

Athletic Warriors ready for next step

Written by Jim Ecker

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Adam Sanchez inherited a winless program last season when he became the boys basketball coach at Cedar Rapids Washington and led the revived Warriors to a 7-16 record after a slow start.

From the look of things, the Warriors could be ready for another leap forward this season.

"I like our group a lot," Sanchez said during practice Thursday. "I think we have a lot of good pieces, a lot of different pieces that make us a pretty tough matchup.

"We're trying to find out what pieces fit together and what guys are playing well together, but I think we'll have a good group and the competition has been extremely good in practice."

Washington graduated all five of the seniors who started most of the games last season in Austin Bergstrom, Brock Butterfield, David Rosenthal, Peter Holmes and Jason Oney. Heath Clark also graduated, but the cupboard is not bare by any means.

Razadon Taylor, Nehemiah Newman, Jake Kramer and Montaves Anderson are back after playing prominent roles last season, and another guy who's been attracting attention in practice has been 6-foot-5 junior Maurice Arrington.

Arrington saw limited action with the sophomore team last season while getting his grades in better shape, but he could be a big factor this time around. Sanchez would have promoted Arrington to the varsity last year if not for the academic issues.

"He's an extremely good athlete," Sanchez said. "He's got a good feel around the rim, he runs the floor really well, he's athletic and long. And he's still learning how to play."

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Taylor is the top returning scorer with 110 points and could be in store for bigger things. He was primarily the sixth man for the Warriors last year.

"He's probably as athletic as anybody in the league," Sanchez said. "Now we're just trying to find a spot for him where he can use that athletic ability. He'll be a really big piece for us this year."

Kramer, a good shooter, averaged 6.9 points last season in nine games after recovering from two ACL injuries. "He has a lot of minutes left in those legs. That's what he tells me all the time," Sanchez remarked.

Anderson was the No.2 point guard last season and could be the catalyst on offense this year. Newman averaged 6.0 points in 17 contests and is another piece of the puzzle.

Reid Snitker, the all-conference quarterback for the Washington football team, also figures in the mix in the backcourt. "The same thing he brings to the football field, he brings to the basketball court also," Sanchez said. "He's about as tough as they come."

Sanchez also mentioned Julian Good-Jones as a football player who could help the basketball squad this season.

The Warriors began the 2012-13 campaign with a 1-14 record, then went on a five-game winning streak and captured six of their last eight games. It took awhile for Sanchez to install his system and get things cooking.

He used a lot of players last season and plans to go deep into his bench again this year.

"They're all in the same bunch," he said. "We don't have a Division I player, we don't have a

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standout guy who's getting a lot of attention on the recruiting side of things. But we have 10 or 11 guys who can all play. They like playing together. That's a benefit for us."

Sanchez would like to get out and run.

"We have the athletes to go in transition, we've got the guys who can put the ball on the floor, we've got guys who can shoot it," he said. "I'm hoping we can play a little more up-tempo, get some more possessions each game and do that defensively as well.

"Hopefully we can put some more points up and make us more fun to watch."

Washington will play Cedar Valley Christian in the Metro Sports Report Classic this Saturday at 7:15 p.m. at Kirkwood Community College in a Pride Challenge event. The Warriors will host New Hampton in the first game of the regular season on Tuesday, Dec. 3.

Washington hosts Bettendorf Dec. 6, visits North Scott Dec. 7 and visits Iowa City West in a challenging start to the regular season.

"If we can weather the storm early and be competitive against those guys, I'm hoping we can finish in the top half of our side (in the MVC) and see what happens come playoff time," Sanchez said.