

Horman eager to get J-Hawks moving

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 25 November 2015 17:23 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 November 2015 18:29



Brandon Horman was all excited when he became the head coach of the Cedar Rapids Jefferson boys basketball team last season, but the J-Hawks struggled through a rough 1-21 campaign that would have tested anyone's resolve and patience.

If anything, Horman sounds even more excited for Year 2.

Horman had heart-to-heart conversations with all of his players after the season and questioned them about their commitment to the game.

"I kind of challenged a lot of people that way," he said this week. "The commitment level of our boys went way up. They worked really hard in the offseason to get better as individuals and with our team stuff.

"We've gotten off to a tremendous start in our first week of practice," he said. "I couldn't be much happier."

Horman said the J-Hawks maintained a positive attitude last season, kept plugging away and played some of their best basketball near the end of the year. He said his assistant coaches and players helped boost his own spirits along the way.

"They helped me through it more than anything else," he remarked.

"It was tough," he said of the 1-and-21 mark, "but they didn't give up."

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Adam Van Oort returns at the top of lineup after averaging 10.3 points and 3.7 rebounds last season. Horman said the 6-foot-5 senior has gotten stronger and has worked on his perimeter skills and post-up moves to get ready for his final year.

"We're looking to use him all over the court," the coach said.

None of the other returning players averaged more than four points per game last season, but Horman thinks there's good depth on the club and a chance for lots of players to expand their roles. He's also glad to have a half-dozen football players on the roster after they enjoyed a successful 7-4 campaign on the gridiron.

"I think it gives those guys a lot more confidence," he said.

Horman noted that Jefferson athletics have been on the rise the past year with the wrestling, baseball and football teams all being successful at the same time.

"That's our plan for the basketball team," he said. "We're proud of what Jefferson is and we want to be a part of that success, too."

Horman said he's still sorting out his starting lineup and rotation, but figures to go 10 or 11 deep.

"Last year we probably led the league with the most different starting lineups than anybody and I wouldn't be surprised if it's the same thing this year," he said.

Valentino Green, Kane Kramer, Brock Hunt, Royshawn Webb, Zachariah Szabo, Grant Wiederin, Dylan Hart, James Brown, Dennis McKinney and others all figure into the mix. Horman mentioned Wiederin and Webb as two J-Hawks who could be ready for big jumps.

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"They were in the gym working non-stop all summer long," he said. "I'm pretty optimistic for those two, that we're going to have a much better backcourt than we did a year ago."

Green had a big year for the Jefferson football team and could be a big ingredient for the basketball squad as well as a lock-down defender. "He is a competitor," said Horman.

McKinney, a post player, moved here from Chicago last year and could be ready to help after a year of practice, according to Horman.

Horman called a .500 record a "reasonable" goal for the J-Hawks this season.

"There's a lot of potential on this roster right now," he said. "I definitely would like to get to that spot."

"Being competitive and winning are two different things, so we have to make sure we're competitive night-in and night-out."