

Petersen signs 11 players for Kirkwood

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kirkwood men's basketball coach Bryan Petersen is young and energetic, but he'd rather not have to sign 11 new players every year to keep the Eagles headed in the right direction.

It's a lot of work for Petersen and his assistant coaches, but seven sophomores graduated from this year's club and two freshmen are not coming back.

There were holes to fill and Petersen thinks they've done it well.

"I feel really good about it," he said this week. "It's a group of kids that we feel will fit Kirkwood, not only as basketball players but as good people and good students.

"I think we're going to be more athletic than we were last year. We're really excited about this group."

Kirkwood finished with a 25-7 record this past season and reached the regional finals, falling one step short of the national tournament.

Five of this year's sophomores have found new homes to continue their careers at four-year colleges.

Jordan Ashton will play at Iowa State, Matt Lassen is headed to William Jewell, Joe Tagarelli is going to Quincy University, Ajay Lawton is headed to the University of Indianapolis and Ronald Singleton will play at

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Stillman College.

Kareem Martin Jr. has not finalized his college plans, but is leaning toward Grand View. Joe Weeks plans to attend the University of Iowa, but will not play basketball.

Those seven sophomores formed the core of the 2014-15 ballclub.

The five returning freshmen are Hunter Rhodes, Jacob Olson, Nick Richards, Josh Bartlett and Earnest Cowser. Chike Ukah, also a freshman this past season, had back surgery after the year ended and has enrolled at the University of Iowa.

The most familiar name in the new recruiting class is Josh Carter, a 6-foot-5 forward who helped Dubuque Wahlert win two Class 3A state titles in a row. Carter averaged 16 points and six rebounds for Wahlert this past season.

"I like his versatility. I like his winning," said Petersen. "He's been a part of two state championships, so that's something that's always big with us, somebody who knows how to win.

"He plays really hard and competes. I think he can get a lot better. He's a good kid, too."

Kirkwood's other new in-state recruit is Byron Harp, a 6-foot-2 point guard who played for former Kennedy coach Bob Fontana at Ankeny Centennial High School. Harp averaged 10 points, 4.2 assists and 3 rebounds this past season.

The Eagles have signed two college transfers in Cristen Wilson, 6-5, from Lakeland Community

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College in Ohio and Josh Meier, 6-7, from Chicago State. They will join Kirkwood as sophomores with one year of eligibility.

"Whenever you take transfers, you're hoping they can come in and help you right away," said Petersen.

Wilson averaged 12 points and 9 rebounds at Lakeland Community College. Meier averaged 5 points and 4 rebounds at Chicago State, which is an NCAA Division I school.

Kirkwood also has signed:

+ Lewrenzo Byers, 6-0, Brown Deer H.S., Milwaukee

+ Al'tavius Jackson, 6-2, Port Washington H.S., Wisconsin

+ Deantae Woods, 6-2, Racine Horlick H.S., Wisconsin

+ Kaliph Fagan, 6-4, Thornwood H.S., South Holland, Ill.

+ Da'Rion King, 6-6, Racine Case H.S., Wisconsin

+ Gary Bonds, 6-8, Scecina H.S., Indianapolis

+ Elijah Henry, 6-5, Evanston Township H.S., Illinois

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Petersen thinks it's a well-rounded class with good size and versatility.

"We're going to be a little guard-heavy, which is fine," he said. "That's kind of the way the game is going anyways. If you watched the NBA finals, you have to have good guards."

With so many new players, Petersen said there will be a lot of teaching when preseason drills begin.

"It's going to be new, we're going to have some growing pains, we'll have some things to work on. There's no question about it," he said.

"If we come together, this team has a chance. Our expectation is going to be win the league, win the region and go over to nationals.

"That's something our guys are going to be hearing a lot from us, because we haven't done that yet since I've take over. So it will be a big focus of ours on a daily basis."

Petersen has a 46-17 record in two years as head coach. He said he might add a 12th player to the recruiting class if the right player comes along.