

Roloff excited about young Cougars

Written by Jim Ecker

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Dennis Roloff is glad he did not retire as the girls basketball coach at Kennedy High School after the 2010-11 campaign.

He retired as a full-time teacher and stepped down as the boys track coach, but elected to return for his 21st season with the girls basketball program.

He loves coaching and knew there were some talented young players on their way to the varsity.

One of the talented newcomers is Stephanie Botkin, a 6-foot freshman who will play for the big club as a ninth grader. Roloff also has promoted three sophomores to the varsity with Madi Meier, Jordan Holmes and Paige Hendrickson.

"I don't move kids up to have them sit on the bench," Roloff said. "If they move up, they play."

It's not a total youth movement, however. The Cougars feature Courtney Strait, an all-state guard who averaged 15.7 points, 6.7 rebounds, 3 steals and 1.5 assists last season.

Seniors Kaylese Johnson (5.0 ppg) and Mariah Simmons (3.1) also gained valuable experience last year when Kennedy finished 9-14. Roloff lists 19 players on the varsity with seven seniors,

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eight juniors, three sophomores and one freshman.

"I'm pretty excited about it," said Roloff, who begins his 21st season with a career mark of 301-155. "Boy, do we get up and down the floor. A lot of youth and excitement. When they get varsity experience, they're going to be pretty tough.

"I love to run, I love to press," he said. "This group is very quick. We'll match speed with anybody."

Kennedy graduated 11 seniors, so there are holes to fill. Olivia Meier averaged 10.1 points last year and has joined the basketball program at Upper Iowa, and the Cougars also lost Shauna Happel, Kassi Nunnikhoven, Kali Hildebrand, Kate Schulz, Kristen Huebsch, Dominique Wright, Ashley Schlueter, Kim Muench and others.

Kennedy played in the state tournament when Strait was a sophomore in 2010 and she thinks the Cougars have the ingredients to make another trip to Des Moines.

"I'm really excited," said Strait, who has signed with Truman State. "I think we do have enough talent. If we play like I know we can, and not worry about who scores and just get the job done, I have a feeling we can get there."