



University of the Cumberlands men's basketball team. | PHOTO COURTESY OF UC

## Patriots men's basketball selected 15th in NAIA Preseason Coaches' Poll

Toming off a 24-8 season that yielded their seventh consecutive bid to the NAIA national tournament, the Patriots men's basketball team earned 282 points to be ranked 15th in the NAIA Preseason Coaches' Poll, announced by the national office. It marks the highest UC has been ranked in the Preseason Poll, since the 2009-2010 season, where they were ranked 14th.

In addition to going 24-8 last season, UC posted a 12-4 conference record thee best conference mark since the 2010-11 season when they went 13-5. Cumberlands was the fourth-seed in the Duer Bracket at the 2020 NAIA National Tournament before the season was canceled.

UC has returned four players from last year's squad, including NAIA Second Team All-American Tevin Olison.

The redshirt senior averaged 17.8 points, 5.5 rebounds, and 2.5 assists per game last year. Olison scored at least 20 points 15 times during the season, including a career-high 46 points in the win over Life. Jahi Hinson and Steven Fitzgerald also return for UC as they averaged 11.4 and 7.9 points per game, respectfully.

In addition to the returners, UC has newcomers in the mix, highlighted by Deng Mayot, Josh Williams Ismiell Etienne, and Kendall Robinson. All four transfers will be in the mix for starting spots as well as provide depth to the Patriots lineup.

Defending conference champion Georgetown received 578 points, including 12 first-place votes to be the favorite. Mid-America Christian tallied 563 points and three first-

place votes to be second, while Indiana Wesleyan notched five first-place votes and 555 points to be ranked third. William Penn and Lewis-Clark State round out the top five. This is the first year that the NAIA has merged Division I and Division II basketball into one divi-

The Patriots opened their 2020-2021 season Friday, October Johnson 23, against University.

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## Patriots picked seventh in Preseason Conference Poll

With the season underway, the Mid-South Conference has released their Preseason Coaches' Poll. Cumberlands received 59 points to be picked seventh overall out of the 12-team conference.

The Patriots are coming off a 19-12 season that included a 6-10 mark in conference play. Entering his third season at the helm Head Coach Rick Reeves believes this year's team has the tools to make a leap into the top half of the conference and via for a NAIA postseason

UC has returned nine players from last year's squad, including six players that started at least 11 games last season. Cumberlands is led by seniors Carla Covane, Vilma Covane, and Silvia Veloso along with sophomores Reagan Begole. Carla Covane, a MSC second team all-conference selection last year, averaged 10.6 points and 7.9 rebounds per game last season, while Vilma Convane gave UC 12.5 points and 73 rebounds per game. Veloso led the Patriots in points (367), steals (104), and assists (87) in her first season dawning the red and navy. Begole was the lone Patriot to start every game last season for UC and made one of the biggest plays hitting a game-tying basket at the end of regulation against Pikeville to force overtime in a game that UC won 64-61.

In addition to those returners, the Patriots have add a strong freshman class of seven newcomers to be coupled with three redshirt freshman. Highlighting this class are Channing Lewis, Kaylee Mathis, and Shelby Moore. Lewis was a Mercer county standout, where she was part of their 2017 and 2018 state championship teams. Mathis graduated from Clay County High School, while Moore went to Gatlinburg-Pittman High School. Additionally, Raegan Hubbard, Shelby McDaniel, and Haley Baxter will see their first action for the Patriots after redshirting last

Earning six first-place votes and expected to defend their regular season conference title, Campbellsville tops the MSC poll



University of the Cumberlands women's basketball team this year. | PHOTO COUR-TESY OF UC

followed by Shawnee State and Thomas More. Shawnee State defeated Campbellsville in last year's conference tournament to be crowned the MSC Tournament Champion. The Bears and Saints earned two first-place votes each while Bethel and Lindsey Wilson each earned one first-place vote to finish fourth and fifth, respectively.

Freed-Hardeman precedes UC to be ranked sixth, while other newcomer Martin Methodist is projected to finish after the Pats in eighth. Rounding out the top ten are Pikeville with 46 votes, and Georgetown with 33 votes. Life and Cumberland fill the final spots of the poll with a mere 22 and 13 votes, respectively.

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## CORBIN



# HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS HEAD COACH: TONY PIETROWSKI • 2019-20 RECORD: 16-14 • GIRLS HEAD COACH: ISAAC WILSON • 2019-20 RECORD: 17-13

## Young Redhounds will have to learn on the fly

Staff Writer

ongtime fans of 13th Region ∕basketball know that no matter the names that are on the roster for the Corbin Redhounds, they are going to be right there, playing with the best in the region, at the end of

Perhaps the most important name on the roster is the one at the top, Coach Tony Pietrowski. Pietrowski has won four regional championships and a slew of 50th District titles during his tenure as head coach of the Redhounds, and with a relatively new squad for the 2020-2021 season, the veteran coach will have to prove once again why he is among the state's best.

While a young team brings challenges, it also brings potential. Without a summer season, due to COVID-19 restrictions, these young Redhounds are going to have to learn on the fly this season. That means that this Corbin squad will likely finish the year much stronger than they begin.

Pietrowski said that he believes there is quite a bit of talent on this year's roster, but, with the lack of experience and a shortened offseason, he is not sure if they will get

"Time will tell if we can reach our upside. With the exception of Josh Hibbitts and Carter Stewart, our team hasn't played any significant varsity minutes," said Pietrowski. "We also have a handful of football players we think can contribute, but again, they are in the same boat with experience. I really like the pieces we have, we just have to mesh them



Tony Pietrowski's Corbin Redhounds enter the season as the team to beat in the 50th District. | FILE PHOTO



Carter Stewart turned in an impressive eighth-grade season for Corbin. | FILE PHOTO

together and improve every day."

Hibbits and Stewart are the most experienced players from last year's squad. Hibbits is part of a fourman senior class that includes Grant Dickerson, TJ Terrell, and Isaac McVey. Stewart will be a freshman, and is considered one of the top young players in the region.

Pietrowski's senior group may not have the varsity minutes that a typical senior class would have, but they have been in Corbin's system for four years now, and they understand the culture and expectations that come with being a Redhound. Pietrowski said he needs the group to step up and be leaders this year.

"We have seniors returning. We need leadership out of this group," said Pietrowski. "They know our expectation level and need to convey that to the team."

While Stewart returns from a stellar eighth-grade season, in which he averaged five points per game, Corbin added another young player that looks to be a key addition for the Redhounds this season. Sophomore Hayden Llewellyn transferred to Corbin from Jellico, Tenn. this offseason and is expected to immediately become one of the top players in the region.

Llewellyn was a star as a freshman at Jellico, averaging over 26 points per game last season. He will provide some offensive power that was missing from the Redhounds

"Hayden Llewellyn is a new face to our program. Most that follow high school sports will know the name," said Pietrowski. "He offers a variety of ways to score and is extremely athletic. He still has a lot of areas he can improve in, but he has a bright future."

SEE REDHOUNDS, PAGE B15

## Senior Shelby Stewart ready to lead Lady Redhounds

**BY JOHN STEPP** Staff Writer

When Isaac Wilson took over the Corbin Lady Redhounds basketball program in 2017, he said he thought the fourth year of his tenure would be the year that his team would begin competing for a district title.

Last year, in his third year on the job, Wilson's team had their best season under the young head coach, finishing the year with a 17-13 record, before falling to Whitley County in the opening round of the district tournament in a 51-49 nail-

Wilson said he is looking forward to starting the year and seeing the progress continue with his

"We're looking to continue to build what we have started here. It's been a process since getting here at Corbin," said Wilson. "I said in the fourth year I felt like we were going to feel good about where we were as a program and what our chances were. We lost a heartbreaker to Whitley County last season, but I like where we are and I like our chances this season."

Corbin lost three seniors from last year's squad, but have a trio of seniors returning that are ready to lead the Lady Redhounds to a regional tournament appearance. Shelby Stewart, Corbin's leading scorer from last season, returns as the most experienced player on the team and one of the top players in the region. Kami Garland and Lauren Faulkner are the other two seniors who return.

"Shelby was our leading scorer from a year ago. She has been the heartbeat of our team. She has some college interest, so we are expecting a big year for her," said Wilson. "Kami Garland is a player who has played since my first year



Corbin enters the season as the No. 4 ranked team in the 13th Region. | FILE



Corbin's Shelby Stewart enters the 2020-21 season as one of the top-ranked players in the 13th Region. | FILE PHOTO

here when she was a freshman. She brings a lot of what the team needs. little things that don't show up in the newspaper, but stands out to coaches. Lauren Faulkner has not had a lot of varsity experience, but we like what we have seen from her and are expecting a big year for

The Lady Redhounds also had two offseason additions to their squad, and both are expected to make a difference this year. Cadence Wynn transferred from South Laurel and Kallie Housley joined Corbin from Whitley County.

Housley will provide more scoring for the Lady Redhounds. She was the leading scorer for Whitley County last year, averaging 10.6 points per game. Wilson said that both Wynn and Housley will add much needed depth for the Lady Redhounds.

"I feel really good about where our roster is at. Our girls have done as good as anyone could do without having a summer to play," said Wilson. "Two players that have really helped and will be two really nice pieces for us, will be Candence Wynn and Kallie Housley. They give us the depth that we needed this year."

In order to put together a successful run this season, the Lady Redhounds will have to find a way to complete within the 50th District. Each year, the 50th is the best district in the region, with South Laurel finishing as the regional champs last year. This year, while the competition will be just as good, it will

be anyone's game. Corbin figures to factor into the conversation this year, as a legitimate contender for the district title. Wilson said it's always tough to make it through the district

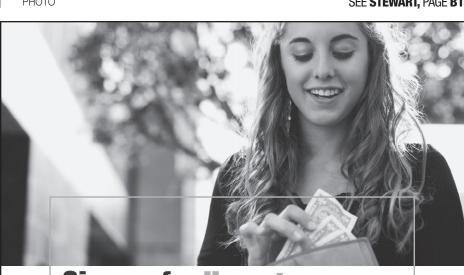
unscathed. "Our district is the toughest in

SEE **STEWART, PAGE B15** 



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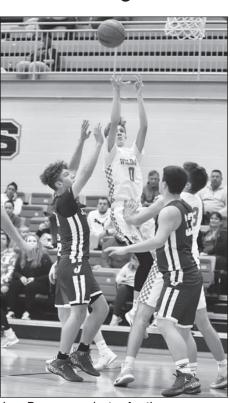
# LYNN CAMP



# HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS HEAD COACH: RODNEY CLARKE • 2019-20 RECORD: 13-15 • GIRLS HEAD COACH: DARRELL HENDRIX • 2019-20 RECORD: 4-28

# Clarke's Wildcats ready to surprise



Jace Boggs saw plenty of action as a freshman last season for Lynn Camp. | FILE PHOTO

BY LES DIXON Staff Writer

CORBIN — High expectations are in store for Rodney Clarke's Lynn Camp Wildcats thanks to a couple of transfers combined with returning talent.

Clarke, who was coach of the Lady Wildcat basketball program last season, will be taking over for former coach Dinky Phipps, who resigned as head coach earlier this year.

Lynn Camp is coming off a 13-15 season that saw the Wildcats fall in first-round action of the 13th Region All 'A' Tournament along with losing in the first round of the 51st District Tournament.

Clarke is hoping to reverse his team's fortunes this season.

"I'm extremely excited about this upcoming season," he said. "I understand the expectations are high and that's what I embrace. I don't want to fly under the radar. I want high expectations and I want my kids to

embrace it as well. I feel like that's how you build a program.

"I think we have a team that can compete in the All 'A', and while I know Knox Central is the favorite, I think we have a legit chance in our

district. As far as regional play, I would like to get there and see what happens."

Like most teams statewide, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Clarke's squad in many ways.

"The pandemic has affected us big time," Clarke said. "Our numbers have been low because football has been pushed back meaning, the football players won't be joining us soon. We also have had a couple of guys out due to COVID along with myself. Missing summer ball is huge because any time the kids can play is always a plus."

Lynn Camp will enter the season as one of the top teams in the region. Seniors Maison Prater returns along with Spencer Gilbert and Luke Ledington. They'll be joining freshman Jace Boggs along with transfers Gavin Allen and Micah Engle.

"Maison is looking to continue his outstanding play from last year," Clarke said. "He averaged 15 points a game and shot 47 percent from 3-point range. Spencer enters his senior year after earning Newcomer of the Year in the 51st District last season averaging six points and three rebounds. He will be asked to guard the opposing team's best player and contribute on the offensive end.

"Luke will be asked to display leadership for the team and very well could be the team's best shooter from behind the arc," he added. "Jace played major minutes as a freshman and shot 44 percent from 3. He will be called on to have a bigger role this season. Gavin is coming off a season where he earned Newcomer of the Year in the 50th District, averaging eight points and four rebounds on 60 percent shooting. He has reformed his body over the summer dropping over 20 pounds while adding some much needed strength. He has a chance to be the best big in the region. Micah Engle is coming off a very productive off season, he played in the Prep Hoops Top 250 2022 and was ranked in the top 10. I think he is poised to showcase he is one of the better players in the region.'

Clarke believes his team's key to success will be his defense being able to limit teams to one shot.

"Our strengths, I hope, will be our balanced post play inside along with our ability to stretch

SEE **WILDCATS**, PAGE **B15** 



Lynn Camp Coach Rodney Clarke is expecting big things from transfer Gavin Allen. | FILE PHOTO

# Darrell Hendrix taking over a rebuilding Lady Wildcat team

Staff Writer

CORBIN — Darrell Hendrix takes over a Lynn Camp Lady Wildcat basketball program that continues to be rebuilding after posting a 4-28 record last season.

Hendrix is excited to see what his players can do after adding new faces to the team.

"We have 18 players on the roster," he said. "We've added 10 girls that didn't play last season, but have all played basketball at some point. We are still very young. I only have two seniors and two juniors that will see varsity playing time. The rest are several freshman and sophomores that will play a lot.

"We have some size, I have three players that are around 5'10" and they are all tall and athletic," Hendrix added. "We also have some speed and several girls that shoot the ball pretty good from outside. I hope we can be competitive in the All 'A' and district right away. It's gonna depend on how quickly we come together as a team. Right now, everyone is meshing together really well. They all seem to have the same goals and have something to prove."

While Lynn Camp is no stranger to success, the Lady Wildcats took some lumps last season and are ready to get back to their winning ways.

"I'm very excited about this opportunity to take over this program," Hendrix said. "I have confidence that we will get the program back to winning again. I hope I and my staff can provide stability for this team. I'm their fourth coach in four years. That can be hard on any player, especially a high school girl. We are trying to build a great relationship with these players and assure them that we are here for the long haul.

"I have surrounded myself with a great staff," he added. "Nikki Hendrix, who has been behind getting all these girls out to play. She has a great relationship with all of them from being the high school softball coach. Stephanie Partin,



Lynn Camp's Natalie Fanella will winter the season as one of the best players in the 51st District. | FILE PHOTO



Abby Mabe averaged six points last season for Lynn Camp. | FILE PHOTO

who played at Lynn Camp and went to school with most of these kids' parents, and Matt Moore who played at South Laurel in the early 2000s."

The cupboard isn't bare at Lynn Camp. Hendrix has eight players at his disposal that saw playing time and even started at some point last season.

"I expect Abby Mabe to start for us and Isabella Blevins, Alissa Crumpler, Brooklyn Colinger, and Alyssa Mounce to see a lot of playing time," he said, "We are going to be using about 10 girls every night. Abby Mabe is very athletic, she can drive the ball and shoots it well from outside, Isabella is a great shooter, Alissa Crumpler will be a very important cause she can play about anywhere. We can use her in any position. Brooklyn Colinger and Alyssa Mounce will see a lot of playing time down low. They will both give us good minutes in the post position. Mackenzie Owens and Chloe Helton are also returning. They are both young but show a lot of potential.

Mackenzie will probably be our JV point guard and also see some varsity minutes," he added. "We have the addition of two seniors. Natalie Fanella and Julia Shepherd who played their freshman and sophomore seasons but didn't play last season. Natalie is about 5'11" and very athletic for her size while Julia will provide us with good outside shooting to help stretch the defense. They both have a lot of experience and know the game well. Jorja Carnes, a freshman, will be our point guard. The thing I like about Jorja is she's always looking to set other players up to score. She shoots the ball well and can drive it to the rim, but she does a great job of looking for the open player."

Hendrix is also excited to see what Brayden Smith and Lindsey Cox bring to the table.

"Braylen has a great feel for the game and can shoot it well or

SEE **HENDRIX**, PAGE **B15** 





# NORTH LAUREL



## HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS HEAD COACH: NATHAN VALENTINE • 2019-20 RECORD: 22-10 • GIRLS HEAD COACH: EDDIE MAHAN • 2019-20 RECORD: 28-5

# Valentine's Jaguars tagged as region's team to beat

BY LES DIXON Staff Writer

LONDON — A new year brings new expectations unless of course you are the North Laurel Jaguars.

For the second consecutive year, Nate Valentine's squad has been tagged by many as the team to beat after coming up short during last season's 13th Region Tournament.

The Jaguars (22-10 overall, 12-6 vs. 13th Region competition) fell in the first round of the 13th Region Tournament to eventual champion Knox Central.

Valentine and company are hoping to reverse the roles this season but he's quick to point out even though his team may be picked as the team to beat until someone knocks off Knox Central, the Panthers will sit atop the region.

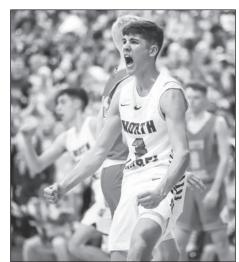
"We are approaching this season one day at a time," he said. "If there is anything we have learned in the past nine months, it's no one knows what tomorrow will bring. We have gone from not being able to do anything, to not being allowed to share a basketball, to being completely shut down again. We are just focusing on North Laurel.

"We are still trying to develop our program and not concerning ourselves with what others are doing," he added. "In terms of rankings, this is Knox Central's region until someone knocks them off. I'm not trying to deflect the attention or put the target on them, but what they have done in this region the past two years deserves the credit. Coach Tony Patterson does an excellent job and their program deserves recognition."

Just like all teams across the state, the Jaguars have had to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, which Valentine feels it will take a while to see what effects will pop up with



Junior Clay Sizemore connected on 44-of-118 3-point attempts last season.



North Laurel sophomore Reed Sheppard led the Jaguars with a 20.6 scoring average last season. | FILE PHOTO

his team not participating in summer basketball.

"I think time will tell on the effect of the pandemic," he said. "While we missed a lot of team activities, I feel our players worked extremely hard to improve individually."

North Laurel lost talent due to graduation and will have some holes to feel entering the season but the cupboard is far from being bare.

Returning sophomores Reed Sheppard (20.6 points per game, 5.2 rebounds per game) and Ryan Davidson (14.7, 5.6) lead the way along with the likes of seniors Nate Bruner (3.2, 1.9) and Wayne Estep (10.9, 2.7), juniors Caden Harris (1.4, 1.6), Clay Sizemore (4.6, 0.6), and Dillan Nicely (0.4, 0.4), and sophomore Brody Brock (0.7, 0.3) are among many players that are expected to contribute this season.

"I have been pleased with our team's improvement thus far," Valentine said. "The guys are working hard and seem to have really good chemistry. We will still be relatively young but I think we can be a good team by the end of the season."

"We have a solid nucleus coming back that will be anchored by Reed and Ryan," he added. "Though they are both sophomores, they have a tremendous amount of game experience. I expect them both to play above their age. We also have two seniors this season. Nate Bruner will be expected to play a huge role for us again. He's a fierce competitor and can be an outstanding defender. Wayne Estep transferred from OBI as a result of the pandemic. OBI was forced to close their boarding facilities and will not field a varsity boys team this season. Wayne is a strong athlete that will have an immediate impact on our team. We are excited to get Caden Harris back on the court after football.

"Clay Sizemore will be relied upon heavily," Valentine continued. "Clay has worked as hard as any-

SEE **JAGUARS**, PAGE **B16** 

# Mahan's Lady Jaguars looking to reclaim title as region's best team

Staff Writer

LONDON — Eddie Mahan's North Laurel Lady Jaguars are two years removed from a 13th Region championship, and just last year, they reached the regional finals before bowing out to crosstown rival South Laurel.

Gone are the talented duo of Gracie Jervis and Isabel Gray due to graduation but that doesn't mean North Laurel is rebuilding.

The Lady Jaguars just reload. North Laurel (28-5 overall, 14-1 vs. 13th Region competition) returns the bulk of their talent from last season but they are young.

Mahan looks to be starting two juniors, one freshman, and two eighth-graders while most of his players in the rotation are eighth-graders.

"The word that comes to mind about this year's team is young. I know most will talk about our talent and we for sure have many talented players, but most people do not understand how important experience is," Mahan said. "Even in our program, when we were rising through the region a few years ago, we had to go through some postseason heartbreak before being able to finally win the region and go to state.

"We will have to overcome that lack of experience this year and it will cost us some games," he added. "I hope that we learn our lessons early though, so we do not have to learn those lessons in postseason play. We will be starting two eighth-graders and a freshman, and four of our top seven players in our rotation will be eighth-graders. I cannot remember any team in recent history this young with such high expectations. That speaks to just how talented our young group is."

With the Lady Jaguars tagged by many as the team to beat, comes pressure, but Mahan expects his team to be able to handle the expectations.



Halle Collins averaged 14.4 points and 6.8 rebounds per game last season as a seventh grader. | FILE PHOTO



Junior Hailee Valentine led North Laurel with a 15.1 scoring average last season. | FILE PHOTO

"We have been competing at the top of the region for a while now," he said. "The expectations of our program are to compete with the best of the state every season. The fact that we are expected to win a region is not new to us within our program and should not be a distraction. I worry more about Covid cancellations affecting our team than I do the outside expectations."

The Lady Jaguars return three starters and players from last season that played significant varsity minutes.

Juniors Emily Sizemore (10.3 points per game, 4.4 assists per game) and Hailee Valentine (15.1) return as the region's frontcourt along with eighth-grader Halle Collins, who was quite the contributor as a seventh-grader last season, averaging 14.4 points and 6.8 rebounds.

"Emily's importance cannot be stated in stats," Mahan said. "She will need to be a leader from this position even more this year than she was last year. Her ability to run our offense and to be the emotional leader from the point guard position will be a huge factor of just how good we can

"Hailee is an improved shooter this season and I think that will help her become even a more consistent scorer," he added. "Two years ago, she was our best on ball defender, and last year, she was our leading scorer, but this year's team needs her to be able to do both. If she does you will see that will separate her from many of the other great players that have come through the region lately and may help separate our team from some of the others in the region.

"Halle is a tremendous player and does it based primarily on being a great rebounder and good shooter," Mahan continued. "I think you will see her take a big step in creating her own shot this season. However, her scoring is the smallest part of her game. She changes the game by how hard she plays, how well she rebounds, and how versatile she is. Those are the first things that col-

SEE **RECLAIM**, PAGE **B16** 





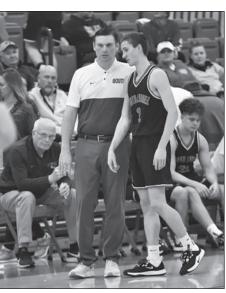
# SOUTH LAUREL



## HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS HEAD COACH: JEFF DAVIS • 2019-20 RECORD: 28-5 • GIRLS HEAD COACH: CHRIS SOUDER • 2019-20 RECORD: 27-6

## Young Cardinals will be tested by tough schedule



South Laurel coach Jeff Davis guided his team to a 28-5 record last season. | FILE

BY JOHN STEPP Staff Writer

The South Laurel Cardinals have been one of the best teams in the 13th Region over the past five years. After winning the regional title in 2016, the Cardinals have reached either the semi-finals or finals of the tournament every year since.

Last season, South Laurel had the best record among all 13th Region teams, finishing the year at 28-5, after being knocked out of the regional tournament by eventual champ Knox Central in the

This year, the Cardinals will have some big shoes to fill. Star guard Matthew Cromer has moved on to continue his basketball career at Eastern Kentucky University. Second leading scorer and rebounder Brett Norvell graduated, along with seniors Alex Hostettler, Zach Allen, Jace Bowling, Ford Breeding, and Fischer Proffitt.

The three most experienced players returning for the Cardinals will be senior Micah Anders, junior Caden Jones, and sophomore Parker Payne. Anders was the third leading scorer on last year's squad, averaging close to nine points per game. Jones saw action in all 33 games and averaged over three points

Payne established himself as one of the top freshmen in the region last year, playing a pivotal role for South Laurel, while averaging four points per game.

Other players who are expected to compete for a spot in the rotations are senior Weslyn Wright, juniors Rhys England, Brayden Reed, and Jacob Steele, along with several sophomores on the roster.

With a lack of experience on the roster, this could be more of a rebuilding year for the Cardinals. Due to restrictions caused by COVID-19, South Laurel, along with all other boys and girls basketball programs, were not able

to have a summer schedule. The experience that teams typically gain in the summer was not there this year, and that could hurt teams like the Cardinals that lost a bulk of their experience from last

Back in July, Coach Jeff Davis spoke to the Times-Tribune about the impact the pandemic could have on his squad.

We take pride in our spring and summer programs, and have done so ever since I came here," Davis said. "We use it to get as many games under our belt for our young guys and for guys to get used to new roles. They allow our coaches to see what guys are comfortable at and what they need to work on before October. Not having that experience this summer is going to be big.

If the Cardinals are going to continue making big runs in the postseason, it will all start with their district schedule. South Laurel plays in one of the toughest districts in the region in the 50th District, alongside Corbin, Whitley County and Williamsburg.

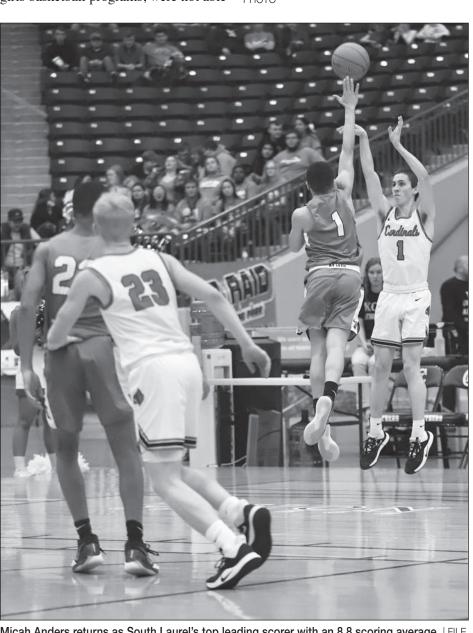
Williamsburg and Whitley County both have new coaches this season, with young talented rosters returning, and Corbin will have one of the better teams in the region, once again. The Cardinals have won the district title three of the past five years, and finished runner-up the other two seasons.

In addition to their district slate, Davis has built a strong schedule that will allow his team to get in a lot of experience and tough competition throughout the year. While there is concern about cancellations, due to the rise in COVID-19 cases, South Laurel will face one of the toughest schedules in the region this season.

They will open the year with the SEE CARDINALS, PAGE B16

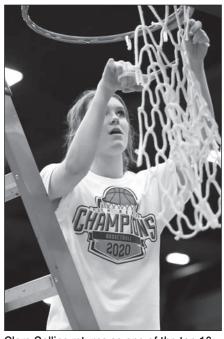


Parker Payne averaged four points per game as a freshman last season. | FILE



Micah Anders returns as South Laurel's top leading scorer with an 8.8 scoring average. | FILE

## Lady Cardinals hoping for another magical run this year



Clara Collins returns as one of the top 10 players in the region. | FILE PHOTO

BY JOHN STEPP Staff Writer

Perhaps no team in the state of Kentucky was as disappointed with the COVID-19 shutdown and quarantine than the South Laurel Lady Cardinals at the end of the 2019-2020 girls basketball season.

The Lady Cardinals were one of the best basketball teams in the state of Kentucky throughout the entire season a year ago, led by a trio of seniors in Ally Collett, Amerah Steele, and Sydnie Hall. Behind their trio of stars, Chris Souder's team marched through the 13th Region Tournament, defeating North Laurel in the finals to take the crown.

Many thought that run could end in the first round of the state tournament, when the Lady Cardinals faced off against the tournament's favorite, Sacred Heart. But, a 58-57 upset in the first round gave South Laurel the win they needed to make a run at a state title. Unfortunately, COVID-19 had other plans, and the tournament was officially ended, leaving all of South Laurel wondering what could have been.

Now that the seniors from last year's team are gone, Souder and his crew are back for what they hope is another magical run in the 2020-2021 season. While they may not have the hype they did a year ago, they still have a talented roster and one of the best coaches in the state.

Souder said that he likes what he is seeing from this year's squad, but they'll have to prove it on the court. And that may take some time.

"This year's team definitely has the talent to make a deep run, but we understand we have big shoes to fill with what we lost last year," said Souder. "With COVID, we did not get a summer and a chance to look at what works and what does not, so we will have to use the season to figure that out. We may struggle

early, until we can figure out what our team identity truly is." Leading the way for the Lady

Cardinals will be returning senior Brianna Howard. Howard burst onto the scene last year as one of the top point guards in the region, running the show for South Laurel during their title run season. While Souder said he is not sure who will be in his top five, it is almost certain that Howard will be there. "Bri Howard is our only senior

and she will more than likely be one of our starters," Souder said. "We don't have a set starting lineup just yet. We have several different options that we can use. Also, to be honest, I may have to change lineups a lot early in the year to see what our best chemistry is."

There are several players, in addition to Howard, who will be in the conversation for the starting spots and rotation players. Rachel Presley, Corbin Miller, Emily Mills, Emily Cox, Clara Collins, Gracie Turner, Reagan Jones, and Kylie Clem are all solid players on the South Laurel squad this year.

Presley and Miller are both juniors and saw some experience last season. Sophomores Emily Cox and Clara Collins both saw significant minutes last season and look to be among the top players this year. Mills, Turner, and Jones will also play big roles. Clem is a freshman, and will be among the names who'll be vying for one of those spots.

Losing most of their scoring from a year ago, the Lady Cardinals will have to rely on their strengths to get them through tough matchups throughout the year. Souder said his team's ability to defend and shoot the three will be relied upon this

"Our strength is definitely our length. I can put four girls out there at one time that are 5-feet 10-inches or better," said Souder. "Also, every single kid can step out and shoot the three."

As the reigning 13th Region champions, the Lady Cardinals will

SEE MAGICAL, PAGE B16



Bri Howard is considered as one of the top shooters in the 13th Region. | FILE PHOTO



## WHITLEY CO.



## HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS HEAD COACH: MARK WHITE • 2019-20 RECORD: 12-19 • GIRLS HEAD COACH: SEAN PIGMAN • 2019-20 RECORD: 15-18

# New coach Mark White ready to lead Colonels

BY JOHN STEPP Staff Writer

There is a new man leading the way for the Whitley County Colonels basketball team this season.

Mark White was named the head coach of the Colonels' boys basketball program back in May, after longtime coach Jerry Overbey resigned. White takes over Whitley County after several years as both a college and high school coach.

White brings a ton of experience to Whitley County, serving as the head coach of two high school programs, two community colleges, and as an assistant for five years at Mississippi State University. As a college coach, he compiled an impressive record of 240-99.

White is taking over a team that has had a string of success over the past several seasons, but failed to get over the hump. While Corbin, South Laurel, and Williamsburg have all won 13th Region titles within the past decade, the Colonels have failed to reach the tournament.

Entering the season, Whitley County will be one of the youngest teams in the 13th Region. They return three starters, but will have no seniors on the roster. Despite that, White said he believes his team will have quite a bit of depth and be able to put a lot of kids on the floor on any given night.

"This year's team is a very young team with no seniors, but it will have a lot of depth. I really like our team a lot," said White. "They play extremely hard. They are a tough team both physically and mentally. I think by year's end, we have a chance to be a really good team to make a run."

The three returning starters from last year will be Jack Estes, Grayson Estes, and Trevor Downs. With all three playing football, they have not been able to be with the team up to this point in the preseason, but will join as soon as the Colonels football season ends.

Whitley County also returns leading scorer Garrett McNealy. The junior guard averaged 10 points per game last season. Downs also averaged close to 10 points per game last season, while both Jack and Grayson Estes averaged over nine. Downs also



Whitley County is looking to make its first trip to the 13th Region Tournament since 2011. | FILE PHOTO



Whitley County posted a 12-19 record last season. | FILE PHOTO

led the Colonels in rebounding at over six boards per game.

Other players who are vying for a starting spot include Jamie Fuson, Brayden Mahan, Ethan Keene, Peyton Anderson, Bryson Potter, and Cody Senters, among several other players.

White said that most of the varsity roster will be included in the rotation at the beginning of the season. He believes that he will be able to play over 10 players throughout the course of a game.

"Some of these kids play football, so it's going to take a little time for them to be where they need to be both physically conditioning and learning all the things that we do on both ends of the court," said White. "We have 12-13 kids that will be competing for playing time. The players in rotation (for us) could be numerous."

In the past, Whitley County has been an in-your-face style defense, with a slowed down half-court offense, but that is changing this year. When the Colonels take the court this season, White expects them to bring an aggressive attitude at both ends of the court. With their depth and athletic abilities, Whitley County could be the type of team that can wear opponents down.

White said both depth and toughness are qualities of his team that stick out to them, and both are important to winning.

"The strengths of this team are its overall depth and it's toughness," said White. "With how hard we play, and our aggressive style of play on defense and offense for 32 minutes. Our practices are very hard, tough, and competitive."

While lack of experience is a concern, White has worked hard on revamping the Colonels' schedule for this season. He will be relying on several freshmen and sophomores to con-

SEE **COLONELS,** PAGE **B17** 

## Second-year coach believes Lady Colonels will surprise

Y JOHN STEPP Staff Writer

In his first year as the head coach of the Whitley County Lady Colonels, Sean Pigman established a culture with his program that looks to pay dividends in the 2020-2021 basketball season.

Pigman brought a fast-paced, workaholic attitude to Whitley County. In his first year, they were able to win 15 games and finish as runner-up in the 50th District Tournament. This season, the Lady Colonels will feature a team that has returned some experience, combined with an influx of youth, and several players who will be on the floor at any given time.

Pigman said that he believes this year's team will be one that continually improves throughout the year and may even surprise some people in the end.

"We really like our team. We have a good mix of experience and youth. We can shoot the ball and get up and down the floor," said Pigman. "We feel like we have the ability to be a little better than most believe by the year's end if we get to continue to grow and develop throughout this strange season ahead."

Whitley County will feature one of the largest senior classes in the region, with six seniors return-



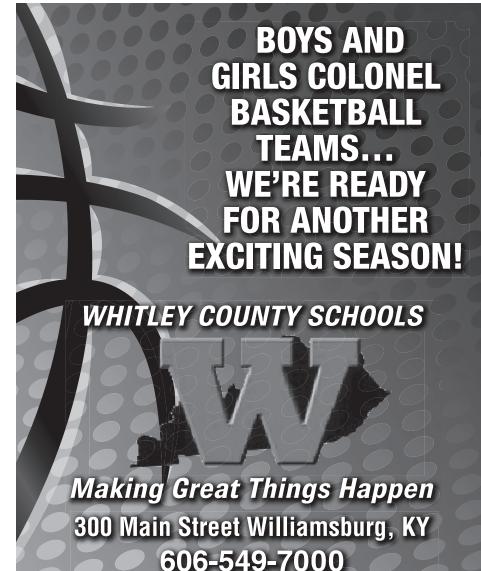
Sean Pigman's Whitley County Lady Colonels posted a 15-18 record last season. | FILE PHOTO

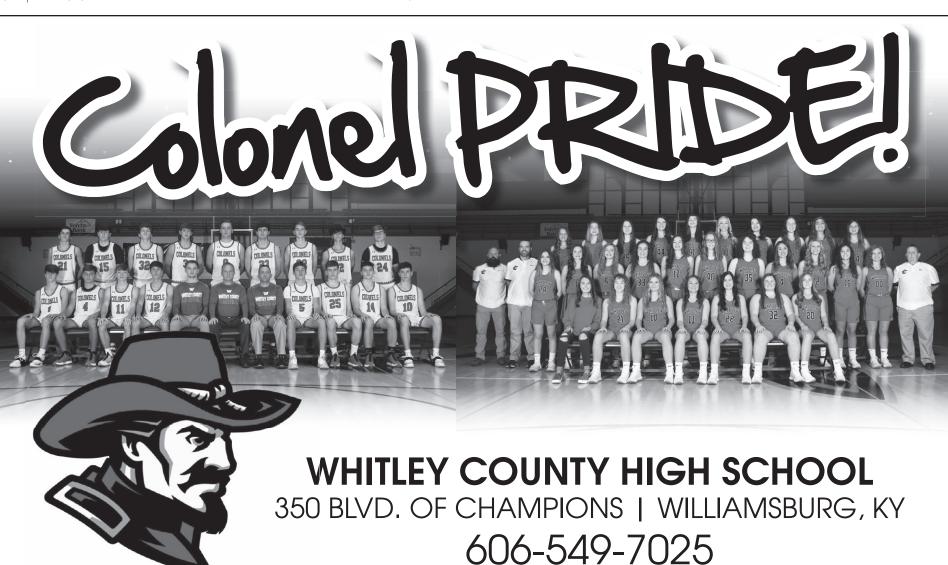
ing from last year. Reis Anderson, Jaycie Monhollen, Natalie Moses will be the three returning scorers from a year ago, while Katie Powers, Dorian Siler, and Gladys Thornton were all able to gain experience last year, and will play bigger roles this season.

Pigman said his senior class is crucial to the success of this season, adding that they feel like they have something to prove this year.

"This group brings lots of experience and I feel like they have something to prove," said Pigman. "They have meant a great deal to our program and they will be missed big time when they are gone."

SEE **SURPRISE**, PAGE **B17** 





# WILLIAMSBURG



## HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS HEAD COACH: ERIC SWORDS • 2019-20 RECORD: 17-13 • GIRLS HEAD COACH: RANDY CRIDER • 2019-20 RECORD: 16-11

## Eric Swords returns to alma mater to lead Yellow Jackets

Staff Writer

WILLIAMSBURG — After head coaching stints at both Lynn Camp and Berea, Eric Swords has returned to his alma mater with hopes of leading Williamsburg to its first region title since 2015.

Swords built Berea into a contender, and now he's ready to do the same with the Yellow Jackets. "It's been great," Swords said when asked about taking over as head coach at his alma mater. "It has always been a dream of mine to coach here and I feel that we will be able to build a great program for the long haul.

"I haven't got to see the football guys in action but I believe we will be a deep team that can shoot it once everyone gets out and we get a flow going," he added. "We believe we have a team that can be competitive in all those areas but we don't have a lot of experience so it will take some

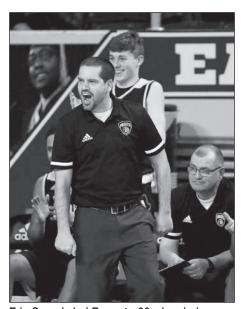
Despite graduating two of the top three scorers in school history (Caleb Rose, Slaht Hunter), Williamsburg will return a solid nucleus of players.

"We have two guys that split time as starters in Micah Steely and Gavon Thomas," Swords said. "Larry Bray is the other guy that was in the rotation from last year. We will have five seniors on this year's team. Steely is as versatile as anyone in the region, he can play inside and out. Great kid who can score and make his teammates better. Bray is an athletics defender and competitor. He will be a huge key for us defensively. He may also be the best shooter on the team. I believe he will surprise people with how much he has improved.

"Dalton Davenport is a point guard that can handle the ball and make people better," he added. "He is still getting his legs under him as he hasn't played in a couple of years. Gavon, from watching film last year,



Williamsburg's Micah Steely averaged 11.5 points and 7.2 rebounds last season. | FILE



Eric Swords led Berea to 66 wins during his four years as head coach of the Pirates basketball program. He will be taking over a Williamsburg team that won 17 games last season. | FILE PHOTO

is a kid that will fit in great with how we want to guard. He will have to make a quick transition from football. Chase Potter is another player. I don't know much about him as he is a football kid. He hasn't played but is a great athlete for the football

Swords said he will also be counting on Bronson Bates, Jayden Rainwater, Clayton McFarland, Drew Damron, Ben Hatfield, Sydney Bowen, Jordan Perkins, and Cade

"I think the two biggest keys are how well we guard and bring pressure, and how well we share it on the offensive end," Swords said. "We will have a lot of bodies and shooters. I worry about our inexperience and transition from football.

Swords likes his schedule. He said it's mixed up with some home and home games against All 'A' schools combined with tough district matchups and games against some regional opponents.

"We are playing most All 'A' schools home and home, so that will give us a good feel to where we stack up with those," he said. "The six district games will give us a feel of where we are with those. Road games at Mercer County, Hazard and Bell County should also provide a great challenge for us."

The 50th District will be one of the toughest districts in the region again this season but many feel there isn't much of a gap from top to bottom compared to years past.
"Corbin and South Laurel have

been at the top of the district for a long time," Swords said. "So I think those are the teams we are gunning for. Whitley didn't lose anyone from last year so they should be much improved. We are just taking it one day at a time but I like the direction we are headed.

SEE **SWORDS**, PAGE **B17** 

## Lady Yellow Jackets look to continue recent success

WILLIAMSBURG — Randy Crider is entering his fifth year as the coach Williamsburg Lady Yellow Jacket basketball program, and if year five is anything like the past four years, Williamsburg fans will have a lot to cheer about.

Crider has put together a 63-50 mark during his time as the Lady Yellow Jackets' head coach while establishing his team as not only a district but regional contender. Williamsburg has captured

two 13th Region All 'A' Classic Tournament championships during the past four years while also having some impressive talent moving through during the process. But with leading scorer Lillie Hall

graduated and playing basketball at the University of the Cumberlands, Crider will try to keep his team's success going.

"This year's team is going to be more similar to my teams when I first started," he admitted. "We are going to have to play very good defense and rebound to have a successful year. I think we can get there but it is still a work in progress. I think we will play more girls as well. One thing I love about this team is how hard they working.

"They come each and everyday working really hard and improving each day from the seniors on down to the young girls," Crider added. "If we keep improving, I don't see why we can't continue our success in the All 'A' and keep inching closer to the district. I'm sure it would be hard for any program to replace a schools second all-time leading scorer but it has to be done. Every other school that we play from now on won't care that Lillie isn't playing any more. They will be focused on the girls who are so they have to step up. It will not fall on one girl so that should help and hopefully we will have some success."



Randy Crider will attempt to lead his Williamsburg Lady Yellow Jackets to their third 13th Region All 'A' Classic title in four years. | FILE PHOTO

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**Next to SAVE-A-LOT** 



Mikkah Siler returns as one of the top players for Williamsburg. | FILE PHOTO

The Lady Yellow Jackets return a strong nucleus of talent that is led by seniors Mikkah Siler and Morgan Prewitt along with junior Kaylee

Each of the three players stated last season and brings a lot of experience to the table.

"Mikkah will be looked on to take over the rains of our team," Crider said. "She is only in her second year with us but she has a lot of varsity experience and has been extremely effective and is very accomplished. As a senior in her last dance, she has stepped up so far and really leading the team to be better every day.

"Kaylee was looked on last year as someone we could put on the opposing teams best player and could really neutralize them and make things difficult for them and then knock down a big 3 from time to time," he added. "This year we really look for her to pick her motor and intensity up a notch and become a more consistent player with us. You see at times like the Whitley game at home last year where she played great defense and also had great offensive output. We need more of that this year.

"Morgan was in and out of the starting lineup last season," he continued. "She may not have all the physical tools you look for in a basketball player but Morgan is someone who really maximizes her ability. She gives everything she has and we will need her to continue to do that again this year and I know she will with it being her final season."

Crider is also looking at a pair of freshmen (Allie Wilson and Lylah Mattingly) and sophomore Zoie

Brown, to contribute. "Allie is someone I wish we could

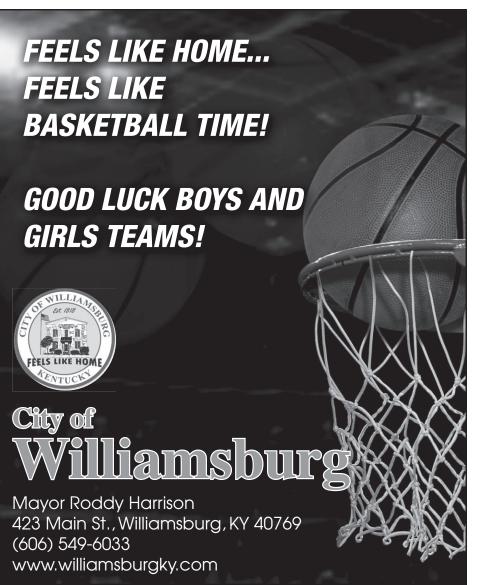
have got her more time and experience knowing we will be very dependent on her in the post for the foreseeable future," he said. "She has all the talent in the world with size and skill but she needs to learn to work harder and push her self to the next level. She is very gifted and God blessed her with size and she needs to use it and make the most of what

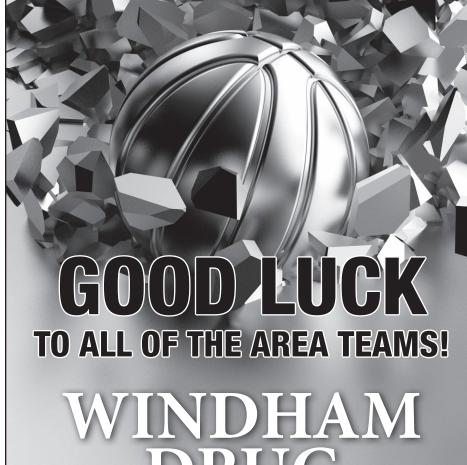
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The Old Bubby's BBQ

SEE SUCCESS. PAGE B17

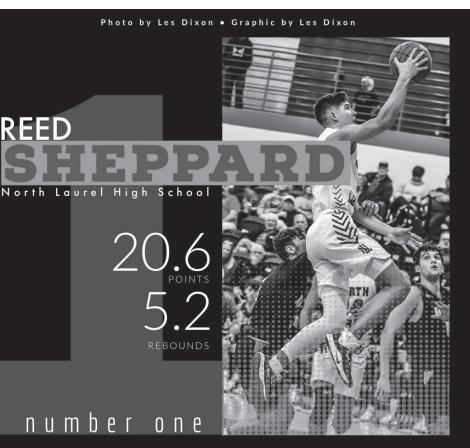




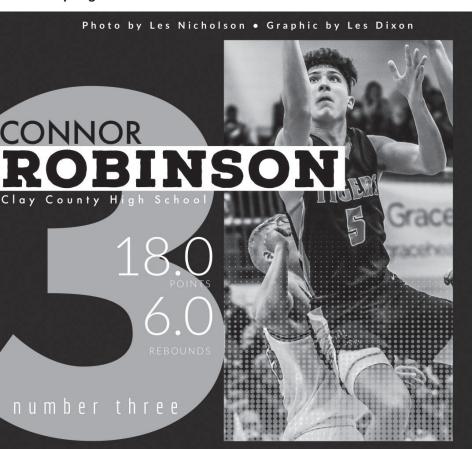
# BOYS TOP 10 PLAYERS

# North's Reed Sheppard tops a talented list of players in the 13th Region

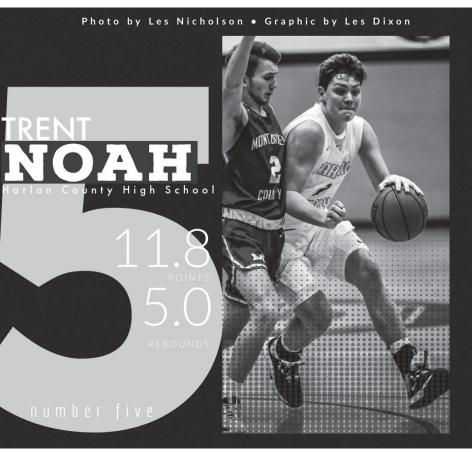
GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS AND SUMMARIES BY LES DIXON



Reed Sheppard put on a show during his freshman season at North Laurel. He helped guide the Jaguars to 20-plus wins while dominating on both ends of the court. He also turned in a heck of a summer which led to him becoming the first 2013 player to garner a Division I offer. They're going to be plenty of those during the next three years. Sheppard recorded a rare quadruple-double last season while averaging 20.6 points and 5.2 rebounds per game last season.



Connor Robinson has been near the top of the player rankings for the past three years. He's a top-notch scorer for the Tigers while helping Clay County to a 49th District championship last season. Robinson is athletic and can hurt teams in many ways both offensively and defensively. He averaged 18.0 points and 6.0 rebounds per game last season



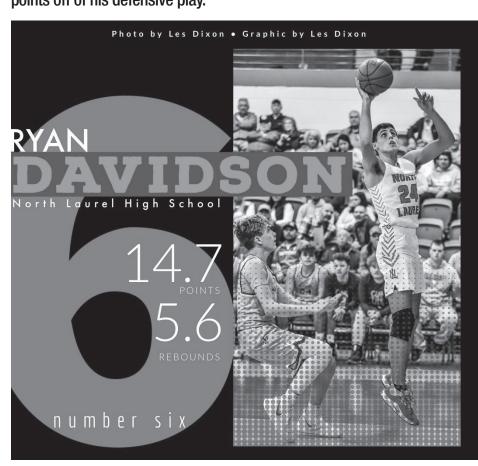
Trent Noah turned in a heck of an eighth grade season for the Black Bears. He helped guide Harlan County to a 52nd District title along with an appearance in the finals of the 13th Region Tournament. Noah averaged 11.8 points and 5.0 rebounds per game last season.



Jevonte Turner established himself as one of the best players in the region last season after turning in an impressive junior campaign. He helped guide Knox Central to another 51st District title along with the Panthers' second straight 13th Region championship. Turner can jump out of the gym while hurting teams with his shooting ability and driving to the basket. He averaged 22.2 points last season along with a 3.6 rebounds per game average.



Jordan Akal could very well be the most athletic player in the region. He is the top returning scorer in the 13th Region after averaging 25.8 points per game last year. He's also a lock down defender who scored a lot of his points off of his defensive play.

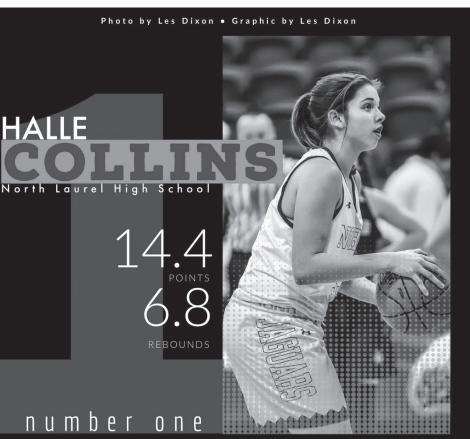


Ryan Davidson has one heck of a freshman season for North Laurel. He showed just how good he can be on both ends of the court. His mid-range jump shot is as good as it gets and he's also a blocking machine on defense. Davidson averaged 14.7 points and 5.6 rebounds per game last season.

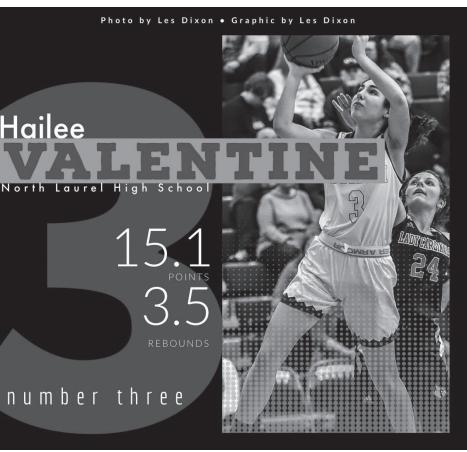
# GIRLS TOP 10 PLAYERS

North Laurel eighth-grader Halle Collins tagged as region's best hoopster

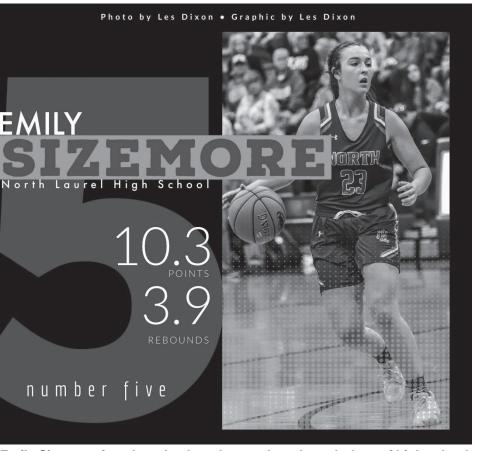
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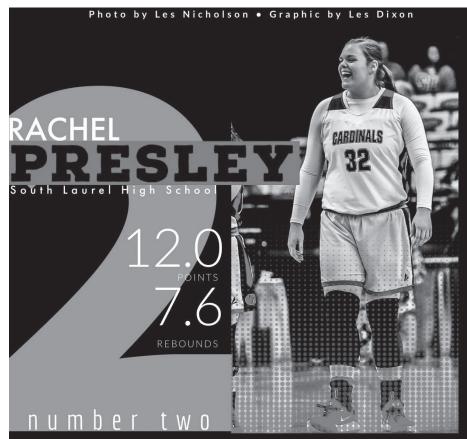
She's only an eighth grader but she has already established herself as one of the top players in the state. Halle Collins had a breakthrough season as a seventh grader last year, averaging 14.4 points and 6.8 rebounds per game. She played a big role in North Laurel's run to another 49th District crown and a runner-up finish in the 13th Region Tournament. It's going to be exciting to see what she will be able to accomplish by the time she graduates.



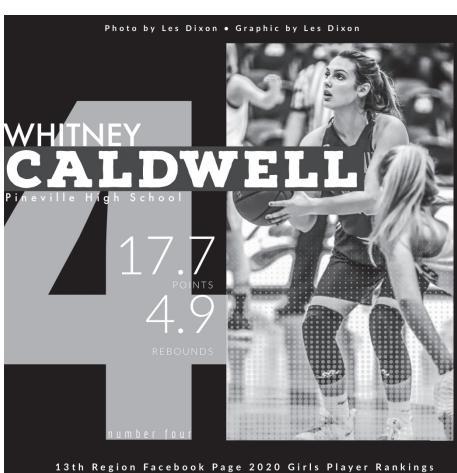
Hailee Valentine enters the 2020-21 campaign as the 13th Region's top guard after turning in one heck of a sophomore season. Valentine helped guide North Laurel to a 49th District championship and a runner-up finish in the 13th Region Tournament. She is one of the big reasons why the Lady Jaguars are tagged as the team to beat in the region. Valentine averaged a team-best 15.1 points last season along with 3.5 rebounds. She's a top-notch defender who can hurt teams with her outside shot and driving to the basket.



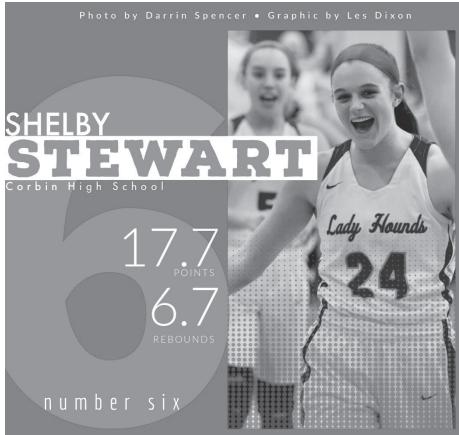
Emily Sizemore is a throwback to the rough and tough days of high school basketball. Sizemore can hurt teams many ways on offense and is a solid defender, too. She is one of three Lady Jaguar players ranked in the top five and was key in North Laurel's 49th District title run and its runner-up finish in the 13th Region Tournament. Sizemore averaged 10.3 points and 3.9 rebounds last season.



Rachel Presley established herself as one of the best players in the 13th Region during her first year at South Laurel. Presley averaged 12.0 points and 7.6 rebounds during her sophomore season while helping the Lady Cardinals to another 50th District championship along with a 13th Region championship. She also played a big role on both ends of the court in South Laurel's win over Sacred Heart during last year's Sweet Sixteen.



Whitney Caldwell established herself as one of the region's top players two years ago as a freshman. She continues to shine and is now considered one of the top players in the mountains after guiding Pineville to a 51st District championship last year. Caldwell and teammate Reagan King have established themselves as one of the top scoring duos in the region. She averaged 17.7 points and 4.9 rebounds per game last season.

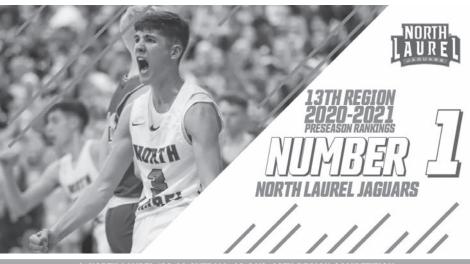


Shelby Stewart could very well be underrated at the No. 6 spot. She's been a top-notch player for the Lady Redhounds for the past few years and continues to do so as she heads into her senior campaign with Corbin. Stewart will try to lead the Lady Redhounds back to an appearance in the 13th Region Tournament this season. She averaged 17.7 points and 6.7 rebounds as a junior last season.

# BOYS TOP 10 TEAMS

## North Laurel tagged as team to beat in 13th Region for second consecutive year

GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS AND SUMMARIES BY LES DIXON



1. NORTH LAUREL (22-10 OVERALL, 12-6 VS. 13TH REGION COMPETITION

The Jaguars just couldn't get on track during their first year under coach Nate Valentine but look for things to change this upcoming season. North Laurel returns what many believe is the region's best one-two punch in sophomores Reed Sheppard and Ryan Davidson but the Jaguars do have some holes to fill due to graduation. You can't forget about the play of Clay Sizemore. He's one of the best long-range shooters in the region. The key to North Laurel's success will be who steps up to fill the void left by the five seniors that graduated.



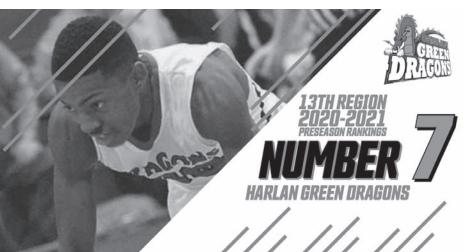
3. HARLAN COUNTY (24-11, 14-5

Mike Jones has done a fantastic job with the Black Bears since taking over as head coach. He guided Harlan County to the regional title game last season and will be expected to contend once again this upcoming season. Leading scorer Taylor Spurlock has graduated but Tyler Cole, Trent Noah, and Jackson Huff return to give the Black Bears a solid trio of scorers. This team has enough returning talent to win the Region.



5. CORBIN (16-14, 8-9)

The Redhounds crack the top five after returning a roster that is loaded with young talent. Corbin could surprise this upcoming season under veteran coach Tony Pietrowski. Transfer Hayden Llewelyn will provide lots of scoring and solid defensive play for the Redhounds while players such as Josh Hibbits, Carter Stewart and a ton of talented upper and lower classmen will be ready to show what they can do. This could be their time to shine.



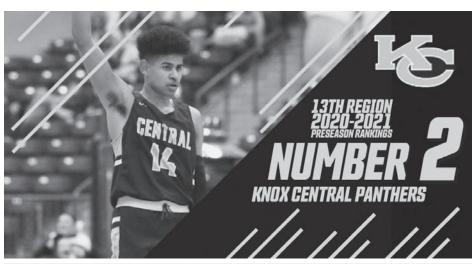
7 HADIAN (12.17 9.11)

The Green Dragons return one of the state's top players in Jordan Akal but will need some players to step up to help turn Harlan into a regional contender. I believe they have the talent to return to the 13th Region Tournament. Akal is top notch and one of the best players in the region. The key will be getting out of the 52nd District Tournament. Bell County, Harlan County and Middlesboro each have the talent to knock off someone in district play at any



9. SOUTH LAUREL (28-5, 19-3)

The Cardinals could be in rebuild mode after graduating an abundance of talent the past few seasons which includes last year's 13th Region Player of the Year, Matt Cromer. The cupboard isn't bare at South Laurel but coach Jeff Davis will need a lot of players step up their game this upcoming season. Micah Anders, Caden Jones, Parker Payne, and Weslyn Wright (if he's back from his football injury) bring experience to the table for the Cardinals. This team might get off to a slow start but by season's end, I expect Davis will have South Laurel ready to make a postseason push.



2. KNOX CENTRAL (25-8, 12-3)

I'm pretty close to putting the Panthers at the top spot. Knox Central has dominated 13th Region action the past few years, and deserve the respect that comes its way. Tony Patterson's squad has won a 13th Region-best 109 games during the past four years while posting an impressive 55-11 record against 13th Region teams. The Panthers have also won consecutive region titles the past two years and four straight 51st District crowns, so the big questions is if they can 3-peat? They return one of the region's top players in Jevonte Turner along with a solid nucleus of players that include Isaac Mills, Andrew Sizemore, and Abram Brock.



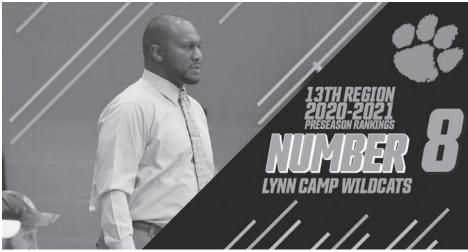
4. CLAY COUNTY (23-10, 16-3)

This could be the make it or break it season for the Tigers with seven seniors on their upcoming roster. Clay County has been slated as one of the teams to beat the past two years but just can't get over the hump. Things could be different this season as Connor Robinson, Raven Abner, Connor Farmer, Tate Farmer, and Colby Sams returns. The Tigers are another team that returns a lot of talented players and will be right in the thick of the 13th Region title chase when all is said and done.



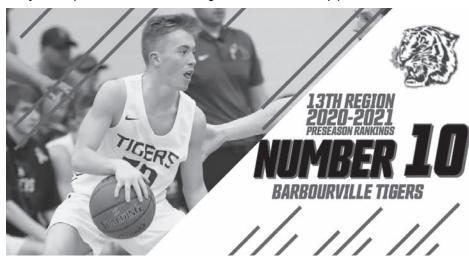
6. BELL COUNTY (12-18, 7-10)

Look for Brad Sizemore's second year as head coach at Bell County to be a good one. It wouldn't surprise me at all to see the Bobcats end up playing for the regional crown, especially with Cameron Burnett and Dawson Woolum returning. Burnett is one of the best post players in the region. I expect to see big things out of him this season. It will be hard to get out of the 52 District, though. From top to bottom, the 52nd District is the best in the 13th



8. LYNN CAMP (13-15, 5-10)

First-year Coach Rodney Clarke is ready for his Wildcats to surprise. Lynn Camp will be led by versatile Maison Prater along with Jace Boggs, who could become a viable offensive weapon this winter. The addition of transfers Gavin Allen and Micah Engle are huge, and instantly gives the Wildcats two players that can hoop. This could be an interesting season for Lynn Camp. The Wildcats have enough talent to make a deep postseason run.



10. BARBOURVILLE (13-16, 8-12)

Coach Cody Messer's Tigers are ready to make more noise this season after reaching the 13th Region Tournament last season. The Tigers return leading scorer Jordan Collins, David Collett, and a very good abundance of talented young players that should contend for the 51st District title while also making a run at the 13th Region crown. Messer is one of the hardest work wrong coaches in the region that will have his Tigers ready to play once the ball is tipped to begin the season.

# GIRLS TOP 10 TEAMS

## North, South Laurel both return an abundance of talent

GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS AND SUMMARIES BY LES DIXON



1. NORTH LAUREL (28-5 OVERALL, 14-1 VS. 13TH REGION OPPONENTS

The Lady Jaguars remain sitting at the top spot after returning the trip of Halle Collins, Emily Sizemore, and Hailee Valentine. Collins established herself as one of the top scorers and rebounders in the 13th Region last season while Valentine continued to be one of the best scorers and defenders. Sizemore can do it all as well. She can score, distribute the ball, and rebound with the best of them. Coach Eddie Mahan has a young roster and they might have gotten even younger with the graduation of Gracie Jervis and Isabel Gray but players such as Katie Bruner, Saige McClure, Chloe McKnight, Brooke Nichelson, and Bella Sizemore have already shown this past season they can step up and contribute.



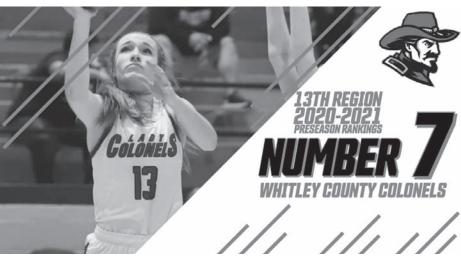
3. BELL COUNTY (25-5, 16-2

The gap between the top two teams in the region and the 3-10 teams might be a bit big but that doesn't mean teams such as Bell County, Corbin, Knox Central, and Pineville can't surprise and win the region crown. The Lady Bobcats will return a solid nucleus of players despite graduating players such as Abby Harris this past season. Players such as Talyah McQueen, Ashtyn Meyers, and Abigail Cornett will play important roles in Bell County's



5. PINEVILLE (17-11, 13-9)

The Lady Mountain Lions are another team that could end up being ranked as high as No. 3 this upcoming season. They'll return the one-two offensive punch of Whitney Caldwell and Raegan King. Caldwell is one of the best players in the 13th Region while King is one of the best post players in the region. The duo will be hard to beat on the offensive end of the floor. Caldwell is athletic and can find many ways to get to the basket while King is a force in the post on both ends of the floor.



7. WHITLEY COUNTY (15-18, 10-11)

The Lady Colonels will be young but talented this upcoming season. Reis Anderson will return as one of the top players for Whitley County along with Jaycie Monhollen and Natalie Moses. Coach Sean Pigman's Lady Colonels have enough talent returning to make a deep postseason run as long as they continue to improve as the season progresses.



NO. 9 JACKSON COUNTY (22-9, 13-6)

The Lady Generals are looking to build off last season's success but they'll have their hands full after graduating leading scorer Taya Davis, who averaged close to 20 points per game. Jackson County returns Edan Lakes, Kenady Ward and Natalie Carl. Jackson County is ready to surprise and could very well be the second best team in the 49th District.



#### 2. SOUTH LAUREL (27-6, 12-0)

The defending 13th Region championship graduated three players that combined to score more than 7,000 points between them which included 1,509 points (63 percent of South Laurel's offense) this past season. With that said, the Lady Cardinals have two potential DI players that can do damage in Clara Collins and Rachel Presley while Brianna Howard returns as one of the top shooters in the 13th Region. Players such as Emily Cox, Gracie Turner, Emily Mills, Reagan Jones, Lindsay Cox, Corbin Miller, Kylie Clem, Jaylin Smith, and Alana Wolf are expected to contribute, too along with some great young talent moving up from the middle school rank.



#### 4. CORBIN (17-13, 15-7)

Isaac Wilson's Lady Redhounds are the big movers in the rankings after seeing Kallie Housley transfer in which makes an already talented roster even better. Shelby Stewart is one of the region's best players and will continue to show that this upcoming season while players such as Bailey Stewart, Kalia Stidham, and Erica Angel will play key roles on the team. Keep an eye on Shelby Stewart. I really believe she's on the verge of having a special season for the Lady Redhounds.



#### 6. KNOX CENTRAL (11-17, 8-12)

The Lady Panthers are a team to keep an eye on. They return enough talent that they could end up being ranked as high as No. 3 in the region but for now, the five-spot is where they'll be. Presley Partin returns as one of the best guards in the region along with underrated



#### 8. CLAY COUNTY (18-14, 11-8)

The Lady Tigers are in a bit of a rebuild mode after graduating Kaylee Mathis, who alone accounted for 37.9 percent of Clay County's scoring last season. Taylor Asher looks to take over the scoring role for Clay County while Alexis Lewis and Jaylen Combs will provide offense as well.



#### 10. HARLAN COUNTY (16-12, 8-6)

The Lady Black Bears welcome a familiar face back to coach in Anthony Nolan, who replaces former coach Debbie Green. Nolan takes over a Harlan County squad that could surprise with KellyBeth Hoskins, Hannah Wood, and Jaylin Smith returning to the mix. Harlan County could be ranked a tad bit too low but let's see how the Lady Black Bears do as the season progresses.

# THE SKY IS THE LIMIT



Reed Sheppard helped guide North Laurel to the 13th Region Tournament last season. | FILE PHOTO

## As one of the state's rising stars, Sheppard continues to improve his game while preparing to lead the Jaguars

**BY JOHN STEPP** Staff Writer

The 13th Region is load-Led with young talent, but leading the pack is North Laurel's Reed Sheppard.

Sheppard moved up as an eighthgrader during the 2018-2019 season to play for the North Laurel Jaguars, and it took him no time to establish himself as one of the top players in not only the region, but one of the best young talents in the entire

In his first season with the Jaguars, Sheppard led the team in scoring, averaging 16 points

per game, helping North Laurel reach the regional finals, where they finished as runner-up to Knox Central. Last season, Sheppard took

another big step forward, where he wasn't just considered a great young athlete, but he quickly became known as the region's top basketball player, leading the Jaguars with 20.6 points per game and 5.2 rebounds.

As with all great players, Sheppard knows that there is always room for his game to improve. This offseason he has been hitting the gym every day and putting up as many shots as

he can, while working on becoming a better shooter from the outside. He said "I am working he is also working every day to hard in the weight become a better room and focusing leader. Being a year on becoming a better defender. older, I'm getting

comfortable being

more vocal. I just

try to stay positive

and help our team

be the best we can

be."

—Reed Sheppard

"I'm just trying to improve my overall game. I've really worked at becoming a more consistent perimeter shooter and improving my overall strength," said Sheppard. "I'm really focusing on

becoming a better defender every day in practice."

Being ranked as the top player in the 13th Region doesn't matter much to Sheppard. He has received plenty of accolades already in his young career. What is most important to him is being a leader for his Jaguars' squad.

Last season North Laurel fin-

SEE **SHEPPARD**, PAGE **B18** 



Reed Sheppard averaged 20.6 points per game last season as a freshman. | PHOTO BY DARRIN SPENCER



Halle Collins started at the varsity level as a seventh-grader last season for North Laurel. | FILE PHOTO

# JUST GETTING STARTED

## Eighth-grader Collins ready to show why she's the region's top player

BY JOHN STEPP

Staff Writer

the region is an eighthgrader, but Halle Collins is

basketball player. Collins burst onto the scene of 13th Region basketball last season, as a seventhgrader, when she helped the North Laurel Lady Jaguars to a runner-up finish in the regional tournament, where they lost to South

Laurel in a close

Entering her second year of varsity ball, Collins has the entire region watching her — and dreading playing her — over the next five years. Last year, she averaged 14.4 points and

6.8 rebounds per game. helped her take her game Those numbers will only It's not often that the improve as she takes over top ranked player in more of a leading role this year.

Since COVID-19 shut not a typical eighth-grade down everything in the

> "I have to step up and be a leader on my team. I am one of the youngest on the team, but when it comes to basketball I bave a very strong IQ. My IQ makes me and other girls better. Being a leader has lots of roles, but it has huge

accomplishments at the end of the day. Being a leader also becomes being a role model. Being looked up to is one of the best feelings ever, and I will do

everything to always keep that feeling." — Halle Collins

> to work on her game. She started playing in the Elite Youth Basketball League first started playing basagainst girls who were older than her. Collins said that experience has really

to the next level.

"My game is something nobody can handle. I am a player that can do anything. My main aspect in the game is scoring and

rebounding. my off time, I got better at handling and driving," said Collins. "Over quarantine, I played EYBL, and it changed me as a player. I played girls bigger, stronger, faster, and older than me, and that by itself made me so much better."

Being a topspring, Collins has gone ranked player in the region

is something that Collins has worked for since she ketball, but she knows that not everyone is going to

SEE COLLINS, PAGE B18



Halle Collins averaged 14.4 points and 6.8 rebounds per game as a seventh grader. | PHOTO BY DARRIN SPENCER



Maison Prater returns as one of the top shooters in the 13th Region. | FILE PHOTO

Continued from page B4 the defense behind the arc. Concerns will be our perimeter shooting because one bad night can change that."

To prepare for postseason play, Clarke likes the schedule his team is going to be playing.

"Our schedule will definitely get us ready to compete on the level we want to be on," he said. "We have four teams ranked in the top 10 preseason on our schedule with two bigger schools on our schedule also.'

The Wildcats will look to unseat Knox Central as defending champions but it's not going to be easy in a much-improved 51st District landscape.

"I think our district is very challenging,' Clarke admitted. "Knox

Continued from page B4

drive it to the basket,"

he said. "She came to

us about two months

ago and wasn't in very

good physical shape,

but she worked her butt

off to get into basketball

shape. I've been very

pleased with her work

ethic. Lindsey moved

in from another school

and is probably our

most physical player," Hendrix added. "She's

the kid you want play-

ing defense on the other

team's best player. She

goes full speed all the

Hendrix admitted his

goal this season is for his

team to get better every

time they step on the floor.

ent, I'm just trying to get

us to learn how to win,"

he said. "I think we have

the pieces we just have

to work hard and put it

all together. Each indi-

vidual has to be okay

with not being the star.

I've been telling them

from day one that it's

gonna be a team effort.

We are gonna use about

10 girls every night.
"We have to come

together as a team with

the same goal," Hendrix

added. "I think the big-

gest thing will be how

quickly we grow. We

are still very young,

which is great for the

future but we wanna be

Hendrix put together

a competitive schedule

to help prepare his team

for what lies ahead.

competitive now."

"I know we have tal-

time."

Central is clearly the favorite and they should be, but I think we have the team and the personnel to make a run at the district this season. I think the 13th Region overall is so competitive with a ton of talent and elite coaches, I think we have a team that can be right in the thick of things. I'm hoping we can play our best at the right time

"Getting off to a good start is key because of the pandemic we don't know what could happen, so I hope we can get out to a good start early," he added. "I'm very excited about the upcoming season. I like that there is a bit of a buzz around here about the upcoming season. I plan on putting out a good product for the fans in the community along with the administration to be proud of

gauge where we are and

As for competing in the 51st District, and the 13th Region, Hendrix said the key for his team is to continue to improve

each time they play. "The district looks

ed," Hendrix added. "There are a lot of good teams. We have to take small victories every day to start and work our way up the ladder. season ends we will be in that top 10 of the region. I think it's huge for us to get off to a good start. With young players, starting off bad can be rough. They need that success to help build them up. We need to get some wins early to get us headed in the right direction.

"I want the school

"Our schedule is pretty much what it should be for a 1A school," he said. "I want to compete every night no matter

and excited to watch." who we are playing. We have Corbin and Harlan County on the schedule, who I feel like will help

where we wanna be."

tough this year. Knox Central and Pineville have very good teams and Barbourville has a new coach that I'm sure will work hard there," he said. "My hope is that we can be right in the mix of it by the end of the season. I've got a couple of seniors that I'm sure would like to make one final trip to The Arena.

"The region is load-Hopefully, before this

and community to support these young ladies," he continued. "They are great kids that deserve the support. They are working their butts off in the gym and I know they will see results from it on the floor. It lifts them up when they know they are making their peers and community proud."



Josh Hibbits averaged 11.7 points last season for Corbin. | FILE PHOTO

#### REDHOUNDS

Continued from page B3

Pietrowski said there are also several football players that he expects to play big minutes this season. They will not be joining the team until football season is over. Those players include Dakota Patterson, Seth Mills, Carter Sevier, and Brody Wells.

When it comes to what this group of Redhounds does best, there may not be anyone who knows that at this time in the year. With a young roster and a couple of new faces, Corbin will have to solidify their identity as a team as the season progresses. Pietrowski said he thinks

there is a lot of potential for this year, but there are still many

is uncertain. "Upside is the word that comes to mind with this group the most," said Pietrowski. "There are so many unknowns for us right now. I'm excited to work with this group for sure."

aspects of the team in which he

With the schedule that the Redhounds will face this season, Pietrowski's squad will have to grow up fast. There aren't many games on the schedule that can just be chalked up to the win. The Redhounds will take on some of the region's best before Christmas in South Laurel, North Laurel, Harlan County and Clay County.

Corbin will also participate in a few tournaments throughout the year, while taking on some non-regional opponents that will provide a challenge.



Corbin posted a 17-13 record last season. | FILE PHOTO

Continued from page B3

the region. At least one, if not two, teams who don't reach the region tournament from our district each year, could go there and make a run," said Wilson. "If you make it out of this district, you have a good shot at making a run."

For Wilson and the Lady

Redhounds, this year's success will come down to how well they can play to their strengths. With a team with little size, Wilson said they will rely on their speed, quickness, and their defensive abilities to wear down opponents and take over the game.

With the lack of games during the summer, due to COVID-

19, Corbin will not truly know

what kind of team they have

until their first tip-off.

"We have literally not played a game against another opponent since February. I think we can be a good, fast paced team. It looks to be a strength of ours, but we won't know until we can play a game," said Wilson. "We are short. Rebounding is one of the most important parts of the game. We're going to have to make a concentrated effort to be hard nosed on defense. We have to find a way to compete."

### **JAGUARS**

Continued from page B5

one this offseason. Clay is one of the best perimeter shooters I have coached. He continues to improve in other aspects as well. He is becoming one of the vocal leaders of this team. Brody Brock played some key minutes last year and will be expected to contribute. Dillan Nicely continues to improve and has gotten much stronger. We have a very deep and talented sophomore class that we will rely on throughout the season including Brayden Caudill, Kyler Elza, Chase Keen, and Chase Dotson. Freshman Cole Messer has been a pleasant surprise thus far as well."

All eyes will be on Sheppard this season, especially after he turned in a breakthrough summer that led to him becoming the first 2023 player in the state to receive a DI offer.

"Having talented players certainly makes coaching easier," Valentine said. "He can make an impact on both ends of the floor. He's extremely unselfish and can dominate a game without scoring. He's worked extremely hard this offseason and continues to improve."

With an abundance of talent returning, Valentine said a key to his team's success will be for his team to "continue to improve and not let our circumstances control our destiny."

"None of us know what tomorrow will bring," he said. "We just have to keep getting better each day. We need to continue to improve on the defensive end and must rebound as a team."

North Laurel will once again be challenged with a tough schedule. The Jaguars played one of the toughest slates in the region last season, and it's just as hard this year.

"Our schedule extremely challenging," Valentine admitted. "Outside of a very talented 13th region schedule, we are playing in two of the best tournaments in the state. The King of the Bluegrass hosted by Fairdale and the Traditional Bank Classic hosted by Lexington Catholic boast many teams that will be featured in the top 25 statewide rankings. We are still a very young team, but I hope this schedule will help prepare us better for postseason play. We wanted to play the best of the best and see where we are."

With the Jaguars being tagged as the region's top team, they'll also look to recapture the 49th District championship after falling to Clay County last season in the district title game.

"The 49th will be very competitive again this season. We lost to Clay County three times last year, and they return a solid core. We will have to find a way to knock them off if we want to make a deep run.

"I think being consistent is very important," Valentine added. "Consistency isn't always measured in wins and losses but I'm cautiously optimistic we will be more consistent."



Sophomore Ryan Davidson averaged 14.7 points and 5.6 rebounds per game last season. | FILE PHOTO



7.6 rebounds per game last season. | FILE PHOTO

### **MAGICAL**

Continued from page B6

have a large target on their backs to begin the season. But, with the way things currently are, Souder said they are just thankful for the opportunity to play the game they love.

To get back to the regional title game, South Laurel will first have to take care of business in the district. Corbin has improved and Whitley County and Williamsburg will both have a say during district.

"As usual, our schedule will be challenging and the schedule could be changing all season with COVID," said up Souder. "I think the region will be more balanced than it has been the past two years and we just take the approach of the tougher the schedule the more prepared we will be. We want our players battle

### **CARDINALS**

tested in March."

Continued from page B6 Legacy Nissan Classic, which features quality

teams like North Laurel, Clay County, Christian County, and Frederick Douglass. They will take on Perry County Central in the Ted Cook Classic, and could play the likes of Madison Southern, Southwestern, and East Jessamine in the Legacy Nissan Dribble Drive Challenge midway through While playing some of the best teams in

the region down the stretch, they'll also face non-region opponents Wayne County, Madison Central, and Pulaski County.

With the season just around the corner, the Cardinals will prepare for a run to three-peat as district champs and compete for another regional

championship in 2021.

North Laurel Junior Emily Sizemore averaged 10.3 points and 4.4 assists last season. | FILE PHOTO

#### RECLAIM

Continued from page B5

lege coaches talk about when they call, and I hope other young players realize points are just a small part of the equation. I think you will see her do even better now that she is playing more of her natural position this season. Halle is a tremendous player, and you could easily see that season. She will be focused on more this season as no one will be surprised by her this year. It will create some challenges, but I think you will also see how much she has developed since last year as well. I don't know the last time I have seen an eighth grader with does."

so much expectations thrown on her as she North Laurel also returns freshman Chloe McKnight (4.5, 3.6) rebounds per game) along with eighth grad-

ers Bella Sizemore (2.2, 1.8), Saige McClure (1.5, 1.7) and Brooke Nicholson (3.5, 1.5).

'Chloe played a good

role for our team last

year and will start for us this season," Mahan said. "Since we have been able to get her back into the gym she has improved tremendously. She will be a vital piece for us this season. I think you will see her develop into a very good post player as we continue working with her.

"Bella did not start but played significant minutes as both a point guard and wing," he added. "She is a very capable scoring and very smart player. She will be competing to start this season and we will depend on her a lot. Saige played a backup role for us last season but will be competing for a starting position this season. She is one of the most consistent players we have and

can do a little of every-"Brooke was limited last year and is very young," Mahan contin-ued. "Her pure athleticism is better than any player I have coached on

the high school level. I

know with the amount of

talent we have we will be

a good team but just what

the ceiling is for us might depend on her development this season. She can be an elite defender and is already a good shooter. When you combine that with her raw speed and you can have something special.'

With a lot of talent returning from last season's 28-win squad, Mahan feels the key to his team's success will be leadership and chemistry.

"It's a nice problem talent but it also means that someone must show them how to win at this level without them going through the tough heartbreaks," he said. "It is making it even harder to develop this team to be ready with no summer ball and a limited preseason that has already experienced one stoppage. Summer ball is usually when you can develop your young players and establish your new team leaders. We missed all of that and most years that wouldn't have been as big of an issue as it has been this year. We needed that time and experience."

Mahan peppered his schedule once again with good teams and tournaments to prepare his team for what they could see once postseason play begins.

'We have an extremely tough schedule once again," he admitted. "We never are afraid to play another team even if that leads to some losses. We have Christian Academy of Louisville, Shelby Valley, Campbell County, Scott County, Bowling Green, Casey County, Rowan County and West Carter just to name a few. "With such a tough

schedule with a very young team I believe you will see some struggles, but I believe it gives us the best chance to be ready for a deep post season run as well," Mahan added. "We need to learn the hard lessons that come from playing the

best. It also is good to get

all the bandwagon fans

off the bus early too." North Laurel will enter the season with hopes of extending its success in 49th District play as well. The Lady Jaguars are winners of three consecutive district titles and have won 20 straight games against district competition,

"The 49th District has always been tough, and I know some will talk about the overall talent to have a lot of young will be down, but I still never count out Coach (Ivy) Burchell and Clay County," Mahan said. "I know many times people say this will be the year they aren't competitive, but they always are wrong. Coach Burchell always has his team ready to compete and he controls the pace so well it makes it hard to get a very big lead on them."

And Mahan's thoughts on the 13th Region, and his team's chances of bringing a 13th Region championship back to

The Jungle:

"Many people have us circled as early favorites, but the returning 13th Region Champions is South Laurel," Mayan said. "They lost a lot of great players including three of the best players in the region but they still have assembled a very good team that also has a good amount of experience. The majority have one of our teams winning region this year and competing for the next few years but the great thing about our game is when it comes to postseason time anyone can beat anyone. "With our youth and

the strength of schedule we are playing I do not expect us to win every game and that is not even what our goals are," he added. "We are more focused on the team we will be at the end of the season than we are at the beginning. The lessons you learn from competing with the best will help us tremendously and might be the difference in the team we could be."

**B17** 



Williamsburg posted a 16-11 record last season. | FILE

#### **SUCCESS**

Continued from page B8

she has.

"Lylah is a very strong, fast, but raw athlete. She can do things others just can't," Crider added. "She needs to understand that she has the ability to be very good but now she has to look within and gain the confidence in herself and know that she can do the things we ask of her and can do it at a high level. Zoie is a guard that will be looked to to run the offense from time to time and has the chance to gain playing time if she continues to improve and continues to take care of the ball."

Crider said his team's keys to success this season will be being the best defensive team in

"I don't think we will be able to score the basketball like we did last season so we will have to step it up on the defensive end," he said. "We must hang our hat on holding teams to there lowest output each and every night. My biggest concern is with the loss of Lillie Hall we now do not have a primary ball handler and in the past, we could just rely on her to start things for us. So it looks like as of right now that we will have to be by committee to get things rolling for us."

Crider has also compiled a tough skate of games to have his team ready for action in the rough and tough 50th District along with hopes

of making a deep postseason run.

"I think with us being a small school and with the district we play in we will always be ready for postseason play," he said. "We have six very difficult district games every year and that no different this year. I really think that's what helps us in the All 'A' each year have been battle testing going into it each year.

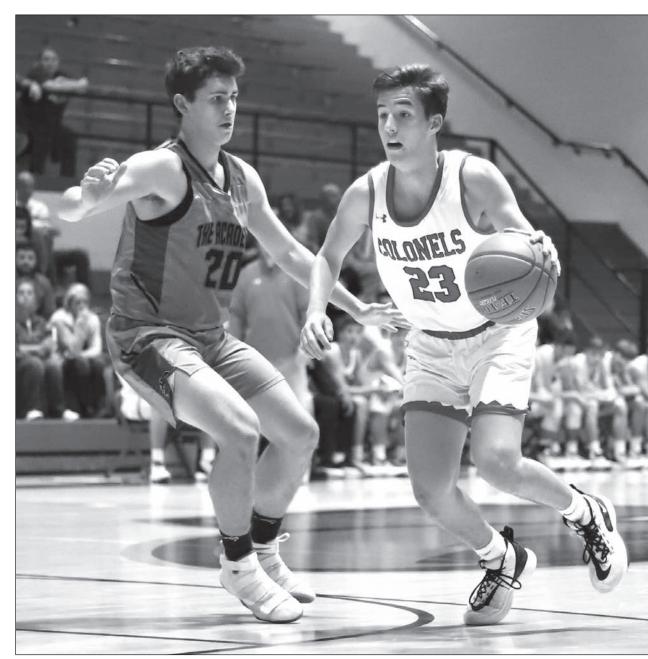
"I think our district will once again be the best, strongest, and deepest district in the region," Crider added. "South Laurel remains at the top but I do think Whitley and Corbin are closing in but will be interested in how things go. Also, I can't wait to see what our girls have to say about it all with nobody expecting much from us. I think, unlike the last couple years, and just like our district, the gap between North and South is closing with teams three to six and seven is. Bell County, Whitley, Corbin, Knox Central are all gaining ground and I think it could make for a very interesting region tourney come the end of the season. I think it always helps to start strong because it is a year we don't know what will happen from day to day. If we start strong, I think it can boost the moral and keep the team energized and hungry for more."



### **SWORDS**

Continued from page B8

"In the region, I think you have Knox Central, North Laurel and Harlan County that have separated from the pack a little," he added. "I think the region is very talented and I think by the end of the year multiple teams can be in the mix as there isn't much separation. It would be big if we could roll off a few wins early but we understand that it will be a huge transition with the number of football kids coming out. We are just taking one day at a time to put ourselves in position by the end of the season."



Jackson Estes averaged 8.9 points per game last season. | FILE PHOTO

#### COLONELS

Continued from page B7

tribute this year, so he wanted to load the schedule with top teams and lots of games.

When he first took over the job, Whitley County had just 18 games on the schedule. With COVID-

19 still factoring into whether games will be played or not, there is a good chance that cancellations will take place throughout the year. White has been able to increase their games to 28, which should provide ample opportunities for his team to compete and improve.

The 10 games we added are

against tough competition," said White. "We are now playing every top team in the region except for North Laurel."

White can't wait to get started to see what his kids can do.

"I like our team a lot," White said. "These kids have worked their butts off from the first day we were allowed to start."



Dorian Siler saw lots of action on the court as a junior last season. | FILE PHOTO

#### SURPRISE

Continued from page B7

Following the seniors is a group of underclassmen that will play big roles this season. Led by freshman Darcie Anderson, Pigman said that the younger players on the team will not only provide the depth needed to play his style of basketball, but they will be relied upon to fill in some key roles this year.

Anderson averaged close to five points per game last season as one of the top eighth graders in the region. Joining her will be fellow freshmen Gracie Jo Wilder and Mariss Douglass, both of whom will be big contributors as younger players.

The Lady Colonels have several other players who will play

into the rotation, including juniors Bailey Brown, Chelsey Logan, Taylor Rice, Becca Meadors. Pigman said because of the

depth that he has on his team,

they will be able to play the style of basketball that will put them in position to be in most of their games in the end.

"Depth is one of our strengths

- we can play lots of kids. We hope to be able to compete more on the glass this year, as kids have really worked in the weight

room at strength and conditioning," said Pigman.

Pigman said one of his biggest concerns this season is something that is out of his control - cancellation of games. With a senior-led team, his squad should have the maturity to navigate a schedule that will likely come with lots of ups and downs, but with a large group of underclassmen, Pigman knows his squad will have a lot of room to improve and that only comes by playing.

Either way, Pigman said that ultimately it is going to come down to his team's performance in their six district games dur-

ing the season. While they were

able to reach the regional tour-

nament last year, they'll have to put together a strong year to do it again, as the 50th District is once

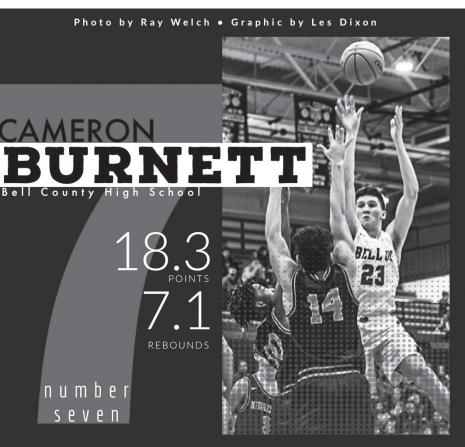
again among the best.

Last season, the Lady Colonels struggled through the middle season, after a strong start. But they were able to pull together and finished the regular season by winning five of their last six games, before defeating Corbin in the first round of the district tournament.

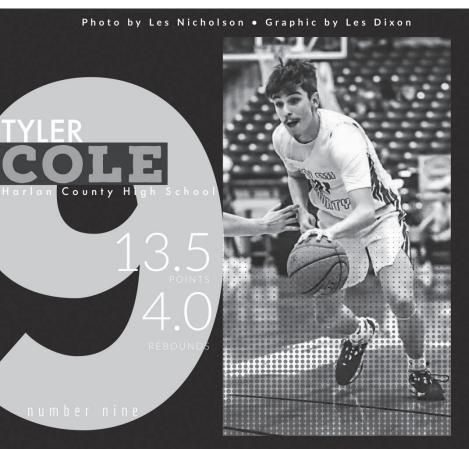
This year, the Lady Colonels will face an even more difficult schedule, filled with the best teams in the region, and some non-regional opponents, as well.

"Our schedule is tough. We play everyone in our district twice and our district is the toughest around, overall, for sure," said Pigman. "Outside of the region, we play Southwestern, Somerset, Wayne, Pulaski, and Madison Southern, which are all going to be great competition. We feel like our schedule should have us ready for the postseason."

## **BOYS TOP 10 PLAYERS (CONT.)**



Cameron Burnett is a scoring machine. He's another player that could move up in the rankings as the season progresses. Burnett averaged 18.3 points and 7.1 rebounds per game last season, and looks to have an even better season this winter.



Tyler Cole is one of the most underrated players in the region. He came on strong late last season and helped lead Harlan County to a 52nd District championship before helping the Black Bears to a runner-up finish in the 13th Region Tournament's title game

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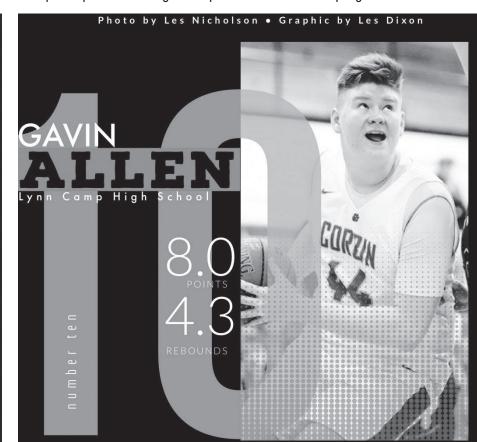
chance to

compete this

season."



Connor Farmer is one of the best offensive players in the 13th Region. He's quick as lightning and has a great outside shot. He played a big role in Clay County's run for a 49th District championship. Farmer averaged 12.3 points and 3.8 rebounds per game last season.



Gavin Allen had a breakthrough season at Corbin last year, averaging 8.0 points and 4.3 rebounds per game. He is now at Lynn Camp and ready to help guide the Wildcats to a successful season.

### **COLLINS**

Continued from page B14

agree. In a region that has been filled with talent, especially with two division one players right across town at South Laurel last year, Collins could be underestimated by some. If that's the case, she is set out to prove them wrong this season.

"Being ranked No. 1 in the region has lots of pressure. That pressure makes me want to show people that I am the number one player in the region," said Collins. "It is a big accomplishment and I'm definitely going to prove it. I have a lot of people that doubt me and to make

them wrong is something I would love to do."

Collins is able to have confidence in her abilities on the court because of the time that she puts into becoming a better player. Through her offseason workouts, to her commitment to playing travel basketball, Collins has become a highly touted player

But it's not just her abilities that she believes in. She thinks this is going to be the year that North Laurel finally gets over the hump and wins a regional championship.

"The team we have will be faster, stronger, and overall, a better team compared to the other teams in the region," Collins said. "To win the

region, we will need to work hard every day to get better. We also need to work as a team and have lots of confidence. There is no doubt in my mind that we will be the region champs this year. We all just have to step up and play as the team we know we can be and we will go far."

Getting her team to the next level is something that Collins takes personally. Despite her youth, she speaks like a player who has a few years of varsity experience under her belt. Because of her talent, players around her listen and want to play better, and she makes the others around her better.

Collins said her ability to lead the team as a freshman comes down

to her basketball know-how. She wants to be the type of player that is an extension of her head coach on the floor, helping put her team in the best position to win every time they're out on the court.

"I have to step up and be a leader on my team. I am one of the youngest on the team, but when it comes to basketball I have a very strong IQ," said Collins. "My IQ makes me and other girls better. Being a leader has lots of roles, but it has huge accomplishments at the end of the day. Being a leader also becomes being a role model. Being looked up to is one of the best feelings every and I will do everything to always keep that feeling."

#### **SHEPPARD**

Continued from page B13

ished as runner-up in the 49th District Tournament, and was bounced from the playoffs in the first round, in a 66-64 loss to eventual champion Knox Central. The Jaguars will return

several key players from last year's squad, highlighted by Sheppard, and will look to be among the region's best teams, once again.

Sheppard knows that in order for his team to succeed and compete for a regional title, he will have to be the best player that he can be. He wants to be the type of leader that gets the most out of his teammates while setting the example.

"I am working every char along to become a better leader. Being a year older, I'm getting comfortable being more vocal," said Sheppard. "I just try to stay positive

and help our team be the best we can be."

Ultimately, the final judgment on a good season is a chance to win a 13th Region title. The Jaguars were close during Sheppard's first season with the squad in 2018, finishing as runner-up. In each of the last two seasons, they have lost to Knox Central, who is now the two-time defending regional champions.

This year, the 13th Region has a solid lineup of teams at the top, and North Laurel is one of them. In their district, they will have to take on a tough Clay County team, and they'll face the likes of South Laurel, Corbin, Knox Central, and Harlan County along the way.

Sheppard knows that it is not easy to win a title. He won a district cham-

pionship as an eighthgrader, but lost to Clay County last season. He said he thinks the region is loaded with good teams, but he likes the team that North Laurel has coming back in 2020.

"There are several good teams in the 13th Region. We have a solid core back from last year and I have a lot of confidence in my teammates," said Sheppard. "We just keep focusing on 'one day at a time' because we never know what to expect with the pandemic."

While the concern over completing a full season because of the pandemic is looming over the entire state of Kentucky High School basketball players, Sheppard said he has tried to keep working on his game and with his teammates, and not focusing on negatives. He and his team are focused on getting better and

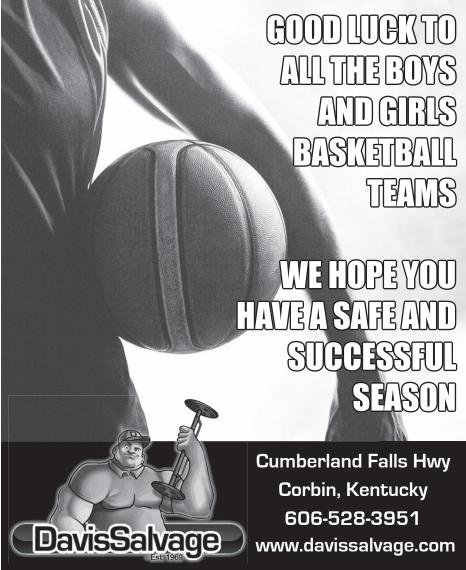
team are focused on getting better and preparing to compete at a high level.

"I'm really just focusing on getting better each day and preparing

myself for the upcoming season," said

Sheppard. "I have been working hard since the end of last season and I'm

just hopeful we get a chance to compete this season."



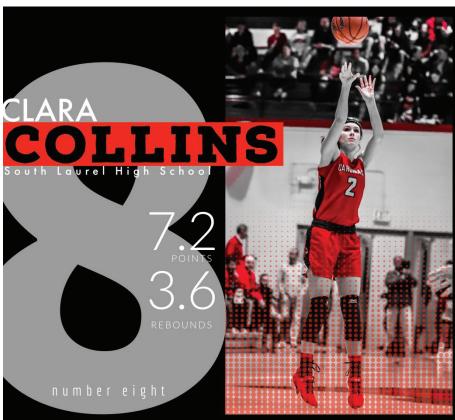
### **GIRLS TOP 10 PLAYERS (CONT.)**



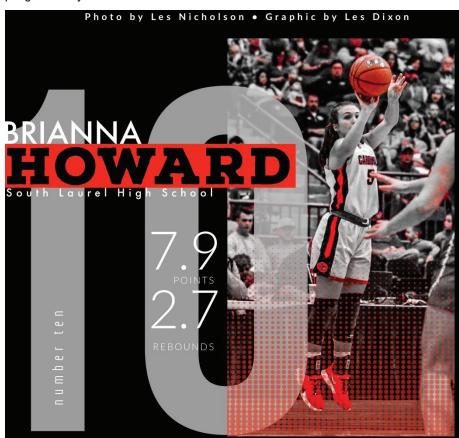
Presley Partin could very well be the top offensive player in the 13th Region this season. Partin can score in numerous ways. She can power herself to the basket or drain the outside shot. She can also hit the boards well and supplies solid play on the defensive end. Partin finished last season with an 18.2 scoring average while pulling down 6.3 rebounds per game.



Caylan Mills is one of the most underrated players in the 13th Region. She has played a key role in Knox Central's success last season and turned in one heck of a summer during AAU games. She enters this season as one of the top guards, who is ready to surprise even more. Mills averaged 13.2 points last season as a sophomore along with 5.7 rebounds per



Clara Collins had a breakout season as a freshman for South Laurel last year. She played big roles in the Lady Cardinals' run in the 50th District and 13th Region championships while hitting some crucial shots during South Laurel's win over tournament favorite Sacred Heart during first round action of the Sweet Sixteen. By season's end, I expect to see her move her way up the rankings as one of the best players. She averaged 7.2 points and 3.6 rebounds per game last year.



Brianna Howard had a breakthrough season as a junior last season and is ready to go out with a bang. She came on strong late last season, knocking down seven 3-pointers during South Laurel's 86-58 win over Clay County in semifinal action of the 13th Region Tournament. She helped guide the Lady Cardinals to 50th District and 13th Region championships while turning in solid play during South Laurel's win over Sacred Heart during first round action of the Sweet Sixteen. Howard averaged 7.9 points and 2.7 points per game last season.



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# New Year, Same Goals: Union men's basketball ready for another season

It might be a new season, but the goals remain the same for Union College men's basketball—win the Appalachian Athletic Conference (AAC) and advance to the NAIA National Championship Tournament.

The Bulldogs have proved quite successful in doing just that for the past seven seasons, having won both the AAC regular-season and tournament championships every year beginning with the 2013-14 campaign. Along the way, Union threw in the 2017 NAIA Division II National Championship for good measure.

Union is coming off a 24-10 campaign in which it made its seventh consecutive trip to the national tournament. The Bulldogs captured the AAC regular-season title with an 18-6 league mark and used a buzzer-beating 3-pointer to win the AAC Tournament championship.

This season, the game has changed a little in that the NAIA has merged the two divisions into one. But for head coach Kevin Burton and the Bulldogs, that means very little in their quest back to the national tournament.

Ranked No. 24 in the NAIA Preseason Poll, Union opened the season with a tough test as it took on No. 15 University of the Cumberlands (Ky.) at the Lou Cunningham Classic in Campbellsville, Ky. A tough schedule is nothing new for the Bulldogs as they do not shy away from stiff competition. It has been tough competition that has forged the Union squads in the past to prepare them for the conference and national tourna-

Union returns six players from last year's squad;

two of whom have been with the program for three or more seasons. Having a good core of returners is nice to have to help get the newcomers acclimated to the system. However, that has not been the case thus far

"It would've been very helpful if they had been participating, but three of those six have not participated," Burton said. "It's nice to have them back, but since they haven't participated, it's minimized their ability to be helpful on the court."

Isiah Knight and Blake Ervin remain sidelined with injuries, while Kelvin Jackson returned last week. Knight is a solid floor general who provides more than his 5.8 points-pergame average from 2019-20 might indicate.

Knight also dished out 66 assists and collected 30 steals last season.

Jackson chipped in 8.3 points and 3.8 rebounds per game in 2019-20, while Ervin added 7.2 points and 2.1 rebounds per game. Ervin drained the gamewinning 3-pointer to secure the AAC Tournament championship, earning him a spot on the AAC All-Tournament Team.

Markelle Turner is back for his sophomore campaign after averaging 10.5 points and 2.9 rebounds per game. He posted a 45.3 field-goal percentage and hit 24-of-60 from 3-point range. During the AAC Tournament, Turner upped his game to produce 14.0 points per game in capturing Tournament MVP honors.

Derron Douglas and Jacob Kenney also return, having averaged 1.4 and 1.3 points per game, respectively, last year.

A couple of newcomers who are expected to be

key players this season are JJ Foster and Andre Silva. A 5-foot-11 point guard, Foster "has good vision, is a good player, and brings good experience," said Burton. "He's poised to have a good season with us."

Silva is a 6-9 forward from Brazil.

While always able to put up points as its 79.3 pointsper-game average for last year shows, Union's defense was its key to victory. The Bulldogs ranked in the top 50 nationally in 16 different statistical categories, and 11 were for defense. Union ranked:

- Third in total rebounds (1395);

- Fourth in 3-point field-goal percentage defense (.305);

- 10th in total blocks (133);
- 12th in field-goal percentage defense (.413);
- 14th in total steals (268);
- 6th in defensive rebounds per game (29.5); - 20th in blocks per game (3.912);
- 23rd in rebounds per game (41.029);
- 27th in steals per game (7.882);
- 32nd in rebound margin (4.382);
- 33rd in scoring defense (73.853).

Offensively, the Bulldogs ranked 17th in total points scored (2713), 18th in total assists (499), 34th in offensive rebounds per game (11.529), 41st in scoring margin (5.941), and 48th in assists per game (14.676).

These numbers have become the norm under Burton as he focuses on not necessarily winning the game but rather the possession. The team that wins the most possessions generally ends up winning the game.

# Trust and Sacrifice: Union women's basketball prepared for 2020-21 season

After a season of broken records and a conference title, the 2020-21 Union College women's basketball team is ready to run it back in a year that is sure to be unlike any other in the program's history.

Head coach Dean Walsh and new assistant Kori West know that during this season every moment is one to be cherished.

That's the mentality our seniors are

"You literally have to take it day by day this year," said Walsh. "Your next practice could be your last.

taking and that is attaching itself to the new players."

Union ended last season with a 26-7 overall record and 20-4 Appalachian Athletic Conference (AAC) mark. The Bulldogs won the AAC Tournament Championship and advanced to the program's first NAIA National Championship Tournament

appearance since 2014. They received

four votes in the NAIA Women's Basketball Coaches' Preseason Top 25.

"It is going to take consistency and bringing it every day to make it back to the national tournament," said Walsh. "I think it is harder to continually win because everyone is going to gun for us now. Everyone is going to want a piece of Union. You cannot have a day off. We have to be able to play every game."

The team returns most of the core from last year's title team. NAIA All-America First Team member and 2020 AAC Player of the Year Brooke Hammonds is back as well as All-AAC Second Team members and fellow seniors Logan Calvert and Chariss Wilson. AAC All-Tournament team member LeAsia Linton also returns.

Walsh is also excited about the return of J'Lyn Martin and how his team has clicked.

"J'Lyn has looked better than she did at any point last year. I am big on the chemistry of my teams," the head coach added. "When you have that many used to playing with each other that overcomes a lot of things."

The Bulldogs added 15 new student-athletes in the off-season. There will be 12 new freshmen, two new

sophomores, and one new senior suiting up in the orange and white in 2020-21.

Union opened the season on the road at Johnson University (Tenn.) in Knoxville, Tenn. on Nov. 3 and stayed on the road to take on No. 4 Campbellsville University (Ky.) on Nov. 9.

Campbellsville is not the only ranked team the Bulldogs will be taking on this season. The NAIA "The Show" Showcase in November will have Union facing No. 7 Southeastern University (Fla.) and a West Virginia Tech team that is receiving votes.

The NAIA combined Division I and Division II this season. With all of the association's teams fighting for one title now, teams have to show they belong more than in previous years.

"With the two divisions combining that means our non-conference schedule had to be stronger," Walsh continued. "It is great to say you've won 20 something games but I would rather play a tough schedule and be prepared for the national tournament than win a lot of games and get my butt kicked in the national tournament. It is all about preparing your team."

The head coach is confident in the selfless culture he has installed in his program. They have a rallying cry they have been leaning on as they prepare for the season.

"Our motto this year is trust and sacrifice," said Walsh. "We must trust what we are doing and how we are playing and sacrifice what we need to sacrifice and leave all egos at the door. I think we are doing that."

In the end, Walsh wants to have a rewarding season for a team that is full of players who are putting on the Union jersey for the last time.

"I want this to be a tremendous year for the senior class that has done great things and has made my life very enjoyable. They are a fun bunch to be around and one of the most competitive I have ever experienced. It's all about controlling that energy. If we can do that, I think we will have another successful season," Walsh concluded.

