

Sellers leads Cougars into new season

Written by Jim Ecker

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Tony Vis has a plan to fight against teams that try to use a "junk" defense against the Kennedy girls basketball team this season.

Up the tempo.

Cedar Falls used a "junk" defense to defeat the Cougars in the regional finals last season by paying extra attention to Kennedy stars Stephanie Botkin and Lela Sellers. Botkin has graduated, but Sellers is back and Vis wants to give his top player a chance to shine.

"We're trying to change the pace of our play, and I think the girls have been very receptive to that," he said. "We'll press a little bit more this year than we have in the past.

"It's hard to get into a junk defense if we're creating steals and converting in transition on you."

Sellers, a 6-foot guard who has signed with Liberty University, averaged 14.5 points, 5.2 rebounds and 2.6 assists last season as a junior after moving here from Minneapolis. Vis said Sellers has improved since last season and expects her numbers to rise, especially in the rebounding department where the Cougars need help.

Botkin, Kennedy's starting center last year, averaged 15.5 points and 6.6 rebounds as a senior. Brinley Milbrath might have been a logical successor in the middle this season, but the 6-1 senior is playing club volleyball this season instead of basketball in preparation for college.

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Vis is remodeling the club without Botkin, who was an all-state player and 1,000-point scorer during her career.

"We won't be able to throw it in to a kid with her back to the basket very often and score down low. That part worries me a little bit," said Vis. "At the same time, we'll be able to spread the court and really attack off the dribble-drive."

Sydney Hayden returns at point guard for Kennedy after averaging 9.2 points and 2.9 assists. Vis likes what he's seen of Hayden in practice.

"I would say Sydney has been our most impressive player so far," he said. "She was phenomenal in the scrimmage on Saturday. She will play very well for us this year. I have very little doubt in my mind about that."

Carly Langhurst returns to the club after missing last year following knee surgery. Vis said Langhurst began playing soccer again this past summer and is healthy again.

"For the most part Carly looks pretty good," he said. "If you did not know she tore her ACL, I don't know if it would be overly obvious to you."

Vis also expects Linden Runels, Hailey Dolphin, Ashley Hamilton and Olivia Hellweg to make significant contributions this season, with other players knocking on the door as well.

Kennedy finished with a 16-7 record last season and expects to have another good year. Vis mentioned Linn-Mar and Iowa City High as the two "heavyweights" in the Mississippi Valley Conference, but thinks his club can be in the discussion as well.

"I think we can compete with them," he said. "It's going to be a fun league race."

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Kennedy opens the season this Tuesday, Nov. 24 at Waukee.