her teammates and get to every loose ball on the floor.

"I've never seen her lose a loose ball to anybody," Howell said Thursday. "If there's a loose ball, she's probably going to get it.

"She's as quick to the basketball as anybody that you'll probably see all year."

Howell is counting on Clark and Anne Visser to set the tone for the Warriors this season as they look to build upon last year's 13-9 record.

"Joniqua has the ability to be the top assist person in the league and Anne can really get the job done on the boards," he said. "If Joniqua can get seven or more assists, then we're going to be in a great position to win the game. And if Anne can get nine-plus rebounds, then we're going to be in good position to win the game."

Clark averaged 2.6 assists last season and Visser averaged 3.8 rebounds, so Howell is looking for big jumps by both players. "It starts with those two guys," he said.

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Visser stands 5-foot-8, which is not big for a rebounder in the Mississippi Valley Conference, but Howell is confident she can box out and battle bigger kids near the basket. He said Visser can also score and run the floor.

Clark and Visser were both named second team all-conference last season when the Warriors finished 5-8 in league games. The Warriors don't have much size, but Howell thinks he has a good group of athletes who can run and be successful.

"We've always tried to play as fast as we can play," he said. "And I think with some of the speed we have out there, that will just enable us to go faster. So I think we'll be a lot of fun to watch."

Visser is the top returning scorer at 8.2 points per game. Clark averaged 6.5 points, Jessi Puk 4.6, Payton Bruner 3.6 and Jayla Johnson 2.1. Brittany Hoeger and Alanna Arrington also return as letter-winners.

Howell thinks the group has potential.

"I think some of the kids are going to come into their own this year," he remarked. "Everybody that we have is a year older and a year wiser, and I just think that probably some kids are going to emerge and have some pretty special nights on hopefully pretty special occasions.

"I think we have a pretty good balance of kids that will make it difficult (for opponents). I think we'll be able to put five pretty good basketball players on the court at all times."

Kandis O'Donnell graduated after leading the Warriors at 10.8 points and 5.3 rebounds. She's

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now playing at Mount Mercy.

Washington also graduated Courtney Squires, Allie Semrau, Lilly Hartman and Brittany Cullen. Emily Oler, a 6-foot-1 center, transferred to Jefferson after averaging 2.7 points.

Howell is confident the Warriors will be competitive in the league again this year. He begins the season with a 330-164 career record.

"It's within the realm of possibility that we can beat anybody that we play," he declared. "The three things we have always said are 'play hard, play together, play smart.' If we can do those three things it's wide open at that point."