

KCC women begin year No. 1 in nation

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 01 November 2017 04:51 -



Here's a dose of bad news for anyone who has to play the Kirkwood women's basketball team this season.

The Eagles, who went 37-0 last year and won the national title, could be even more talented this season.

"This group has a chance to be pretty good," Coach Kim Muhl said. "We're long, we're athletic.

"We have more depth than last year," he announced. "We just don't have the monster inside."

That "monster" last season was Simone Goods, the powerful center who was named the National Player of the Year and the Outstanding Player in the NJCAA national tournament.

Goods graduated after averaging 16.2 points, 8.2 rebounds and 1.8 blocks per game. Muhl will rotate several players in the post this year, but knows it will be difficult to get the same production near the hoop.

Otherwise, Muhl likes what he sees as the Eagles prepare to open the season at the State Fair Tournament in Sedalia, Mo., this weekend. Kirkwood faces Iowa Western Friday and State Fair Saturday.

"Obviously you're never happy at this point, but it's time to play," he said. "You don't have much choice. It's going to happen."

The Eagles have been installed as the No. 1 team in the country as the new campaign begins,

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but that's based on what the squad did last year more than anything else.

The Eagles also must replace Deleyah Harris, Shaneequah Watkins, TiRayah Cotton and Rylee Voss from last year's club, but Muhl thinks he has the raw ingredients at Johnson Hall. Harris averaged 13.3 points and 6.5 rebounds last year and could be hard to replace.

Tayana Wilson, a talented point guard who averaged 7.6 points and 3.2 assists, is back to run the club. She's joined by Olivia Usher and Megan Axcell, two veterans who played key roles a year ago, along with Awal Ajak, Christmas Puok and Niaja Taylor.

The ball will be in Wilson's hands whenever the 5-foot-6 sophomore is on the floor. "Tayana is really good," said Muhl. "She leads us in every direction. She's a tough little kid."

Usher, from Cedar Rapids Prairie, averaged 6.6 points, 4.1 rebounds and 2.8 assists last year. Axcell, from Knoxville, Ill., averaged 6.2 points last season.

Ajak was averaging 8.1 points last season when she suffered a knee injury and was lost for the year.

There's a lot of height and length among the newcomers with 6-foot-3 Taylor Irons, 6-2 Arika Wooldridge, 6-1 Leah Robinson, 5-11 Briana Mensen, 5-11 Tinee'sha Coleman and 5-11 MacKenzie Jenkins.

The Eagles also have added 5-8 Anasha Hurst, 5-6 Jahnisha Brown and 5-5 Haley Mullinnix.

Wooldridge, who is from Center Point, transferred to Kirkwood from Winona State. Coleman, who is from Chicago, transferred from the University of Cincinnati.

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Muhl's biggest concern about this year's team is defensive rebounding, especially after losing Goods and Harris.

Muhl enters his 29th year as Kirkwood's head coach with seven national titles and an overall record of 829-147. He's confident he'll have a seasoned team by the time the postseason rolls around in February, but he's not worried about another national title at this point.

"You plug away at this level," he said. "You plug away and try to get better."

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MacKenzie Jenkins, 5-11, Frosh, Peoria, Ill.
Tayana Wilson, 5-6, Soph, Country Club Hills, Ill.
Christmas Puok, 6-0, Soph, Des Moines
Jahnisha Brown, 5-6, Frosh, Crete, Ill.
Megan Axcell, 5-11, Soph, Knoxville, Ill.
Anasha Hurst, 5-8, Frosh, St. Louis
Awal Ajak, 6-0, Soph, Des Moines
Niaja Taylor, 5-6, Soph, Rockford, Ill.
Leah Robinson, 6-1, Frosh, Evanston, Ill.
Haley Mullinnix, 5-5, Frosh, West Branch
Briana Mensen, 5-11, Frosh, Delhi
Taylor Irons, 6-3, Frosh, South Holland, Ill.
Tinee'sha Coleman, 5-11, Soph, Chicago
Olivia Usher, 5-9, Soph, Fairfax
Arika Wooldridge, 6-2, Soph, Center Point