

A sneak peak at girls basketball

Written by Scott Unash

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The calendar is ready to flip to the month of December, and that means that basketball is here.

In fact, the Prairie Hawks have a game under their belts already. With that in mind let's take a quick peak at what we will see in the Metro for 2011-2012, with last year's record in parentheses.

Jefferson (8-15)

The J-Hawks said goodbye to one of the Metro's top performers in Brittney Steffeny after her four-year varsity career came to a close. That's the bad news.

The good news is Jefferson returns a lot of fire-power for the Metro's dean of coaches Larry Niemeyer.

Taylor Jacobson looks to lead the way for the J-Hawks. Jacobson, a junior, averaged just under a team high 13 points a year ago and is a terrific shooter. Three other juniors will also lend a hand in Rachel Broghammer, Kaitlyn Davidson and Maddie Koolbeck. Sophomore Madison Bleitz should also help.

It's not Larry's most talented team he has ever put on the floor, but the J-Hawks have some talent and will be scrappy. A team that will get better as the year goes on.

Kennedy (9-14)

It was a rare "off" year for Coach Dennis Roloff and the Cougars in 2011. Kennedy will look to

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bounce back with a young cast of characters and a tough veteran.

Leading the way will be one of the MVC's top players in senior Courtney Strait. The Truman State signee averaged nearly 16 points a game and led the Cougars in most categories. Kalese Johnson and Mariah Simmons will also be leaders.

After that, it's youngsters. Three sophomores will be counted on: Madi Meier, Jordan Holmes and Paige Hendrickson, as well as 6-foot freshman Stephanie Botkin. It's an interesting mix of talent. Much like the J-Hawks, the Cougars will get better as the year moves on.

Linn-Mar (22-3)

Many MVC coaches probably attended Linn-Mar's graduation ceremony to make sure Kiah Stokes walked across the stage and accepted her diploma! Arguably the Metro's best girls player ever has moved on to UConn after a brilliant four-year career.

But the cupboard is far from bare as the Lions look to advance to state for the fifth straight season. Junior Mykela Brandt is back and will be running the show as point guard after averaging more than seven points a year ago. The Lions bring back Shanice Cheatham on the interior who is one of the MVC's toughest players in the post. Rachel Thrune and Courtney Major will be counted on to help the Lions on the perimeter.

Even though there are big shoes to fill, look for Coach Mike Brandt to have another terrific team at Linn-Mar.

Marion (6-16)

It was an up-and-down season for the Marion Indians and first-year Coach Brian O'Donnell a year ago. One night the Indians looked terrific and the next, not so much. With a year under his belt at Marion, O'Donnell looks to continue to put his stamp on this program.

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The Indians lost perhaps the Metro's most underrated player in Kristin Kramer, but bring back both interior and perimeter players. Senior Dani Peyton is back at the point. Peyton was very consistent a year ago and tossed in over 10 points a game. She will be counted on to score a little more off the dribble this year. Also returning are seniors Jessie Kramer and Allysa Jones and junior Beth Knapp.

Williamsburg will be the heavy favorite in the Wamac West this season, but after that it's up in the air and the Indians will be a part of that fight.

Prairie (4-18)

You would think a coach that won only four games last year wouldn't be smiling so much about his prospects for the next season, but that's not the case with Hawk Coach Steve Doser. He likes his young team.

The Hawks will be young and not real tall, but should be exciting to watch. Madison Dellamuth is back after starting as a freshman last season and averaging nearly double-figures. She will be asked to take more of the scoring load this season. More youngsters who look to make a mark for Prairie will be Alisa Wieland, Courteney McCrary and Cyerra Hutchins. Senior leadership will be provided by Kaitilyn Yanecek.

Prairie may surprise people at the end of the year and is certainly a team with a very bright future.

Washington (19-4)

The sign of a good program is one where a coach reloads instead of rebuilds. That can be said for Washington.

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Coach Frank Howell and the Warriors look to get back to the Des Moines this year and despite the fact they lost four seniors from a year ago who are playing college ball, the Warriors look to be one of the MVC's best this year.

There is no Tia Dawson and no player named Oney for the first season in many, but the Warriors have a terrific inside player in Jazz Royster, who plays much bigger than her 5-9 height. Royster averaged nearly double figures a year ago and is a terrific rebounder. Also back are seniors Tasha Roundtree, Kelli Klaus and Brooke Foreman. Juniors who look to contribute are Abbey Herb and Madison Kramer.

The Warriors' sophomore team from a year ago was very good and they will look to mesh with the returners to give Frank Howell a lot of options for his Warriors this year.

Xavier (15-8)

Believe it or not it has been a couple of years since the Xavier Saints have been to Des Moines, and this could be the year that the Saints make a return trip.

Coach Tom Lilly has an abundance of talent, many of them seniors, that he will look to make a run to the state tournament. One thing is for certain, the Saints will defend you. Alex Bartz is a terrific shot blocker on the interior at 6-2 and she will look to improve upon her 3.6 scoring average of a year ago.

The Saints will also be strong on the perimeter with Annie Dale, Katelyn Winker and Katlyn Andersen. Juniors looking to help include Sarah Dickes, Lisa Boomgarden and Kayla Armstrong.

The Saints have a chance and the personnel to make a strong run this season, if they can find the offense, and specifically the outside shot, that has not been steady over the last couple of seasons.

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I did not include a synopsis of Cedar Valley Christian basically because we don't know a lot about the Huskies going into their first year of sanctioned IGHSAU play. Cedar Valley has been very tough in its former league and will look to make some noise in Class 1A this year. I'm looking forward to seeing them play for the first time.

All in all it looks to be a strong year once again in the Metro for girls basketball. We don't have the team that looks to be head and tails above the rest this season, but there is a great deal of talent and balance going into the 2011-12 season.

Get out and enjoy it!

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. He is a six-time winner of the Iowa Broadcast News Association play-by-play Announcer of the Year Award. Scott and Mark Dukes co-host the Gym Class weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM)