

O'Donnell looks forward to 2nd year at Marion

Written by Jim Ecker

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Brian O'Donnell knows everyone's name now. And the girls know their coach, who teaches at a different school.

Yes, O'Donnell's second year as the girls basketball coach at Marion High School should be smoother than the first.

"Absolutely," he said. "Just knowing the kids and them knowing me, I think that establishes familiarity. It's nice on both ends."

O'Donnell teaches at Springville High School and commutes to Marion for basketball practice, so he doesn't see his players during the day or have a chance to answer their questions until he sees them in the gym after school.

Perhaps predictably, the Indians started with a 1-and-9 record last year and lost a series of close games by 6, 2, 2, 4, 6 and 5 points before turning the corner. They won 5 of their next 7 games and finished with a 6-16 record.

"I was really pleased with the improvements that the girls made throughout the year," he said. "I thought they really came a long way."

"I thought last year the kids did a fantastic job of working with me as a new coach and being someone who's outside the building. They were great about it."

"From my end, I'm a lot more comfortable this year just knowing the school system, knowing the kids, knowing everyone a whole lot better."

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The Indians didn't have much experience when O'Donnell took over last year, but they do now. He used a nine-girl rotation last season on a young club, and now seven of those players are back with experience and knowledge.

Kristin Kramer and Leah Smith graduated, but Dani Peyton, Jessie Kramer, Alyssa Jones, Beth Knapp, Micaela Combs, Paige Perkins and Allison Scott all know the drill.

Peyton averaged 10.4 points last season, just a shade behind Kristin Kramer's team-best mark of 10.5.

Marion has a stiff non-conference schedule that includes Dubuque Wahlert, Kennedy and Prairie from the Mississippi Valley Conference. He tabbed Williamsburg and Benton Community as potentially the teams to beat in the Wamac Conference.

O'Donnell declined to publicly state any team goals, other than to be competitive and win as many games as possible. "I never like to talk about the specific number of wins," he said.

Nonetheless, he's optimistic about the new campaign. "Absolutely," he remarked. "They're the type of kids you like to coach."