

Rickertsen gets early start at Prairie

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cedar Rapids Prairie boys basketball coach Jeremy Rickertsen also coaches the junior high school boys in the College Community district, so he gets an early look at some of the talent that's coming along.

Rickertsen spotted point guard Cal Clark when Clark was an eighth grader and has coached him ever since. Clark is now a senior, which means they've been together for five years.

"Cal is a classic point guard," Rickertsen said. "He's smart, he understands the game, he thinks the game. A lot of times as I'm about to call something, he calls it before I can get it out."

Clark played for Rickertsen on the eighth grade. Then he played for Rickertsen on the sophomore team as a freshman when Rickertsen was the sophomore coach. And now they've been on the varsity for three years together, first when Rickertsen was an assistant coach and the past two years with Rickertsen at the helm.

"We're on the same page most times, which is good," the coach said. "It's what you want with your point guard."

Clark, who is also an all-state shortstop at Prairie, averaged 7.6 points, 3.0 rebounds and 2.5 assists last season, but those numbers will probably increase this year for the guard-oriented Hawks. Prairie graduated eight seniors from a 9-14 club, but Clark, Max Smith-Drahos and Jalen Rima return after they led the team in scoring last year as underclassmen.

Clark is the point guard, Smith-Drahos (9.4 points) is the off-guard and Rima (7.7 points) is the small forward.

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"Our backcourt is solid," Rickertsen said. "That's my 1,2 and 3 right there. Four and 5 are kind of up in the air."

Rickertsen is leaning toward sophomores Mason Hook (6-foot-5) and Jack Johnson (6-foot-6) at those two inside spots to give the Hawks some length. "We're trying to coach them along and get them up to speed in what we're doing and give us a little bit of size and depth at the same time," he remarked.

Rima has been slowed in practice by a sore ankle and foot. The all-state receiver got hurt in the ninth game of the football season against Ottumwa and tweaked the ankle again in basketball practice.

Rima has a medical appointment Friday to learn more about the injury and perhaps get cleared for action.

"We're taking it slow with him," said Rickertsen. "I'd rather get him healthy than have it nag him all year long."

Rima is a four-sport athlete at Prairie. In addition to football and basketball, he's the reigning state champion in the 200 and 400 meter dashes and is an accomplishment center fielder for the baseball team.

"He's a special athlete, that's for sure," Rickertsen said. "The thing with Jalen on the basketball court is getting him to understand what he does best for us."

Rickertsen has coached Rima for four years, putting them on the same wave length.

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"He and I know each other pretty well. He knows what I want from him," the coach said. "Any time you have a state champion trackster and a Division I football player and he's a heck of a center fielder, that gives you versatility on the basketball floor."

Rima has committed to play football at the University of Northern Iowa.

Smith-Drahos led Prairie in scoring last year as a sophomore.

"He's a dream to coach," Rickertsen said. "Not only does he have some skills, but he's one of the hardest workers - if not THE hardest worker. I think people are going to see that pay off this winter."

"His goal right now is to play college basketball and to do it at a high level, so he's kind of committing himself to that. He's a pleasure to coach. He's a great kid, he's a good student."

Rickertsen said Hook is more of a wing player than an inside guy with his soft touch and ability to drive to the basket, but the Hawks need his 6-foot-5 frame near the bucket.

"He's there because he's ready to contribute," Rickertsen said. "I look forward to him coming along fairly quickly."

Rickertsen called Johnson a "true" post performer, although still a little frail as a 10th grader.

"He does what you want your '5' man to do, which is run rim to rim," Rickertsen said. "He does it every time. That stretches the floor and opens things up for our 3-point shooters when he does that."

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Rickertsen said Ethan Copeland and Ryan Oxley are pushing for playing time after getting their feet wet on the varsity last year when they appeared in 10 games apiece. Oxley is 6-foot-1 and can play a variety of spots.

"He would be Mr. Versatility, because he really could play the 2, 3, 4 or 5," Rickertsen said. "Probably anything but the point."

Copeland, who is 5-foot-9, can play anywhere in the backcourt.

Marty Borseth, a 5-11 guard, also could enter the picture after recovering from a leg injury from football. Several other players are competing for playing time as well.

Former University of Iowa basketball star Kenyon Murray has joined the Prairie coaching staff as a volunteer assistant. Murray's twin sons are ninth graders at Prairie and are playing for the sophomore team this year. Jeff Gordon is the assistant coach for the varsity.

Prairie opens the season Tuesday night against Davenport West.

Rickertsen said the Hawks are looking to win at least half of their games this season after going 9-and-14 last year.

"I think that's the minimum," he said about a .500 record. "If things fall into place and we stay healthy, I think we could push 12-13-14 wins. But the MVC is tough and it's solid again this year."

ROSTER

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Seniors

Ethan Copeland (5-9), Cal Clark (5-11), Cooper Reittinger (6-0), Jalen Rima (6-2), Ryan Oxley (6-1), Mitch Nierling (6-1), Elijah Allen (6-2), Phillip Oligmueller (6-1).

Juniors

Matt Lorenz (5-10), Marty Borseth (5-11), Max Smith-Drahos (6-1), Jake Eilers (6-3), Darren Kilpatrick (6-2), Mac Nierling (6-0), Cade Chadima (6-1), Evan Lins (6-4), Logan Serbousek (6-1), Blake Krapfl (6-2), Walt Rowland (6-5).

Sophomores

Mason Hook (6-5), Zack Johnson (6-6).