

Special year for Marion girls sports

Written by Jim Ecker

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This has been an extraordinary year for the girls sports teams at Marion High School. And it keeps getting better.

Every girls team at Marion has won their Wamac Conference title and qualified for the state meet. Every single one, since the beginning of the school year until this very moment.

The volleyball team captured a Wamac title and qualified for state. The cross country team won a Wamac title and placed sixth at state. The bowling team finished third at the state tournament, and the only reason they did not win a conference title was because there are not enough bowling teams in the Wamac to have one.

Now the Marion High School girls basketball team will be playing in the Class 4A state tournament with an opening-round game against Harlan Wednesday morning at 11:45 at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines.

"It's been a really fun year," said Corby Laube, the athletic director and girls basketball coach at Marion. "We've had a really good run with girls athletics.

"It's really neat the way they support each other," he said Monday morning. "And sometimes success breeds success. That confidence from one sport can carry over to another."

Laube and his wife, Ami, a former All-American basketball player at Mount Mercy University, began coaching their daughter Mia's team when she and her friends were in the second grade. Mia is now a sophomore on the varsity and one of the leading players on an extremely young team.

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Their younger daughter, Kayba, is currently an eighth grader, but she's played basketball with the current ninth graders who are competing for the Marion varsity this season. Sean Rice, who played basketball at Northern Iowa, and Kim Knapp, the varsity softball coach at Marion, also have been heavily involved with coaching the girls youth basketball teams at Marion with their daughters.

Many of the girls played for the Titans basketball teams at back-to-back age groups when they were growing up, playing in AAU and other events, competing and getting better as they got older.

"Early on, you could tell the group had potential," said Laube. "The girls were obviously really competitive. And each year they would get a little bit better. You could see it was there.

"There were no guarantees, but you could see a lot of girls had a passion for it."

There are seven freshmen and five sophomores on the varsity basketball team, with only two juniors and two seniors. All five starters are freshmen and sophomores, but Laube feels their "basketball age" is older than their real age due to all their experience.

When this season is over, many of the girls will be playing for the Minnesota Fury AAU program in tournaments in North Carolina, Georgia, Minnesota and Chicago to gain further experience.

Sophomore Chloe Rice, who is Sean Rice's daughter, is the leading scorer for the Indians at 14.3 points. Mia Laube is the second-leading scorer and leading rebounder at 5.3 per game. Sophomore Caitlyn Smith leads the team in 3-pointers. Rice leads in assists and steals. Isabella Sade, a junior, leads in blocked shots.

Coach Laube said the team gained a lot of confidence this season when they beat Center Point-Urbana on Jan. 29, a victory that ultimately led to the Indians tying Center Point-Urbana for a division title in the Wamac.

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"I think we always believed we were a good team and we could do it, but I think that actually showed that we could do it," he said. "We got over the hump and we got a signature win."

The seventh-ranked Indians (19-4) are riding a 12-game winning streak into the state tournament against Harlan (20-2), which has won the last two Class 4A state titles. The Indians had to defeat 15th-ranked DeWitt Central and sixth-ranked North Scott in the regional tournament, giving them additional confidence that they can beat Harlan.

"Our girls have already battled just to get to state, to beat two ranked teams and have to beat one of them (North Scott) on the road in a really tough environment," said Laube.

"We talked before the North Scott game. We gave them the message that their state tournament started now. It's a 16-team state tournament, and you just have to play one game on the road first. You have to win four (to become state champs).

"I think they feel like, if anyone deserves to be down there (in Des Moines), we feel we deserve it as much as anybody."