

A sneak peek at boys basketball

Written by Scott Unash

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We continue our look at the 2011-12 basketball season this week by looking at the Metro boys teams.

The biggest question going into this winter is what will the Metro do for an encore?

Last year we enjoyed a once-in-a-generation season. Numerous Division I athletes, terrific teams and a state championship team to cap everything off in March. While it will be hard pressed to come even close to the heroics of a year ago, this season holds promise.

With that in mind let's look at the Metro rundown for 2011-12.

As with the girls preview last week, I will start off by saying that since it is Cedar Valley Christian's first year of IHSA play, we will hold off on a preview of the Huskies. Although I will say that the boys basketball team for CVC should be the most successful of all of the teams at the school because of its past performances. The Huskies should compete very well in Class 1A.

Now on with the show (last year's record in parentheses, teams listed in alphabetical order):

Jefferson (17-6)

After two straight state tournament appearances, it will be a different looking J-Hawk team this year. Gone is Mr. Basketball from a year ago Jarrod Uthoff, who is red-shirting for Bo Ryan at Wisconsin this year. His 6-foot-8 presence will definitely be missed.

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However, all is certainly not lost for the J-Hawks.

Three starters return led by a pair of three year senior starters Taylor Olson and Alec Saunders. Both players will look to increase their individual scoring for this year. Also back is junior Ky Kramer who impressed as a sophomore a year ago. Creighton Robinson, a junior who had a terrific game in Des Moines also is expected to step up for the J-Hawks.

It will be a different Jefferson team for Coach Stu Ordman, but a team that will be very balanced and will be exciting to watch. A third straight trip to Des Moines is definitely a possibility.

Kennedy (17-5)

For the second straight year it was a disappointing end to a very good year for the Cougars. Kennedy was upset by Dubuque Hempstead during the tournament run at home denying the Cougars a chance at state. Kennedy loses some terrific athleticism of that squad, but has a list of promising returners.

The top two scorers coming back are seniors Joe Coleman and Darius Fuller. Coleman averaged just over 10 points a year ago and could be one of the Metro's best, however he and Fuller will miss at least the first seven games because of suspension.

Coach Bob Fontana also welcomes back 6-8 big man Elliot Christians in the middle as well as Josh Jahlas on the inside. Trevor Heitland will help at the point and the Cougars could have a pair of good shooters in Cody Bell and Alex Hayden.

If the Cougars keep their heads above water until their full team returns, they could be a force the back half of the season.

Linn-Mar (26-0)

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The Lions won their fourth title and third in the last decade by beating Des Moines Hoover in the final last March. That's the good news, the bad news is that four of those starters are playing college basketball this season.

However, as we know the Lions don't rebuild, they simply reload and that is the task this year for Coach Chris Robertson and the Lions.

If you have just one starter coming back you might as well have it be the top player in the state and that's what the Lions return in point guard Marcus Paige. The North Carolina signee is the overwhelming favorite for the Mr. Basketball award for this season and is one of the country's best. He makes others around him better, simply put.

After that it will be a new cast of characters for the most part. Junior Derrick Gogg, a 6-8 center, returns after getting some back-up time a year ago. He will be counted on to shoulder the load inside. Junior Matt Lassen should also get some quality minutes this year and has some terrific athletic ability, and senior Andy Henry will try to go from being an all-state wide receiver on the football field to a contributor on the court.

For the first year since 2003 there will not be a Bohannon on the floor for the Lions, but expect a lot of traditions to continue, chiefly that Linn-Mar will have one of the top squads in the state.

Marion (17-8)

The Indians may have certainly been the "feel good" basketball story of a year ago, advancing to the state tournament before dropping a quarterfinal decision. The Indians had a super senior class led by a pair of all-staters in Kasey Semler and Dusty Albaugh. All the starters from a year ago have graduated and several key players off the bench for Coach Mike Manderscheid, but the cupboard is not bare.

Isaac Frazier is the leading returning score for Marion at just over a bucket a game. He will

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counted on to improve that stat along with a pair of seniors in guards Mitch Wagner and Mark Stone, both of whom will miss the first seven games because of suspension. The Indians return a pair of good all-around athletes in Jake McDonald and Cale Cannoy to provide senior leadership.

The Indians will need some help from the junior and sophomore classes to pick up their games and help to contribute to this year's edition as well. The Wamac-West is up for grabs this year with no real favorite. Perhaps this inexperienced group of Indians can make some noise toward March and embark on another memorable run.

Prairie (3-18)

The Hawks have had their share of problems over the last few seasons, but there may finally be a light at the end of the tunnel.

Second-year coach James Moses has instilled excitement back into the program and Prairie should be much improved for this coming season. One reason is the return of point guard Jace Hanna. Hanna missed the entire season a year ago due to injury and he will bring leadership and scoring to the point. Matt McDougall returns along with his 10.6 per game scoring average as well as outside-shooting Jacob Aune at over eight a game. Brooks Kehoe, Ty Mouglin and Garrett Rasmussen also look to play key roles for the Hawks this year. The Hawks also have some terrific athlete prospects in Demetrius Harper and Kentrel Smith. Prairie also may have their first true "big" in some time with freshman Bryce Meeker down low.

The pieces are starting to come together for the Hawks and they will provide the basketball savvy fans at Prairie with some fun times this year. I dare say the Hawks will be the most improved team in the Metro and the MVC.

Washington (17-9)

The Warriors of Washington were certainly worth the price of admission last year. Led by two Division 1 players in Josh Oglesby and Wes Washpun, the Warriors could put up points in

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bunches. At times the Warriors looked like the best team in the state and at other times not quite as much, but they were a lot of fun. Those two have left for Iowa and Tennessee, respectively, and now most fans are wondering what is in store for this year's edition of Washington basketball.

What we do know is that the Warriors will have beef on the inside with football lineman Sean Bredl and McCauley Todd on the block. They can hold their own against anyone and will look to own the paint. Cyb Moa will be back for his third varsity season. Moa had some big games a year ago, and will need to improve his scoring average this go round. Heath Clark and Jason Oney should help spark the Warriors offense as well.

It will be for the most part a new cast of characters for the Warriors this year, but never count out a Brad Metzger coached team. They will be better as the calendar turns to 2012.

Xavier (7-16)

There is, in my mind, not a more intriguing team heading into this season than Xavier. Second-year coach Matt Jenkins has his stamp on the program now and will try to bring some stability to the Saints after several seasons of coaching changes.

The Saints have the talent to make some noise in 2011-12 led by a large and talented group of seniors. Five players return who averaged more than five points a game a year ago for the Saints. Swingman Kevin Hosch leads the parade at just under eight points a game. Ben McDermott, Carter Valentine and Alec Clausen can all provide scoring for the Saints when needed. On the inside, 6-5 Matt Mattke and 6-8 Matt Nelson look to make their mark, although Nelson is fighting some injuries at the moment. Juniors Trey Sampson and Corbin Woods will figure into the Saints plans and will give Xavier some much needed depth.

This group of seniors has enjoyed success over the years for the Saints. If Xavier can be consistent with their shooting for the year, this is a group that can make some noise throughout the season.

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THINGS LOOK pretty good on paper for the upcoming season, now it's time to see if that potential produces on the court.

One thing is for sure, these kids have a tough act to follow after last season's heroics.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. He is a six-time winner of the Iowa Broadcast News Association play-by-play Announcer of the Year Award. Scott and Mark Dukes co-host the Gym Class weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM)