

Jacobson leads young J-Hawks into new year

Written by Jim Ecker

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Larry Niemeyer retired as a teacher after the 2010-11 school year, so he has considerably more time on his hands when he's not coaching the Cedar Rapids Jefferson girls basketball team.

"I can watch Matlock every morning," Niemeyer said with a smile. "He did something down on the floor today and couldn't get back up. That's why I don't go down on the floor."

Aside from watching Matlock reruns on TV, Niemeyer is back for his 53rd year as a coach. He's compiled an 861-328 record since 1959 at Adel and Jefferson and said life is "easier" now that he's not spending the entire day at school.

Niemeyer does not like to reveal his age, but he's in his mid-70's and anxious to produce a good team after the J-Hawks slipped to 8-15 last season. Jefferson finished 12-10 during the 2009-10 campaign and was 13-10 in 2008-09 for a three-year mark of 33-35.

"We've struggled the last couple of years," he said.

The J-Hawks will have a young team with six juniors, three sophomores and three freshmen. The girls who are seniors in school this year stopped playing basketball after their sophomore campaign, leaving a hole in the program.

Members of this year's junior class gained experience last year as 10th graders. "As sophomores, this is a tough league to play in when you've got that many," Niemeyer noted.

"These kids have been playing for the last couple of years. There are some things we'll do better than we did last year."

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The J-Hawks struggled with turnovers last season, but Niemeyer is hopeful they'll improve in that department this year.

The six juniors are Taylor Jacobson, Rachel Broghammer, Kaitlyn Davidson, Maddie Koolbeck, Dani Stromert and Alleigha Green. Jacobson, Broghammer, Davidson, Koolbeck and sophomore Madison Blietz started in the Kennedy Jamboree last week.

"Our whole team is basically juniors," Niemeyer said. "Now that they're a year older, it should be easier for them. Hopefully it will be."

Jacobson poured in 19 points in the Jamboree against Alburnett in less than two quarters and has the green light to shoot.

"She's a good player," Neimeyer said. "She plays a lot of basketball in the summer."

Koolbeck, a 5-foot-11 center, played well for the J-Hawks in the Jamboree with her defense and rebounding.

"She did OK, didn't she?" Neiemeyer remarked. "She's the only big kid we have. When you have a six-footer in there, both offensively and defensively, it makes such a big difference."

Jacobson averaged a team-high 12.9 points last season. Broghammer produced 8.9 points, Davidson scored 7.4 points and Koolbeck averaged 2.8 points as a part-time player.

Britteny Steffeny graduated after scoring 10.2 points per game.

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Linn-Mar and Cedar Rapids Washington dominated Metro girls basketball last season. Both teams suffered heavy graduation losses, but Niemeyer is not sure if the landscape has leveled off.

"Maybe," he said. "The top has lost a lot of size since last year. But I'll tell you, we played some of these teams all summer and they're still pretty good."

Jefferson hosts Bettendorf in the season opener Saturday at 6:30 p.m.