THE SENTINEL-ECHO AND TIMES-TRIBUNE'S

2026-27 BASKETBALL PREVIEW

CORBIN

New coach, new system, same championship expectations for Corbin Redhounds

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

CORBIN — A new era of Corbin basketball is set to begin, but the expectations surrounding the Redhounds remain unchanged.

After capturing the 50th District Tournament championship and reaching the semifinals of the 13th Region Tournament last season, Corbin will enter the 2026-27 campaign with Kevin Burton taking over a program that has established a tradition of postseason success.

Burton replaces longtime coach Tony Pietrowski, who stepped down as the Redhounds' boys' coach to take over Corbin's girls' basketball program.

The Redhounds are coming off a 16-14 season that included an 11-6 record against 13th Region competition and a 6-2 mark against 50th District opponents.

Corbin defeated South Laurel, 61-40, in the 50th District Tournament semifinals before knocking off top-seeded Whitley County, 61-57, in the championship game.

The Redhounds carried that momentum into the 13th Region Tournament, opening postseason play with a convincing 54-32 victory over Knox Central before falling to eventual regional champion North Laurel, 66-46, in the semifinals.

With a new coaching staff, a different system and several talented players expected to contribute, Burton believes Corbin has the potential to compete for another regional championship.

"The enjoyable challenge is that everything is brand new to everyone," Burton said. "From our year-around strength/explosive training program, system of play, personnel, etc."

For Burton, the transition involves much more than introducing a new offensive or defensive philosophy.

The Redhounds are adjusting to a year-round strength and explosiveness training program, a different system of play and new expectations regarding how players will contribute.

The summer provided an opportunity for Burton and his coaching staff to begin building relationships with their players while introducing the foundation of the program.

"Summer was significant for our players and coaches to begin learning each other and building relationships," he said.

While many coaches enter a season identifying their projected starting five, Burton takes a different approach.

He doesn't place much emphasis on traditional starting lineups, instead focusing on how players fit within his overall system.

"We don't categorize our players as 'starters'," Burton said. "I understand the question, but none of my teams have ever had traditional 'starters'. It's something I give almost zero time thinking about. It is just not an important thing for us."

That philosophy could give the Redhounds flexibility as they work to establish their rotation and determine which

SEE **REDHOUNDS,** PAGE 12

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Saturday, Dec. 5 — Danville Christian Academy, 5 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 8 — Somerset, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Dec. 10 — at Scott County, 7:30 p.m. (Billy Hicks Classic)
Saturday, Dec. 12 — at Frederick Douglass, 4 p.m. (Billy Hicks Classic)
Saturday, Dec. 19 — at Webb School of Knoxville, 5:30 p.m.

JANUARY

Tuesday, Jan. 5 — at North Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 8 — at McCreary Central, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — Knoxville Catholic, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 12 — South Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 19 — at Whitley County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 22 — Knox Central, 7:30 p.m.
Monday, Jan. 25 — at Clay County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — at South Laurel, 7:45 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Tuesday, Feb. 2 — Whitley County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 6 — at Warren Central, 6 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 9 — Pineville, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 12 — at Covington Catholic, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 13 — at Campbell County, 6 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 15 — Leslie County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 19 — at Great Crossing, 7:30 p.m.

Note: All schedules were taken from the respective team's KHSAA Arbiter page. Dates and times are subject to change.



Coach Kevin Burton identified Evan Ellis (pictured), Trey Person and Madison Central transfer Grayson Burton as three of the team's most talented players. | FILE

New Era, Familiar Face: Pietrowski takes over Corbin girls program with championship aspirations



Coach Tony Pietrowski believes Aubree Clemens has the ability to emerge as one of Kentucky's top players. | FILE

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

CORBIN — Tony Pietrowski has already established himself as one of the most successful basketball coaches in Corbin High School history.

Now, the longtime Redhounds boys' basketball coach is beginning a new chapter in his coaching career, taking over the Lady Redhounds' program with hopes of bringing championship success to the girls' side.

After stepping down from his position as the Redhounds' boys' coach, Pietrowski replaces Isaac Wilson, who guided Corbin to a 15-11 record during the 2025-26 season.

The Lady Redhounds finished 10-7 against 13th Region opponents and 3-4 against 50th District competition but saw their season end with a disappointing 53-46 loss to Whitley County in the semifinals of the 50th District Tournament.

The defeat prevented Corbin from advancing to the 13th Region Tournament.

With a new coach, an experienced group of returning players and several talented underclassmen, the Lady Redhounds are hoping to make a significant postseason push.

For Pietrowski, the transition from coaching boys to girls has gone better than he initially anticipated.

SEE **CORBIN,** PAGE 9

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

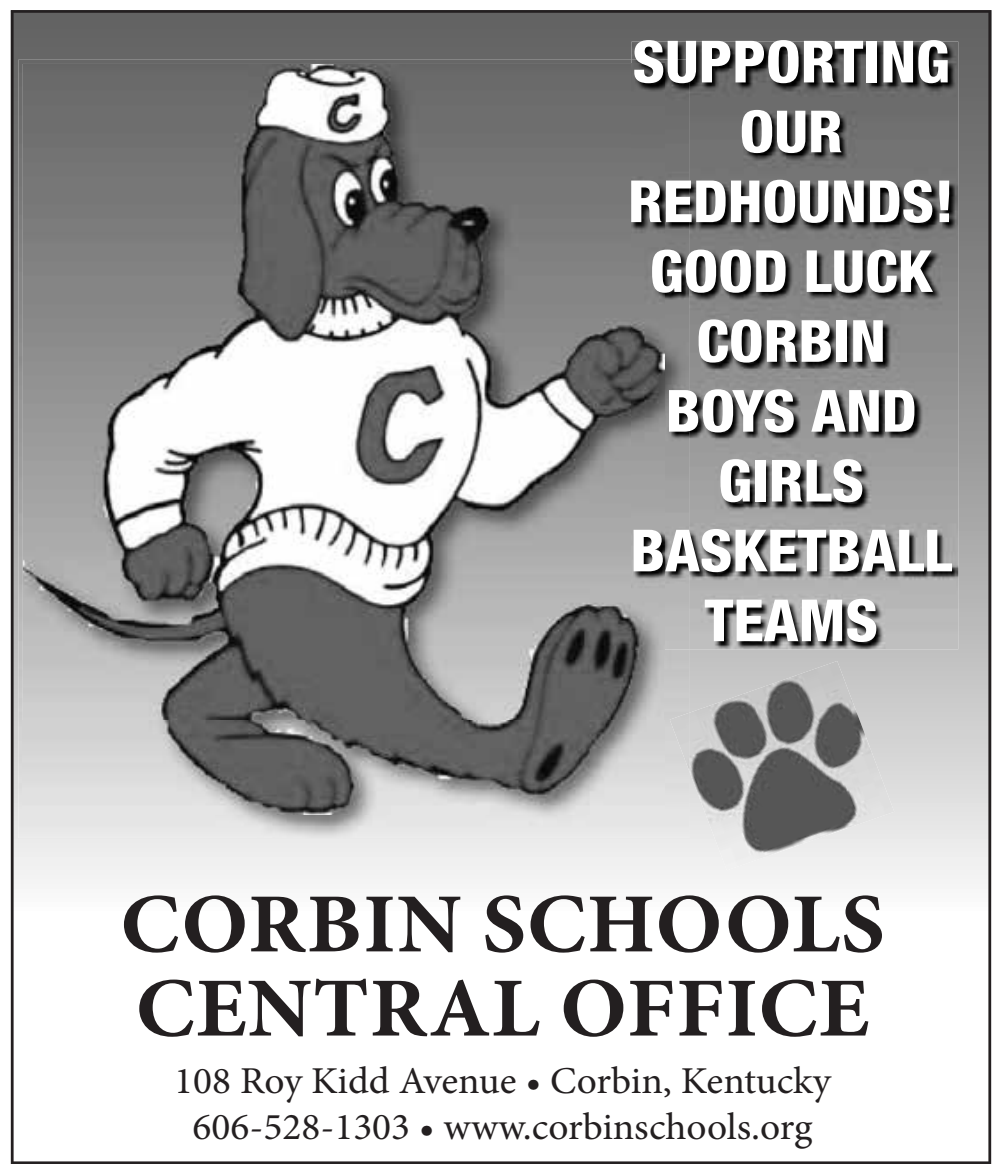
Tuesday, Dec. 1 — at Wayne County, 6 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 4 — at Danville Christian Academy, 7:30 p.m.
Monday, Dec. 7 — Madison Southern, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 15 — Clay County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 18 — Pineville, 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, Dec. 27 — Tates Creek, 6 p.m. (at Boyle County)

JANUARY

Saturday, Jan. 9 — Knoxville Catholic, 3 p.m. (Hometown Bank Classic)
Tuesday, Jan. 12 — South Laurel, 6 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 14 — at Barbourville, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 19 — at Whitley County, 6 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 21 — Knox Central, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 23 — Boyle County, 4:30 p.m.
Monday, Jan. 25 — at Harlan County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — at South Laurel, 6 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Tuesday, Feb. 2 — Whitley County, 6 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 5 — at Pineville, 6 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 8 — at Middlesboro, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 9 — at Hazard, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 11 — Harlan, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 12 — Upperman, 6 p.m. (at Barbourville)
Monday, Feb. 15 — at North Laurel, 6 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 18 — Bell County, 7:30 p.m.



LYNN CAMP

Experience, improved depth have Lynn Camp looking to take next step under McKeehan

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

CORBIN — After spending much of last season adjusting to a new coach and a different system, Lynn Camp's Wildcats are hoping a year of experience will translate into more victories during the 2026-27 basketball campaign.

Coach Marcus McKeehan enters his second season with a roster that features several returning contributors, promising younger players and increased depth.

The Wildcats are coming off an 8-22 season that included a 2-12 record against 13th Region opponents and an 0-5 mark against 51st District competition.

Lynn Camp's season ended with an 89-40 loss to Knox Central in the semifinals of the 51st District Tournament.

While the Wildcats struggled to find consistency during McKeehan's first season, he believes the foundation established a year ago has put his program in a much better position entering the new campaign.

"Our returning players have really bought into our system and have worked hard all offseason," McKeehan said. "They have really been great leaders for our younger guys. Last season with a new coach and a new system, it took us a while to get it into place. Now, with a year under our belt in our system, all our guys know exactly what to do in our system and they have been helping the younger guys learn as well."

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Friday, Dec. 11 — at June Buchanan, 7:45 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — Buckhorn, 7 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 19 — June Buchanan, 3:45 p.m. (Wildcat Classic Presented by Knox County Tourism)

JANUARY

Saturday, Jan. 16 — at Trinity Christian Academy, 3:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 19 — at Knox Central, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 21 — at Model, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — at Pineville, 7:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Tuesday, Feb. 2 — at Berea Community, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 12 — at Harrison County, 8 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 13 — at Robertson County, 2:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 18 — at Jackson City, 7:15 p.m.

That familiarity should help the Wildcats spend less time learning the basics of their system and more time improving their execution on both ends of the floor.

One of Lynn Camp's biggest challenges will be replacing the production of several important players from last season.

The Wildcats graduated Caleb Woods and DJ Wren, their only two seniors, who both held starting roles.

They also suffered a significant setback during summer competition when leading scorer Landen Rose sustained an ACL injury.

McKeehan remains hopeful Rose can return before the season ends.

"We graduated our only two seniors from last year Caleb Woods and DJ Wren who both started," McKeehan said. "We also lost our leading scorer Landen Rose due to an ACL injury during summer ball. We hope to have Rose back before the season ends."

The loss of Rose leaves a significant offensive void, but McKeehan believes several returning players are capable of stepping into larger roles.

Conner Mabe returns after playing the four position last season while Eisen Mayo brings experience at guard.

Kayden Powers also returns after starting numerous games at the five position.

"We have Conner Mabe returning at the 4, Eisen Mayo started the majority of the season at guard, Kayden Powers started quite a bit of games at the 5," McKeehan said.

Another important contributor will be Elijah Mayo, who has embraced his role coming off the bench.

"Elijah Mayo has embraced his role as the sixth man and will continue to be our spark off the bench who plays a lot of minutes," McKeehan said.

With several players returning who have significant varsity experience, Lynn Camp should have a stronger foundation as it works to overcome its personnel losses.

While the Wildcats will lean heavily on their returning contributors, McKeehan expects several other players to compete for starting positions and significant playing time.

Miguel Arribas, Dylan Sizemore, Cason Mills, Max Carnes, Shawn Reyes, Ethan Curry and Braxton Lewis are among those expected to contribute.

"We will have several other guys in the mix for starting positions and quality playing time,"



Conner Mabe returns after playing the four position last season. | FILE

SEE **WILDCATS,** PAGE 14

Lynn Camp Lady Wildcats look to rebuild under Shields



Aubrey Hollin is a player Coach Amy Shields expects to take on an expanded role. | FILE

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

LYNN CAMP — A new coaching staff, a roster facing significant personnel losses and a group of players eager to prove themselves will define the Lynn Camp Lady Wildcats' 2026-27 basketball season.

New coach Amy Shields inherits a program looking to establish stability and build a foundation for future success after a difficult 2025-26 campaign.

The Lady Wildcats finished last season with a 6-18 overall record, including a 1-12 mark against 13th Region opponents and an 0-6 record against 51st District competition.

Their season ended with a 72-24 loss to Knox Central in the semifinals of the 51st District Tournament.

With a new coach leading the program, Lynn Camp faces the challenge of replacing much of its offensive production while developing players who have seen limited starting opportunities.

"This team lost 85 percent of their offense and three starters," Shields said. "The returning players have had limited starts. We need to gain experience and get comfortable in the roles we have because those may change from previous years."

Despite those challenges, Shields believes the Lady Wildcats have the attitude and determination necessary to begin moving the program in the right direction.

Shields and her staff were hired late in the summer, limiting the amount of time they had to evaluate players and begin installing their system.

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Friday, Dec. 4 — at Cordia, 6 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 11 — at June Buchanan, 6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — at Wolfe County, 1:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 19 — at Jackson City, 2 p.m.
Sunday, Dec. 27 — at Jackson City, 3 p.m. (Buckhorn Go Time Christmas Classic)
Monday, Dec. 28 — Lee County, 1 p.m. (Buckhorn Go Time Christmas Classic)
Tuesday, Dec. 29 — at Buckhorn, 1 p.m. (Buckhorn Go Time Christmas Classic)

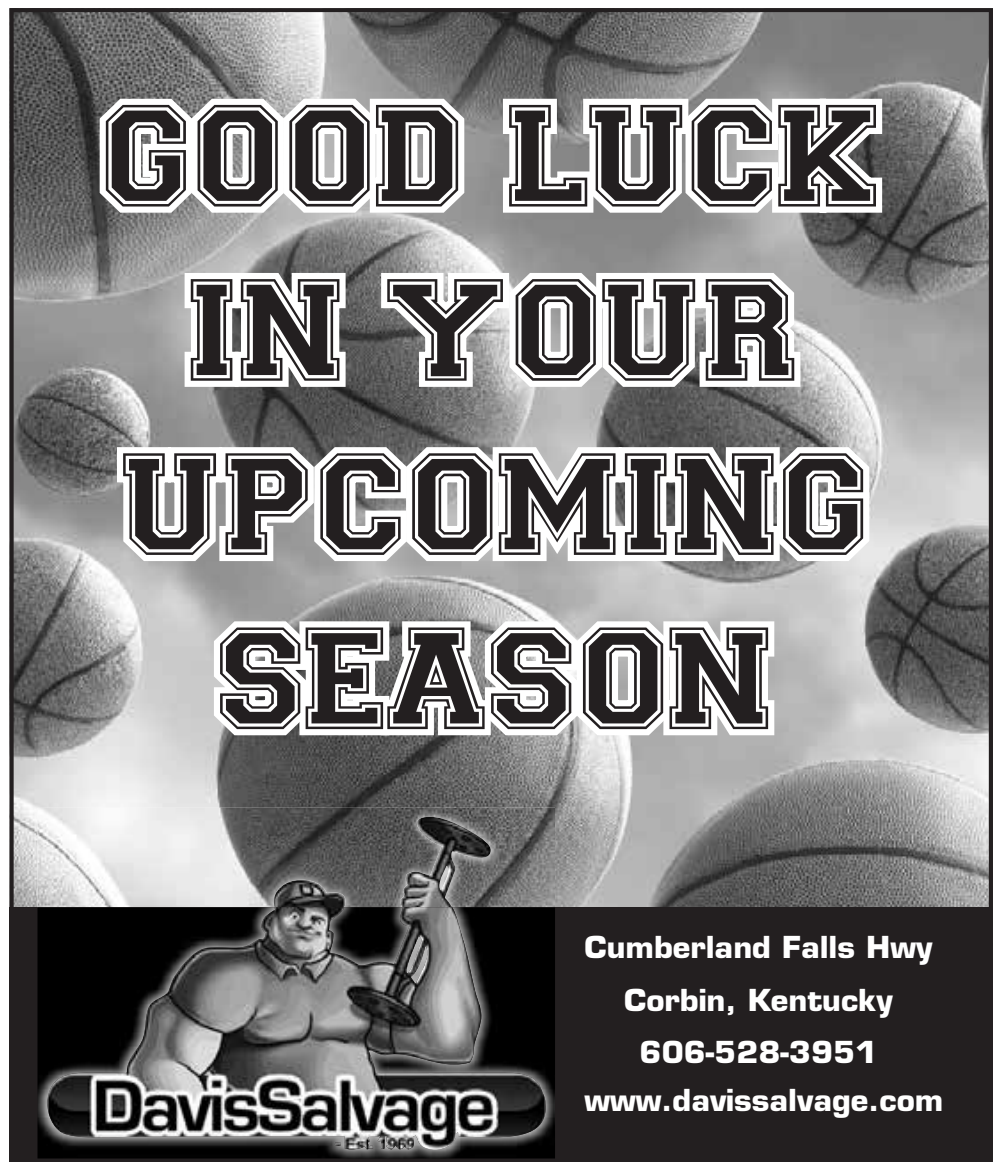
JANUARY

Saturday, Jan. 9 — at Oneida Baptist Institute, 1:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 16 — at Williamsburg, 6 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 19 — at Knox Central, 6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — at Pineville, 6 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Saturday, Feb. 6 — Wolfe County, 1:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 12 — Cordia, 5 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 16 — at Jackson County, 7 p.m.

SEE **CAMP,** PAGE 13



NORTH LAUREL

Reloaded Jaguars eye third straight 13th Region title, another Sweet Sixteen run

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

LONDON — North Laurel has established itself as the team to beat in the 13th Region, and Jaguars coach Nate Valentine has no intentions of allowing that success to slow down.

After capturing four regional championships in five seasons, including back-to-back titles, North Laurel enters the 2026-27 campaign looking to continue one of the most successful stretches in program history.

The Jaguars are coming off an impressive 29-8 season that included a 17-1 record against 13th Region competition and a perfect 10-0 mark against 49th District opponents.

North Laurel captured the 49th District Tournament championship by defeating Oneida Baptist Institute, 81-41, in the semifinals before knocking off Clay County, 56-46, in the title game.

The Jaguars continued their postseason success in the 13th Region Tournament, defeating Harlan, 49-36, in the quarterfinals and Corbin, 66-46, in the semifinals.

North Laurel then captured the program's fifth regional championship, its fourth in five years and second consecutive title, with a 51-38 victory over Bell County.

The Jaguars weren't finished.

North Laurel advanced to the KHSAA Sweet Sixteen's Elite Eight for the second straight season after defeating Warren Central, 52-38, before suffering a heartbreaking 46-44 loss to St. Xavier in the state quarterfinals.

Now Valentine faces the challenge of replacing two important contributors while developing a roster that features a combination of experienced returning players and promising newcomers.

"We return a good nucleus of guys from last year's team," Valentine said. "We'll have to find ways to replace our two seniors from last year. Reece gave us consistent scoring and rebound and his defensive versatility gave us some flexibility to guard. Jordan was able to stretch the floor and make timely shots."

The Jaguars will enter the season without two key contributors from last year's championship team.

Reece Davidson, who averaged 19.8 points per game, provided North Laurel with a dependable offensive presence, rebounding and defensive versatility.

Jordan Rawlings, who averaged 9.4 points per game, gave the Jaguars another scoring option and the ability to stretch opposing defenses with his perimeter shooting.

Together, Davidson and Rawlings accounted for 29.2 points per game, leaving a significant amount of offensive production to replace.

The Jaguars have also suffered another setback with the loss of senior Brayden Hampton to a preseason knee injury.

Hampton was expected to provide physicality and defensive toughness, qualities Valentine knows his team must

SEE **JAGUARS,** PAGE 12



Junior Corey Cunagin is the Jaguars' leading returning scorer after averaging 11.2 points per game last season. | FILE

SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER
Monday, Nov. 30 — at Taylor County, 7:30 p.m.

DECEMBER
Friday, Dec. 4 — at South Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 5 — Jeffersontown, 5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 8 — Knott County Central, 8 p.m. (WYMT Food City Mountain Basketball Classic)
Friday, Dec. 18 — at Danville Christian Academy, 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, Dec. 20 — at Frederick Douglass, 6:45 p.m. (Borderline Classic)
Monday, Dec. 21 — Wayne County, 6:45 p.m. (Borderline Classic)
Wednesday, Dec. 23 — at Breathitt County, 4 p.m. (Hyden Citizens Bank Classic)

JANUARY
Tuesday, Jan. 5 — Corbin, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 8 — at Clay County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — at Red Bird Christian, 2 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 12 — at Knox Central, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 15 — at Madison Southern, 8 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 16 — at Wayne County, 3 p.m. (Bobby Keith Classic)
Tuesday, Jan. 19 — Lexington Catholic, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 22 — at Pulaski County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 23 — Montgomery County, 5 p.m. (Raymond Reed Classic)
Monday, Jan. 25 — Boyle County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — Clay County, 7:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY
Tuesday, Feb. 2 — Jackson County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 5 — South Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 6 — Covington Catholic, 6 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 8 — at Oneida Baptist Institute, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 11 — at Madison Central, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 13 — Bell County, 6 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 15 — George Rogers Clark, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 18 — at Whitley County, 7:30 p.m.

North Laurel Lady Jaguars chasing another regional crown, deeper Sweet Sixteen run



At the center of North Laurel's championship hopes is Mariella Claybrook, who has established herself as one of the state's most accomplished players. | FILE

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

LONDON — Four consecutive 13th Region championships. Nine straight district tournament titles. A 60-game winning streak against 49th District opponents.

The numbers tell the story of North Laurel's remarkable dominance in girls' basketball.

But as the Lady Jaguars prepare for the 2026-27 season, coach Eddie Mahan wants his players focused on something other than the championships they've already won.

He wants them focused on the next one.

North Laurel enters the season with nearly its entire roster returning from a 25-7 campaign that included a 14-1 record against 13th Region competition and a perfect 6-0 mark against 49th District opponents.

The Lady Jaguars continued their championship tradition last season by defeating Oneida Baptist Institute, 73-12, in the 49th District Tournament semifinals before knocking off Clay County, 66-41, in the championship game.

North Laurel then rolled through the 13th Region Tournament, defeating Barbourville, 66-14, in the quarterfinals and Bell County, 61-35, in the semifinals.

The Lady Jaguars completed their regional championship run with a 45-34 victory over crosstown rival South Laurel,

SEE **NORTH,** PAGE 8

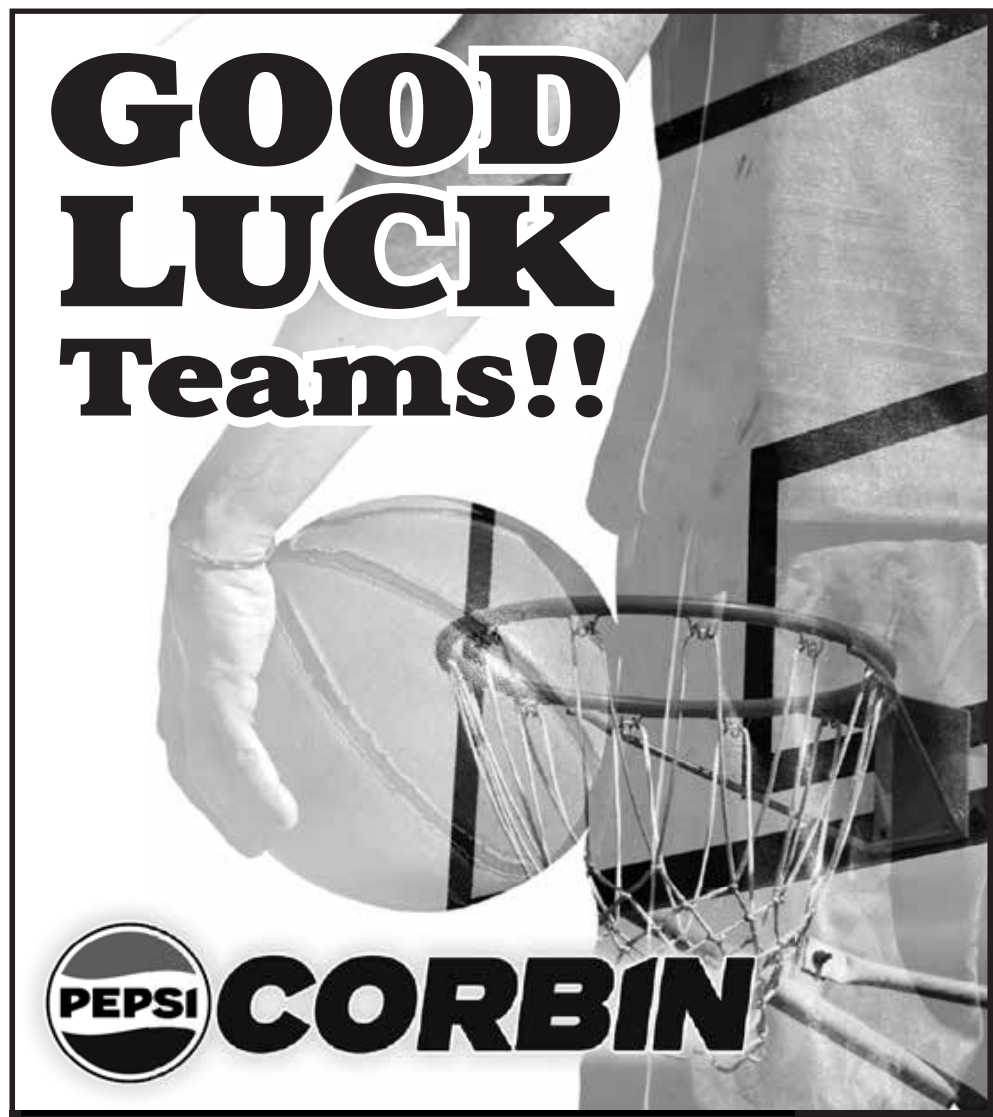
SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER
Monday, Nov. 30 — at Taylor County, 6 p.m.

DECEMBER
Saturday, Dec. 5 — Southwestern, 7:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Dec. 9 — Perry County Central, 8 p.m. (WYMT Food City Mountain Basketball Classic)
Tuesday, Dec. 15 — Harlan County, 7:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Dec. 30 — McLean County, TBA (Lake Cumberland Holiday Hoops)

JANUARY
Saturday, Jan. 2 — at Assumption, 3:30 p.m.
Monday, Jan. 4 — South Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 8 — at Clay County, 6 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — Cooper, 7 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 12 — at Southwestern, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 15 — at Jackson County, 7 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 23 — Campbell County, 2:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — Clay County, 6 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 30 — at Paintsville, 3 p.m.

FEBRUARY
Tuesday, Feb. 2 — Jackson County, 6 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 5 — at Sacred Heart Academy, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 6 — at Simon Kenton, 6:30 p.m. (The Camel Classic)
Tuesday, Feb. 9 — at West Jessamine, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 11 — at South Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 13 — Franklin County, 4:30 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 15 — Corbin, 6 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 19 — Ryle, 7:30 p.m.



SOUTH LAUREL

Sizemore returns home to South Laurel with championship aspirations

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

LONDON — Brad Sizemore knows what it takes to win a regional championship at South Laurel.

He has already done it as a player.

Now the former Cardinal standout returns to his alma mater as head coach, hoping to guide South Laurel back to the top of the 13th Region and restore a program accustomed to competing for championships.

Sizemore helped lead South Laurel to its first-ever regional championship and an Elite Eight appearance in the KHSAA Sweet Sixteen during his playing career.

His return comes at an important time for the Cardinals, who are looking to rebound from a disappointing 2025-26 campaign.

South Laurel finished last season with a 14-15 overall record, including a 6-8 mark against 13th Region opponents and a 4-3 record against 50th District competition.

The Cardinals' season ended with a 61-40 loss to Corbin in the semifinals of the 50th District Tournament, marking the first time since the 2014-15 season that South Laurel failed to qualify for the 13th Region Tournament.

But with a talented roster featuring experienced players, promising underclassmen and considerable size, Sizemore believes the Cardinals have the pieces necessary to make an immediate impact.

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Friday, Dec. 4 — North Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 5 — at McCreary Central, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 8 — Clay County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — Daniel Boone, 2:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — at TBA, 4:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 15 — at Wayne County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 19 — Oak Ridge, 1:30 p.m. (Borderline Classic)
Sunday, Dec. 27 — St. Mary, 1:30 p.m. (Jim Rose Central Bank Classic)

JANUARY

Saturday, Jan. 2 — Trinity (Louisville), 4:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 5 — at Pulaski County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 8 — Knox Central, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — Boyle County, 6 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 12 — at Corbin, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 15 — Whitley County, 7:45 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 16 — at Martin County, 4:30 p.m. (Bobby Keith Classic)
Friday, Jan. 22 — Clinton, 6 p.m. (Raymond Reed Classic)
Saturday, Jan. 23 — Jackson County, 7 p.m. (Raymond Reed Classic)
Tuesday, Jan. 26 — at Whitley County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — Corbin, 7:45 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Friday, Feb. 5 — at North Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 6 — Somerset, 6:30 p.m. (Fox 56 Home Team Showcase)
Monday, Feb. 8 — Barbourville, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 13 — at Upperman, 5 p.m. (500 Club Classic)

"We are really excited about this group, they have a chance to be special," he said. "Hopefully last year's experience will help us take the next step and win a regional championship."

Taking over a program with championship expectations brings challenges, particularly when introducing a new system.

Sizemore believes his players have embraced the changes and made considerable progress since the spring.

"We had a great summer," he said. "I saw a lot of good things from several guys. Bringing a new coach and a new system can sometimes be a learning curve but our guys have bought in to what we are asking them to do. Yes, I think they have made a big jump from the start of summer until the end, they got more comfortable playing for me and with each other."

That development has given Sizemore confidence heading into his first season leading the Cardinals.

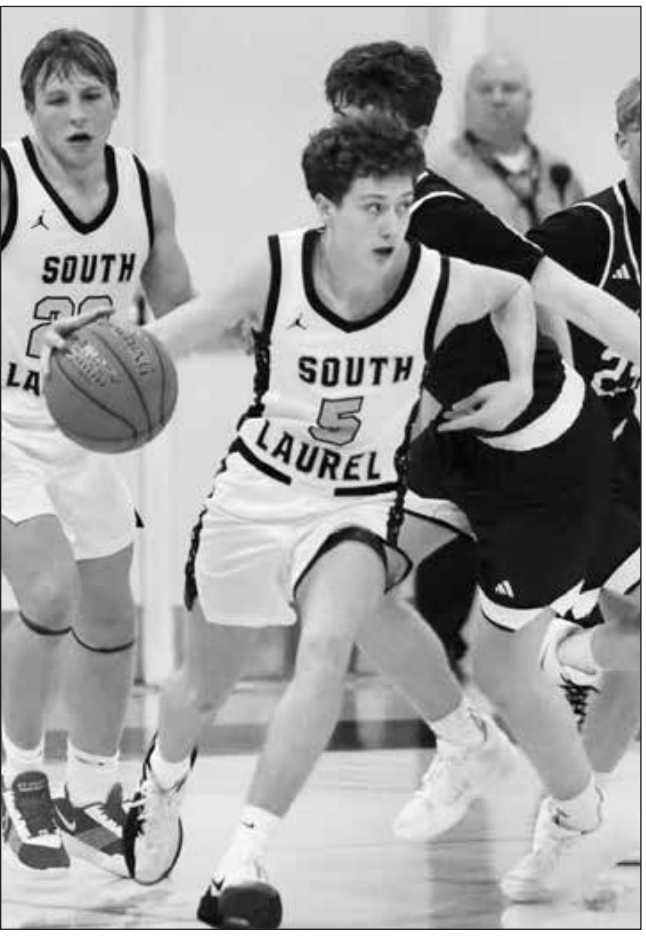
South Laurel returns several players with varsity experience while adding younger talent capable of contributing immediately.

"We think we have a chance to have a special group," Sizemore said. "We have a lot of experience mixed in with talented underclassmen. We have a lot of size on this team and guys who can play multiple positions on the floor. We think we have several guys who are going to be a threat to score and we like how our chemistry has developed this offseason."

One of South Laurel's biggest offensive weapons will be Bell County transfer Ethan Buell, who returns healthy and looking to build on a strong finish to last season.

Sizemore believes Buell has the ability to establish himself among the state's top offensive players.

"Ethan is healthy, bigger, stronger and looking to make a statement this season," he said. "He has a lot of varsity experience under his belt and hopefully he takes off right where he left off at the end of last season. He has got more athletic overall, stronger and has continued to develop his overall



Brayden Cassidy is a player Coach Brad Sizemore expects to take a significant step forward. | FILE

SEE **CARDINALS,** PAGE 11

Lady Cards set sights on 13th Region crown after back-to-back title game heartbreaks



Maci Messer, who has signed with the University of the Cumberlands, returns as the Lady Cardinals' leading scorer and one of the region's most dangerous offensive players. | FILE

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

LONDON — Winning basketball games hasn't been a problem for South Laurel's Lady Cardinals in recent years.

Getting past North Laurel in the 13th Region Tournament championship game has been another story.

After finishing as regional runners-up in each of the past two seasons, South Laurel coach Todd Windlan believes his Lady Cardinals have the experience, talent and determination necessary to take that final step during the 2026-27 campaign.

The Lady Cardinals are coming off an impressive 26-7 season that included a 14-2 record against 13th Region competition and a perfect 8-0 mark against 50th District opponents.

South Laurel captured the 50th District Tournament championship in dominating fashion, defeating Williamsburg, 80-17, in the semifinals before cruising past Whitley County, 66-32, in the championship game.

The Lady Cardinals continued their postseason success in the 13th Region Tournament, defeating Clay County, 69-29, in the quarterfinals and Knox Central, 56-31, in the semifinals.

But their championship hopes came to an end with a 45-34 loss to North Laurel in the regional title game.

With four starters returning and several talented younger players expected to contribute, South Laurel hopes to finish what it couldn't accomplish during the previous two seasons.

"We return four out of five starters, plus our fourth leading scorer who did not start," Windlan said. "We are experienced but still young as only two seniors and no juniors. We need to rebound the ball better, have better ball movement on offense and have more hunger from all players."

One of South Laurel's biggest advantages entering the season is the return of two experienced seniors who have already committed to playing basketball at the collegiate level.

Maci Messer, who has signed with the University of the Cumberlands, returns as the Lady Cardinals' leading scorer and one of the region's most dangerous offensive players.

Windlan believes Messer's athleticism and scoring ability will once again play a major role in South Laurel's success, but he also wants to see her become more productive on the boards.

"Maci Messer - Signed with Cumberlands and is a great athlete who has been our leading scorer and wanting her to be a better rebounder for us. She has been great in practices," Windlan said.

Fellow senior Skeeter Mabe, a Campbellsville University signee, provides South Laurel with another experienced player capable of contributing in several different ways.

Mabe's versatility and basketball knowledge make her one of the team's most valuable players, particularly as the Lady Cardinals prepare for another postseason run.

"Skeeter Mabe - Campbellsville signee, great basketball IQ, can play multiple positions and currently overcoming some injuries. She will play key role in how far we go in the post season," Windlan said.

The health and production of both seniors will be important as South Laurel attempts to return to the regional championship game.

While Messer and Mabe provide senior leadership, South Laurel also returns several younger players who gained valuable experience during last season's 26-win campaign.

Callie Jones is one player Windlan expects to take a significant step forward.

"Callie Jones - Has worked hard on all facets of game, gotten stronger and expecting her to make a big leap in scoring, handling the ball, rebounding and defending," Windlan said.

Ryleigh Bretz, who led the Lady Cardinals in rebounding last season, gives South Laurel a physical presence inside while also providing defensive versatility.

"Ryleigh Bretz - Leading rebounder last year, has gotten stronger and devel-

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Tuesday, Dec. 1 — at George Rogers Clark, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 5 — at Great Crossing, 10:30 a.m.
Monday, Dec. 7 — at Rockcastle County, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 8 — at Harlan County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 11 — Southwestern, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — Daniel Boone, 4:45 p.m. (Lisa Collins Classic)
Thursday, Dec. 17 — at Madison Southern, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 19 — at Bethlehem, 3:30 p.m. (Robert Alexander Center Queen of the Commonwealth)

JANUARY

Monday, Jan. 4 — at North Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — at Notre Dame Academy, noon
Saturday, Jan. 9 — at Notre Dame Academy, 1:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 12 — at Corbin, 6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 15 — Whitley County, 6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 22 — Campbell County, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 26 — at Whitley County, 6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 29 — Corbin, 6 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Friday, Feb. 5 — at Bell County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 6 — at Ryle, 5 p.m. (The Camel Classic)
Thursday, Feb. 11 — North Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 12 — at Ashland Blazer, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 13 — at Boyd County, 2:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 16 — Russell County, 8 p.m.

SEE **SOUTH,** PAGE 10

WHITLEY COUNTY

Whitley County looking to build on historic season, make run at 13th Region title

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

WILLIAMSBURG — After putting together one of the program's most successful seasons in decades, Whitley County boys' basketball coach Eric Swords believes his Colonels have the experience, talent and depth necessary to take another step forward during the 2026-27 campaign.

The Colonels are coming off a 20-12 season that included an 11-8 record against 13th Region opponents and a 5-3 mark against 50th District competition.

Whitley County reached the 50th District championship game before suffering a heartbreaking 61-57 loss to Corbin. The Colonels also advanced to the 13th Region Tournament for the first time since 2011, defeating Pineville, 76-48, before falling to Bell County, 68-39, in the semifinals.

The regional tournament victory over Pineville was significant, ending a 52-year drought without a win in the tournament.

With three returning starters and several experienced players back in the lineup, Swords believes the Colonels have the pieces to contend for both district and regional championships.

"We return a core group of juniors in Tootie Mahan, Riley Fuson, and Levi Jackson," Swords said. "Those three were our leading scorers last year and all have improved in different areas. Senior Jase Meadors returns from ACL surgery last year, and senior Shamal Allen is back after being in the rotation last year. Senior Tucker Hale is back after playing an important role as a sophomore. Sophomore Anderson Gentry will provide a lot on the offensive end after transferring from Pineville. Kayden Centers and Brayden Fuston are young guys that can help."

Mahan, Fuson and Jackson give Whitley County an experienced trio that accounted for much of the team's offensive production last season.

Mahan earned 50th District Player of the Year honors and was selected first-team All-13th Region while Fuson received second-team All-Region and All-District recognition.

Swords believes all three have made significant improvements heading into the new season.

"We return three starters from last year," Swords said. "Tootie Mahan, who was 50th District Player of the Year and first team All-Region, has improved his overall game a ton from last year finding people a lot better. Riley Fuson was second team All-Region and All-District. Looking for him to have a big year as he missed some games due to a foot injury. Levi Jackson, great shooter that has improved his overall game on both ends of the floor."

The return of Meadors could also provide a significant boost.

After starting games as a sophomore, Meadors missed the entire 2025-26 season because of an ACL injury. His return gives Whitley County additional size and another experienced option.

Gentry, a transfer from Pineville, is another player expected to make an immediate contribution.

"Jase Meadors started games as a sophomore before missing all of last year with injury, he will provide much needed size," Swords said. "Anderson Gentry comes from Pineville and will have a chance to make a big impact with his skill set. Tucker Hale, Shamal Allen, Kayden Centers are also in the mix to start some games."

The Colonels also made progress during their summer workouts, particularly when it came to developing depth throughout the roster.

"I thought we had a good summer and was able to develop some depth," Swords said. "I think we

SEE **COLONELS,** PAGE 11



Tootie Mahan earned 50th District Player of the Year honors last year and was selected first-team All-13th Region. | FILE

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Tuesday, Dec. 1 — Model, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 4 — Harlan County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 5 — MHG Preparatory Academy, 2 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 8 — Wayne County, 6 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 11 — Middlesboro, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — Bourbon County, 5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 15 — at Clay County, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 18 — Frederick Douglass, 7 p.m. (Borderline Classic)
Saturday, Dec. 19 — Central Magnet, 3:15 p.m. (Borderline Classic)
Sunday, Dec. 20 — Red Boiling Springs, 3:15 p.m. (Borderline Classic)
Monday, Dec. 21 — Sullivan East, 5 p.m. (Borderline Classic)

JANUARY

Thursday, Jan. 7 — at Pineville, 7 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — Central, TBA
Tuesday, Jan. 12 — at Middlesboro, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 15 — at South Laurel, 7:45 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 19 — Corbin, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 22 — Knoxville Christian, 7 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 23 — Coalfield, 5:15 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 26 — South Laurel, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 30 — at Central, TBA

FEBRUARY

Tuesday, Feb. 2 — at Corbin, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 5 — Lee County, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 9 — at Southwestern, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 12 — Berea Community, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 13 — at Rowan County, 5 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 16 — Bell County, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 18 — North Laurel, 7:30 p.m.

Experience, improved offense key to Whitley County's hopes of making postseason run



Madison Hopkins gives Whitley County a versatile scoring threat who can create matchup problems by playing both inside and on the perimeter. | FILE

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

WILLIAMSBURG — Whitley County girls' basketball coach Ronnie Collier believes the experience gained by his younger players last season, combined with an increased emphasis on offensive improvement, could help the Lady Colonels take another step forward during the 2026-27 campaign.

Whitley County finished last season with a 15-15 overall record, including a 10-10 mark against 13th Region opponents and a 4-4 record against 50th District competition.

The Lady Colonels advanced to the 50th District championship game before falling to South Laurel, 66-32. They also earned a berth in the 13th Region Tournament, where their season ended with a 39-30 loss to Bell County.

With four returning starters and a mixture of veteran leadership and younger talent, Collier believes his team has the potential to become one of the region's toughest opponents.

"Last season, we had a few younger players that had to step up and play a lot of minutes when we had players go down with injuries," Collier said. "Even though we went through some growing pains last year, I think the experience that players like Aubree Fore and Cristen Siler were able to obtain will help us this year."

One of Whitley County's biggest priorities during the offseason was improving its offensive production.

"Over the summer, we put an emphasis on getting better offensively," Collier said. "I feel like we made some strides in the right direction, and I'm looking forward to seeing if it correlates to this season."

The Lady Colonels return four starters in Madison Hopkins, Jonna Rice, Aubree Fore and Jaylee Cox.

Hopkins gives Whitley County a versatile scoring threat who can create matchup problems by playing both inside and on the perimeter.

Rice will direct the offense from the point guard position, but her versatility allows her to contribute in several different roles.

Collier described Hopkins as a "great scorer who can play inside out and present matchup problems."

He also praised Rice's all-around ability.

"Jonna Rice leads our team as our point guard, but she is very versatile and can play any position on the floor," he said. "She is a good shooter, rebounder, and defender."

Fore returns as one of the team's top defensive players and athletes, while Cox provides another experienced perimeter shooter.

Collier described Fore as a "great defender and athlete" and Cox as a "good shooter and brings back experience."

The Lady Colonels will also benefit from the return of players who missed time because of injuries.

Khylea Ray Collier is returning from an ACL tear and is expected to provide additional perimeter shooting.

"Khylea Ray Collier is returning from an ACL tear, and I look for her to help us offensively with her shooting ability," Collier said. "Cristen Siler will play a huge role for us, also. She is an elite rebounder and plays very hard. Isabella Smiddy is also returning from an ACL tear, and she is working to get back to playing."

Although Whitley County returns four seniors, several younger players will compete for significant varsity minutes.

"Our team will be mixed with youth and experience," Collier said. "We have four returning seniors, but we will have several younger girls that will be competing for varsity minutes."

While improving offensively is a major goal, Collier expects defense to remain one of Whitley County's strengths.

The Lady Colonels developed a gritty identity toward the end of last season, something their coach believes played a major role in reaching the regional tournament.

"I feel like our biggest strength last year was our defense," Collier said. "I look for that to carry us again this year.

SEE **WHITLEY,** PAGE 10

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Tuesday, Dec. 1 — at Pineville, 7 p.m.
Thursday, Dec. 3 — Middlesboro, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 8 — Pulaski County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — at Johnson Central, 7:15 p.m. (Lisa Collins Classic)
Tuesday, Dec. 15 — Wayne County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 19 — Paintsville, 3:45 p.m. (Central Bank Jim Rose Classic)
Sunday, Dec. 20 — at Central, 4:30 p.m. (Central Bank Jim Rose Classic)
Monday, Dec. 21 — Newport Central Catholic, 2 p.m. (Central Bank Jim Rose Classic)
Monday, Dec. 28 — at Clyde A. Erwin, 5 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 29 — at TBA, TBA
Wednesday, Dec. 30 — at TBA, TBA

JANUARY

Tuesday, Jan. 5 — at Madison Southern, 6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 8 — Rockcastle County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — Central, TBA
Friday, Jan. 15 — at South Laurel, 6 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 19 — Corbin, 6 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 21 — at Harlan County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 23 — Estill County, 2 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 26 — South Laurel, 6 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 28 — at Middlesboro, 7:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Tuesday, Feb. 2 — at Corbin, 6 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 4 — Adair County, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 9 — Knox Central, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 11 — Barbourville, 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 16 — at Bell County, 7:30 p.m.

WILLIAMSBURG

Battle-tested Williamsburg looks to turn experience into victories after one-win season

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

WILLIAMSBURG — The wins were difficult to come by for Williamsburg during the 2025-26 basketball season, but Yellow Jackets coach Brandon Bargo believes the experience his young team gained could prove invaluable this winter.

After finishing with just one victory a year ago, Williamsburg enters the 2026-27 campaign with a roster that is still young but no longer unfamiliar with the demands of varsity basketball.

The Yellow Jackets finished last season with a 1-27 overall record, including a 1-18 mark against 13th Region opponents and an 0-7 record against 50th District competition.

Their season ended with a 71-31 loss to Whitley County in the semifinals of the 50th District Tournament.

Despite those struggles, Bargo believes his program is in a much better position than it was entering last season, particularly because of the number of players returning with varsity experience.

"We return experience and that was something that was not in the program when we started the season last year," Bargo said. "Game reps, similarity with our offensive and defensive schemes. It's not all brand new now."

That familiarity could make a significant difference for a Williamsburg squad that spent much of last season learning how to compete at the varsity level.

One of the biggest reasons for Bargo's optimism is the return of seven players who have started varsity games.

That experience gives the Yellow Jackets a foundation to build upon as they attempt to become more competitive in one of the 13th Region's toughest districts.

SEE **JACKETS,** PAGE 15

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER

Monday, Dec. 7 — Ligon COGO (KY Home School), 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 11 — Berea Community, 6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 12 — Red Bird Christian, 5 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 19 — Trinity Christian Academy, 2 p.m. (Wildcat Classic Presented by Knox County Tourism)
Tuesday, Dec. 29 — at Trinity Christian Academy, 2 p.m.

JANUARY

Monday, Jan. 11 — at Red Bird Christian, 6 p.m.
Thursday, Jan. 21 — at McCreary Central, 7:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Monday, Feb. 1 — at Oneida Baptist Institute, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 12 — at Jackson City, 7:15 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 15 — at Frankfort Christian Academy, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 18 — at Pineville, 7 p.m.

Williamsburg counting on experience, team chemistry to take next step in rebuilding process

LES DIXON
SPORTS CONTRIBUTOR

WILLIAMSBURG — With an entire roster returning from last season and a pair of seniors ready to provide leadership, Williamsburg girls' basketball coach Melissia Douglas believes her Lady Yellow Jackets are closer than ever to seeing their hard work pay off.

Entering her fourth season at the helm, Douglas has spent the past three years rebuilding the program, emphasizing fundamentals, developing basketball knowledge and creating a culture built around teamwork and accountability.

Williamsburg finished the 2025-26 campaign with a 10-17 overall record, including a 2-9 mark against 13th Region opponents and an 0-7 record against 50th District competition.

The Lady Yellow Jackets' season ended with an 80-17 loss to South Laurel in the semifinals of the 50th District Tournament.

Despite those struggles, Douglas believes the experience gained by her returning players could make a significant difference this winter.

"This is my fourth season at Williamsburg, and over the past three years, our team has worked hard to rebuild the program and establish a strong foundation in the fundamentals of the game," she said. "Last season, we did not have any seniors, so we are fortunate to return with the entire team and have the leadership

SEE **WILLIAMSBURG,** PAGE 15

SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER

Monday, Nov. 30 — Trinity Christian Academy, 6 p.m.

DECEMBER

Friday, Dec. 4 — at June Buchanan, 6 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 5 — at Jackson City, 1 p.m.
Monday, Dec. 7 — Ligon COGO (KY Home School), 6 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 8 — Bluegrass United (KY Home School), 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 15 — at Owsley County, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 19 — at Frankfort, 12:30 p.m.
Monday, Dec. 21 — at Jenkins, 1:15 p.m. (Cavalier Christmas Classic)
Tuesday, Dec. 22 — East Ridge, 10:30 a.m.
Wednesday, Dec. 23 — at Betsy Layne, 2:45 p.m.

JANUARY

Tuesday, Jan. 5 — at Trinity Christian Academy, 6 p.m.
Friday, Jan. 8 — Frankfort, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 9 — Middlesboro, 3 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 16 — Lynn Camp, 6 p.m.
Saturday, Jan. 16 — Jackson City, 7:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Thursday, Feb. 11 — Knoxville Ambassadors, noon
Thursday, Feb. 11 — Lee County, 7:30 p.m.



NORTH

Continued from Page 4

securing their fourth consecutive trip to the KHSAA Sweet Sixteen.

Their season ended with a 55-46 loss to eventual state champion George Rogers Clark in the opening round of the state tournament.

With four returning starters, one of Kentucky's premier players and what Mahan believes is the deepest roster he has coached, North Laurel enters the season with championship expectations once again.

"We are excited about this group," Mahan said. "We return all of our roster from a team that went 25-7, won its ninth consecutive district championship, and captured our fourth consecutive regional championship except for one player. The biggest thing our players can take from last season is understanding what it takes to be successful, but also recognizing how much room we still have to grow."

Despite the program's continued success, Mahan believes last season provided valuable lessons that could help his team take another step forward.

"We had a very successful season, but we also experienced some things in the postseason that should motivate us," he said. "We have to become more consistent, make better decisions under pressure, and continue learning how to play together. Being able to execute better in high pressure situations will be key. Experience is valuable, but only if you use it to get better."

At the center of North Laurel's championship hopes is Mariella Claybrook, who has established herself as one of the state's most accomplished players.

The Western Kentucky University commit is coming off a tremendous season that included 13th Region Player of the Year honors and first-team All-State recognition.

Claybrook also surpassed 1,000 career points and 1,000 rebounds, demonstrating the impact she has made throughout her high school career.

Mahan believes her combination of size, skill and basketball intelligence gives North Laurel an advantage regardless of the opponent.

"Mariella Claybrook returns as one of the premier players in Kentucky," Mahan said. "She is coming off a tremendous season in which she was named 13th Region Player of the Year, earned first-team All-State recognition, and surpassed 1,000 career points and rebounds. She has also committed to Western Kentucky University. Her combination of size, skill, and basketball IQ makes her special."

Mahan isn't shy about expressing his confidence in his standout player.

"Every matchup we have this year when I feel like no matter who we play we have the best player on the court in a North Laurel jersey," he said.

Claybrook missed much of the summer competition because of a sprained ankle, but her absence created opportunities for younger players to gain valuable experience.

"We played most of the summer without Mariella Claybrook who had a sprained ankle and it was a great growing experience for our younger players," Mahan said.

Her return gives the Lady Jaguars a proven leader as they prepare for another demanding season.

Mahan, Phillips and Lewis give Lady Jaguars talented perimeter group

While Claybrook provides a dominant presence, North Laurel also returns several talented perimeter players capable of creating offense and making an impact defensively.

Bella Mahan is expected to take on an even larger leadership role after continuing to develop her game during the offseason.

"Bella Mahan gives us a very skilled guard who can handle the basketball, create opportunities for others, and stretch the defense with her shooting," Mahan said. "She continues to grow as a floor leader. She has worked really hard in the weight room and expanding her game and I expect her to make a huge leap in her game this season."

Another returning standout is Laylee Phillips, who made an immediate impact as an eighth-grader last season.

Phillips earned multiple honors during her first year of significant varsity competition and has continued developing into one of the state's promising young players.

"Laylee Phillips had an outstanding season as an eighth grader, earning multiple honors," Mahan said. "She is a talented young guard who plays with confidence and has continued to develop. She literally lives in the gym and has earned the recognition as one of the best upcoming players in the state."

Bella Lewis provides another dangerous option on the perimeter.

Her athleticism allows her to contribute on both ends of the floor, and Mahan believes she could emerge as a more complete offensive player this season.

"Bella Lewis gives us another perimeter scoring threat," Mahan said. "She can attack the basket, shoot from the perimeter, and create offense in different ways. Her tremendous athleticism is unique and makes her dangerous on both sides of the floor. She has been known as a good perimeter defender but I think she will show a much improved offensive player as well. I think she has the potential to be a tremendous two-way player."

With Claybrook, Bella Mahan, Phillips and Lewis returning, North Laurel has an experienced foundation capable of competing against quality opponents.

The Lady Jaguars must replace the leadership of graduated point guard Haley Combs.

"We return four starters from last season, with the biggest graduation loss being Haley Combs, who was an outstanding point guard and leader for our program," Mahan said.

Replacing Combs' leadership and decision-making will be an important part of North Laurel's development.

Although the Lady Jaguars return several established players, Mahan believes the team's overall depth could be one of its greatest strengths.

Emma Carl returns after missing part of last season and is expected to provide a major defensive presence.

"Emma Carl has started in years past and after not playing some of last season is back and will look to continue being one of the best defensive players in the state," Mahan said.

Ella Hubbard gives North Laurel additional size and versatility inside, while several other players are expected to compete for significant minutes.

The group includes Molly Morgan, Allie Gray, Sophie Gray, Jaslyn Philpot and Paisley Robinson.

"We also have players like Ella Hubbard, who gives us valuable size and versatility inside," Mahan said. "We have several players capable of stepping into expanded roles."

The depth of the roster could allow North Laurel to use different combinations throughout the season while maintaining its intensity on both ends of the floor.

"Ella Hubbard, Emma Carl, Molly Morgan, Allie Gray, Sophie Gray, Jaslyn Philpot and Paisley Robinson are all players we expect to compete to contribute," Mahan said. "Each brings something different to our team. We have the most depth I have ever had, and I think one of our biggest advantages could be the number of players who can contribute in different roles. We will need that throughout a long season, and it will

SEE **MAHAN,** PAGE 9

We Would Like To Wish All The Students Good Luck In Their Up Coming Season







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CORBIN

Continued from Page 2

"It's been an awesome transition," Pietrowski said. "Much easier than I expected, my coaching style really hasn't changed, the girls have done great up to this point. I'm lucky to have a very hard working group that wants to get better and accomplish some great things this season."

Pietrowski brings an impressive résumé to the Corbin girls' program.

During his tenure as the Redhounds' boys' coach, he surpassed legendary coach Harry Taylor as the program's all-time winningest coach, recording his 442nd career victory in January 2022.

He guided Corbin to four 13th Region championships in 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2018, along with 11 50th District titles and 10 appearances in the regional championship game.

Pietrowski also led the Redhounds to two Elite Eight appearances in the KHSAA Sweet Sixteen, accomplishing the feat in 2005 and 2018.

That championship experience will now be put to work with a Lady Redhounds squad looking to establish itself among the 13th Region's elite programs.

While the coaching change brings excitement, Pietrowski understands that developing chemistry and implementing a new system will take time.

"We have a good mix of experienced upperclassmen and talented underclassmen," Pietrowski said. "The challenge will be figuring out how to mesh those groups together, gaining an understanding for rotations/lineups & installing a new system."

The Lady Redhounds spent the summer working toward those goals, with Pietrowski using the opportunity to evaluate players and begin implementing his approach.

"We had a productive summer," he said. "Played a lot of girls, started the installation of our system, and got a feel for one another."

The early results have left Pietrowski encouraged about the team's potential.

"I think we have enough pieces to compete for championships," he said. "It will be a work in progress, but hopefully by the end of the season we will be the best version of ourselves."

Among the players Pietrowski will rely on this season are Aubree Clemens and Lydia King, two returning standouts who bring different strengths to the Lady Redhounds.

Pietrowski believes Clemens has the ability to emerge as one of Kentucky's top players.

"Aubree is dynamic player who we will use in a variety of ways," Pietrowski said. "I expect her to put her name on the map statewide this season."

King provides Corbin with another scoring threat and a competitive presence on the court.

"Lydia is feisty competitor and leader," Pietrowski

SEE **KING,** PAGE 10

MAHAN

Continued from Page 8

define our success by those who can contribute and find their roles."

Despite the roster's youth, Mahan believes the experience gained from multiple championship runs gives North Laurel an advantage.

"We have a pretty unique combination," he said. "We have a lot of varsity experience, but we are also a relatively young team in terms of age and classification. We have players who have been through district and regional championship games, and we have younger players who have already experienced meaningful varsity basketball."

But Mahan doesn't want his players relying on past accomplishments.

"That is a good combination to have," he said. "We aren't starting over, but we also aren't going to rely on what we accomplished last year. This group has to establish its own identity."

North Laurel has built its championship success around talented players, strong defense and the ability to perform in pressure situations.

Mahan believes this year's team possesses those same qualities.

"Our biggest strengths are our experience, versatility, and overall skill level," Mahan said. "We have the ability to play in different ways offensively, and we have several players who can make plays with the basketball. Mariella gives us a tremendous presence inside and on the perimeter, while our guards provide shooting, ball handling, and playmaking ability."

The Lady Jaguars also have the potential to be one of the region's strongest defensive teams.

"Defensively, we have the potential to be very good," Mahan said. "I also think our experience in big games is important. We have players who understand what championship-level basketball requires."

Mahan also pointed out talent and experience won't guarantee another championship.

North Laurel must improve its decision-making, ball security and consistency while learning to handle the pressure that comes with being the region's defending champion.

"We have to continue improving our decision-making and our ability to take care of the basketball," Mahan said. "We can be a very good offensive team, but we have to understand that good offense isn't always about making a play. Sometimes it's about making the extra pass, getting the ball to the right person, and allowing the game to come to us."

Mahan also wants his team to respond better when facing adversity.

"We also have to continue developing our consistency defensively and become better at handling adversity," he said. "Our expectations are high, and we understand that teams are going to give us their best effort every night."

Ultimately, the Lady Jaguars' success will depend on their willingness to play together and embrace individual roles.

"Our success will come down to our willingness to put the team first," Mahan said. "We have talented players, but talent alone doesn't win championships. We have to defend, rebound, take care of the basketball, and trust one another. We have to understand our roles and be willing to make the right play rather than always trying to make the play. If we can do those things consistently, I really like what this group can accomplish."

North Laurel isn't interested in simply preparing for another district or regional championship.

Mahan wants his Lady Jaguars ready to compete against the best teams Kentucky has to offer.

To accomplish that, North Laurel has assembled a demanding schedule featuring several of the state's premier programs.

"We have put together a very challenging schedule, and I think it will prepare us well," Mahan said. "We will play some of the best teams in Kentucky, including Sacred Heart, Assumption, Simon Kenton, Taylor County, Cooper, Ryle, and West Jessamine, along with several other quality opponents. We have also scheduled some very good teams outside of our immediate area."

The schedule should provide plenty of opportunities for the Lady Jaguars to evaluate their strengths, identify weaknesses and develop the consistency necessary to compete deep into March.

"We don't want to just be prepared for our district and region," Mahan said. "We want to be prepared to compete with anybody in the state. Our schedule will challenge us, expose areas where we need to improve, and hopefully make us better as the season progresses. We believe playing quality competition is important if you want to accomplish something special in March."

North Laurel also gained valuable experience during summer competition, even without Claybrook available for much of that time.

"I was pleased with our summer," Mahan said. "We had a chance to compete against some very good competition, and I thought our players made significant individual and collective improvements. We had a few players who have invested a lot of time into their development, and that has been encouraging to see."

The progress has left Mahan optimistic about the team's potential.

"We have a good combination of returning experience and players who are continuing to establish themselves," he said. "I think this group is excited about the opportunity in front of them. Now, we have to translate that work into production when the games count."

North Laurel's dominance within the 49th District has been remarkable.

The Lady Jaguars have captured nine consecutive district tournament championships and enter the season riding a 60-game winning streak against district opponents.

But Mahan understands how quickly success can be taken for granted.

Before the current championship streak began, North Laurel had gone 25 years without winning a district title.

That history is something he wants his players to remember.

"We understand the expectations that come with being at North Laurel," Mahan said. "We have won nine consecutive district championships, and our goal is always to compete for another one. However, we also understand that those championships don't carry over into the next season."

Mahan believes appreciating the difficulty of winning championships is essential to maintaining the program's success.

"Before we started our streak of district championships this program had gone 25 years without winning one," he said. "I want our players to understand that these are not easy."

North Laurel has also established itself as the 13th Region's dominant girls' basketball program over the past four seasons.

The Lady Jaguars have won four consecutive regional championships, including back-to-back victories over South Laurel in the title game.

But Mahan knows the road to a fifth straight championship won't be easy.

South Laurel returns a talented roster after finishing 26-7 last season while Corbin, Whitley County, Knox Central, Bell County and Harlan County are among the programs expected to compete for regional honors.

"Absolutely," Mahan said when asked whether his team could make another regional championship run. "We believe we have the personnel to compete for another region championship. We have won four consecutive region titles, and that experience is something we value. However, we also know how difficult it is to win in the 13th Region. There are good coaches, talented players, and several programs capable of making a run."

Despite the Lady Jaguars' recent dominance, Mahan doesn't believe his team can afford to become complacent.

"We certainly aren't taking anything for granted," he said. "Our players understand what it takes to get to that point, but they also understand that every season is different. We have the talent and experience to put ourselves in that position again. Whether we get there will depend on how committed we are to improving every day."

After four consecutive trips to the Sweet Sixteen, North Laurel has established itself among Kentucky's most consistent postseason programs.

But last season's nine-point loss to eventual state champion George Rogers Clark provided another reminder of how difficult it is to advance at the state tournament.

With Claybrook leading an experienced roster, several talented guards returning and unprecedented depth, Mahan believes the Lady Jaguars have an opportunity to accomplish something special.

Still he wants this year's team to establish its own identity rather than simply attempt to repeat past success.

"I really like this group's potential," Mahan said. "We have talented players, good depth, and a group that has experienced success together. We also have some unfinished business and plenty of motivation. One thing I want our players to understand is that we don't have to chase last year's accomplishments. We need to create our own identity and establish our own standard."

For Mahan, the message is simple.

Championships are earned through preparation, discipline and a commitment to improvement.

And while North Laurel enters the season with an impressive collection of trophies and winning streaks, the Lady Jaguars understand that none of those accomplishments guarantees another successful postseason.

"We have always believed that at North Laurel, standards matter more than expectations," Mahan said. "We are excited about the opportunity to get started, and I think our fans are going to enjoy watching this group compete. We are going to work hard, play together, and see how good we can become."



WHITLEY

Continued from Page 6

Toward the end of the season, we became a really gritty team that learned to fight together and trust each other. I feel like that was the biggest reason why we were able to make it to The Arena."

Collier knows his team must become more consistent offensively to compete with the region's top programs.

"We need to improve offensively," he said. "We struggled shooting from the perimeter last season, and we turned the ball over too much. Those areas have definitely been an emphasis to improve upon this season."

Staying healthy and developing depth will also be important as the Lady Colonels attempt to build on last season's postseason appearance.

"Our keys to success this season will be getting better offensively, staying healthy, and continuing to build depth," Collier said. "We will be depending on a few players to step up who have little to no varsity experience."

The Lady Colonels won't have an easy road through the regular season.

Whitley County's schedule includes matchups against Paintsville, Louisville Central, Newport Central, Johnson Central and Adair County.

Collier believes facing quality competition will help prepare his team for the challenges of district and regional tournament play.

"Our schedule is very difficult this season, and I look for that to have us prepared to make a run in postseason play," Collier said. "Teams on our schedule, such as Paintsville, Louisville Central, Newport Central, Johnson Central, and Adair were all at the top of their regions last year."

The 50th District also figures to be highly competitive, with its four teams returning much of their personnel.

"Our district will be very tough, as always, with all four teams returning nearly all of their players," Collier said. "But, I think the tough schedule that we are going to play will have us ready by the time district play comes around."

Despite the challenges, Collier has high expectations for his Lady Colonels.

"The 13th Region is loaded with talent this year, but I truly feel we will be a top five team and a difficult out come tournament time," he said.

For Collier, the team's attitude and willingness to work have made the upcoming season exciting.

"We have a great group of young ladies who are extremely fun to coach," he said. "They show up to practice everyday with great attitudes. I'm looking forward to seeing what they can accomplish this season."

SOUTH

Continued from Page 5

oping into a nice scoring threat for us. She brings physicality and toughness to our team. She is very good defender being able to guard multiple positions," Windlan said.

Kenzie Fannin is expected to move into the starting lineup, giving South Laurel another perimeter scoring threat.

"Our fifth starter will be Kenzie Fannin - she can really shoot the ball and very good in transition at scoring the ball. Needs to improve her defense but also gives us another solid ball-handler," Windlan said.

With four returning starters and Fannin expected to fill the remaining starting position, the Lady Cardinals will enter the season with an experienced core despite having only two seniors and no juniors.

That combination of returning talent and younger players gives Windlan several options as he develops his rotation.

South Laurel's depth could become one of its biggest assets during a demanding regular-season schedule.

The Lady Cardinals have several players capable of contributing off the bench, including Kenna Andes, who is returning from an Achilles injury suffered last season.

"Kenna Andes - Coming off achilles injury last season and is now getting into basketball shape and brings us a physical presence and solid player. Can play multiple positions," Windlan said.

Khloe Osborne provides perimeter shooting and defensive effort while Hallianna Massey gives South Laurel another versatile option.

"Khloe Osborne - She is a very good shooter and plays very hard for us and defends well. She needs to give us solid minutes in rotation," Windlan said. "Hallianna Massey can play multiple positions for us. Good driver, defends well and improved her shooting. Looking for her to impact games off the bench," he added.

Eighth-grader Mia Bowling could also see important minutes because of her ball-handling ability and understanding of the game.

"Mia Bowling - Smart basketball player, gives us ball-handling and knows everything we want to do. She is very vocal for an 8th grader," Windlan said.

Kylee Woods is another athletic player who could make an impact.

"Kylee Woods - Great athlete who can defend and score the ball for us, could be a big key for us off the bench," Windlan said.

Zoey Church adds length and offensive versatility while Addalyn Breeding provides another dependable perimeter option.

"Zoey Church - Gives us length while being able to score the ball and handles the ball well for her size," Windlan said. "Addalyn Breeding is a very good shooter, good basketball IQ who can handle the ball and pass the ball," he added.

Alyssa Joseph is another young player who has impressed Windlan with her confidence and ability to create opportunities.

"Alyssa Joseph - Quick point guard who can create shots for others and plays with no fear. She could be a diamond in the rough for us," Windlan said.

With so many younger players expected to contribute, South Laurel will be relying on athletes in the eighth, ninth and 10th grades to complement its two seniors.

South Laurel enters the season with several strengths, including experienced starters, perimeter shooting, players capable of attacking the basket and a defense that has proven effective against quality competition.

"We return four out of

SEE **STRENGTHS,** PAGE 11

KING

Continued from Page 9

said. "She plays with a high motor and can really score the ball."

While Clemens and King are expected to play significant roles, Pietrowski believes Corbin's overall depth could be one of its greatest advantages.

Nine additional players are expected to see playing time, giving the Lady Redhounds the ability to use different lineups and adjust their style of play depending on the opponent.

"Beyond that we have nine girls that will all see playing time," Pietrowski said. "If we remain unselfish and buy into the team-first motto we can be very dangerous. We will have the ability to play different styles, defenses and present other teams problems."

That group includes Sayde Mobley, Kalley Stewart, Paityn Creech, Arabella Clemens, Lynnlee Pietrowski, Ashtyn Creech, Brylee Frederick, Braylen Frederick and Bella St. John.

With a combination of experienced upperclassmen and promising younger players, Corbin should have several options as Pietrowski establishes his rotation.

One of the biggest advantages Pietrowski sees in his team is its ability to play different styles.

Rather than relying on one particular approach, he believes the Lady Redhounds have enough versatility to adjust offensively and defensively.

"Versatility and depth," Pietrowski said when asked about his team's strengths. "We can play a variety of styles offensively and defensively."

That flexibility could become especially important against a demanding schedule featuring several of the region's top programs.

The biggest challenge might be getting the entire roster comfortable with its new system while developing the chemistry needed to succeed.

"Meshing this group together and staying positive during trying times," Pietrowski said when asked about areas of concern.

The longtime coach understands there will be adjustments throughout the season, but he believes those challenges can help prepare his team for postseason competition.

"We have to develop over the entire season," Pietrowski said. "We have a difficult schedule and that's intentional. We want to make a push in the postseason."

Pietrowski isn't shying away from difficult competition during his first season leading the Lady Redhounds.

Corbin will face several of the 13th Region's strongest teams while also competing against quality opponents outside the region.

The Lady Redhounds will also participate in a challenging Christmas tournament, giving them additional opportunities to measure their progress.

"We have a very challenging schedule this season," Pietrowski said. "We play all the top teams in the region, have added some quality opponents out of region and scheduled a high-level Christmas tournament. Couple that with playing in a very competitive district and we obviously will be tested on most nights."

Those challenges will extend into 50th District competition, where South Laurel and Whitley County are expected to be among the region's strongest teams.

South Laurel is coming off a 26-7 season that included a district championship and a runner-up finish in the 13th Region Tournament.

Whitley County also returns an experienced roster after reaching the district championship game and advancing to the regional tournament.

Pietrowski believes both programs deserve to enter the season ahead of Corbin until the Lady Redhounds prove they can compete with them.

"Right now you have to rank South Laurel and Whitley County above us until we can prove otherwise," Pietrowski said. "Both are well coached and loaded with talent and depth."

Despite the challenges of adjusting to a new coach and competing in one of the region's toughest districts, Pietrowski believes Corbin has the potential to make a serious postseason run.

The Lady Redhounds have enough returning talent and depth to compete against quality opponents, but their development throughout the regular season will ultimately determine how far they can advance.

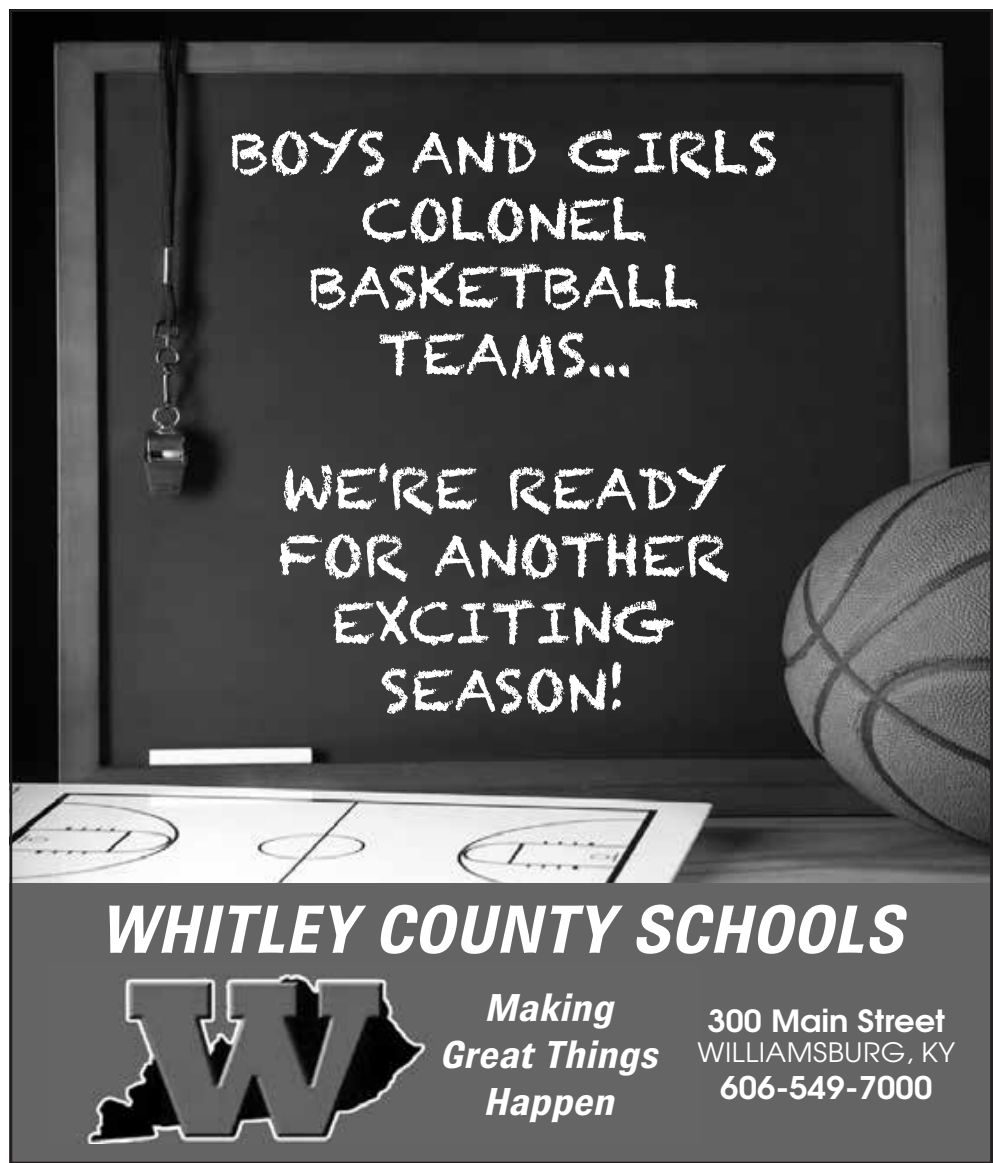
"I do think we can make a run at region, that said there is a lot of ground to make up over the course of the season," Pietrowski said.

For a coach who has already experienced four regional championships and two trips to the Sweet Sixteen's Elite Eight, the opportunity to build another championship contender at Corbin provides a new challenge.

But Pietrowski isn't looking to completely overhaul what Wilson established during his time leading the Lady Redhounds.

Instead, he hopes to build on that foundation while introducing his own system and championship expectations.

"I'm excited about the direction our program is headed," Pietrowski said. "Coach Wilson had it in an excellent place and we plan to build off that foundation. Our girls are hungry, hard working and coachable. We are excited to get our season started up soon."



COLONELS

Continued from Page 6

have improved tremendously as a group and excited to see what we can do."

Experience should be another advantage for Whitley County.

"We have a veteran group that have played a lot the last two to three years," Swords said. "We also have some young guys with bright futures we are trying to mix in."

One of Whitley County's biggest strengths entering the season is its ability to score from multiple positions.

With Mahan, Fuson and Jackson returning, along with the addition of Gentry and the return of Meadors, Swords believes the Colonels could be difficult to defend.

"I think our depth will be a positive for us, our guards are really good, we got some depth behind Riley and Jase as well," he said. "We got 4 kids that are capable of scoring 20-plus on any given night so as long as we share the basketball we shouldn't have many problems on the offensive end as the season goes."

While the offensive potential is encouraging, Swords knows the Colonels must improve in other areas to compete for championships.

"Rebounding and communication are two big areas we are trying to improve in," he said.

Those improvements, along with consistent defensive effort and unselfish play, will be critical to Whitley County's success.

"How well we play together and how well we rebound and defend will determine how much success we have," Swords said.

Whitley County also isn't backing away from challenging competition.

Swords has strengthened the Colonels' schedule considerably in hopes of preparing his team for the demanding 50th District and 13th Region postseason tournaments.

"We have really ramped up our schedule," he said. "We play all the really good teams in the region again but have added out of region Frederick Douglass, Knoxville Central twice, who went 28-3 last year, Bourbon County who won 20-plus games, Pulaski Southwestern, Wayne County, and Rowan County. We play in Madison Central tournament where we will play three games against top teams in the state and will play some good out of state teams in our Borderline Classic."

The schedule should provide plenty of opportunities for the Colonels to measure themselves against quality competition before district tournament play begins.

And the 50th District could be one of the toughest in the region.

Whitley County earned the district's No. 1 seed last season but came up four points short of winning the championship against Corbin.

That loss remains a motivating factor for Swords and his returning players.

"We were the No. 1 seed last year and feel like we let the district championship get away from us last year," Swords said. "We feel we are capable of getting the No. 1 seed again and winning the district but we know it will be tough with the transfers that Corbin and South added. I think three of the top four teams are in the 50th District. The district is as good as it has ever been."

Last season's regional tournament appearance and victory over Pineville represented major milestones for Whitley County basketball.

But Swords doesn't want his program to be satisfied with simply reaching the regional tournament.

"I think we are a top-level team in the region, I think we are very capable of making a run, last year we ended a 52 year drought of a region tournament win so now we are looking to continue the momentum from that," he said. "I think there's about six to eight teams that could be capable of winning the whole thing."

CARDINALS

Continued from Page 5

skill set. We think Ethan is one of the top scorers in the state and someone who will be able to go get us a bucket when we need it."

Brayden Cassidy is another player Sizemore expects to take a significant step forward.

After dedicating considerable time to improving his strength and athleticism, Cassidy could become one of the Cardinals' most dependable scoring options.

"I look for him to have a breakout season," Sizemore said. "He has lived in the weight room since April. He has gotten stronger and become a more explosive athlete. He is a three-level scorer who we think can go get us a basket in crunch time."

Joe Smith could also play a major role after injuries limited his opportunities during the previous two seasons.

His versatility gives South Laurel another player capable of creating mismatches and contributing at multiple positions.

"Joe has been a huge surprise to me. I knew he was a good player but because of limited minutes due to injury over the last couple seasons I hadn't got a chance to watch him play much," Sizemore said. "With that being said, he has a chance to be a top player in the region. He is extremely versatile, we can run him at the point, put him inside against a smaller player and not to mention he is a great passer. I look for him to have a huge year."

Kaden Taylor is another Cardinal who has impressed his new coach with his offseason improvement.

"Has made as much improvement as anyone on our roster," Sizemore said of Taylor. "He is bigger and stronger than he was in the spring, he is being more aggressive going to the basket and just overall he looks like a complete player."

While South Laurel has several experienced players to lean on, Sizemore is equally excited about the potential of his younger talent.

Bell County sophomore transfer Braxton Ferguson is expected to play a significant role on both ends of the floor.

"Braxton has had a great offseason and looks to have taken another huge jump going into his sophomore season," Sizemore said. "Overall, he has continued to get stronger and become a better overall player. We think Braxton is a three-level scorer and someone we can put on the other team's best player and shut them down. I expect a huge sophomore season from the super talented combo guard."

Another intriguing addition is 6-foot-9 Bell County freshman transfer Bentley Buell, whose combination of size and perimeter skills could create matchup problems for opposing teams.

"Bentley is another kid who has made a huge jump this offseason," Sizemore said. "He is a 6'9 freshman, who is big, can jump, play inside and has the ability to go out on the floor to shoot the ball and to drive. He will add a different dynamic to our team when he is in the game. Bentley's potential is through the roof and we feel he is going to have a breakout season."

South Laurel will also look for contributions from sophomore point guard Maddox Warren, sophomore center Logan Webb and senior forward Cannon Jackson.

Their presence gives the Cardinals additional options as Sizemore works to establish his rotation.

With multiple players capable of contributing offensively, Sizemore believes South Laurel's physical presence could become one of its biggest advantages.

"Our overall size, strength and toughness," Sizemore said when asked about his team's strengths. "We think we are going to be really good defensively and a solid rebounding team. We think we can give teams problems in the lane on both ends of the floor."

The Cardinals still have work to do as they adjust to a different coaching philosophy and develop chemistry during live competition.

"We just need to get minutes on the floor playing together," Sizemore said. "We have a new coach and updated roster who needs real live games to help

SEE **OPPONENTS,** PAGE 14

STRENGTHS

Continued from Page 10

five starters and we play a tough schedule to prepare us for the tournament," Windlan said. "We have good shooters, good drivers and play solid team defense."

Windlan knows his team must improve in several areas to take the next step.

"Rebounding and consistent 3-point and free throw shooting," he said when asked about areas that need improvement.

Staying healthy will also be important.

The Lady Cardinals have already suffered a significant setback with the loss of Shelby Smith, who served as the team's sixth player last season before suffering a knee injury in June.

"Stay injury-free, we already lost our sixth man from last season in Shelby Smith to knee injury in June," Windlan said. "Rebound the ball better and talk more on defense."

Those areas could become important during postseason play, where a handful of possessions can determine whether a team advances or sees its season come to an end.

Windlan isn't making things easy for his Lady Cardinals during the regular season.

South Laurel played only 10 summer games, choosing instead to spend additional time improving individual skills, speed and agility.

"We played very good competition but only played 10 games as we worked on skill development, speed and agility," Windlan said. "I feel like this team is ready to compete at a high level and will have to with our very difficult schedule."

The Lady Cardinals will face a demanding slate of opponents throughout the season, something Windlan believes will prepare his players for the pressure of postseason basketball.

"I believe our schedule is the toughest or one of the toughest in the state of Kentucky," he said.

South Laurel won't have to wait long for its first major test.

The Lady Cardinals open the season December 1 at George Rogers Clark, giving them an immediate opportunity to measure themselves against quality competition.

"Looking forward to season and seeing how we respond to our difficult schedule," Windlan said. "Open up at GRC Dec. 1st, so great test right away in great atmosphere. Wanting to see how this team develops over the course of the season. Go Cards."

After going unbeaten against 50th District competition last season and winning the district tournament championship, South Laurel enters the 2026-27 campaign as the team to beat in Windlan's eyes.

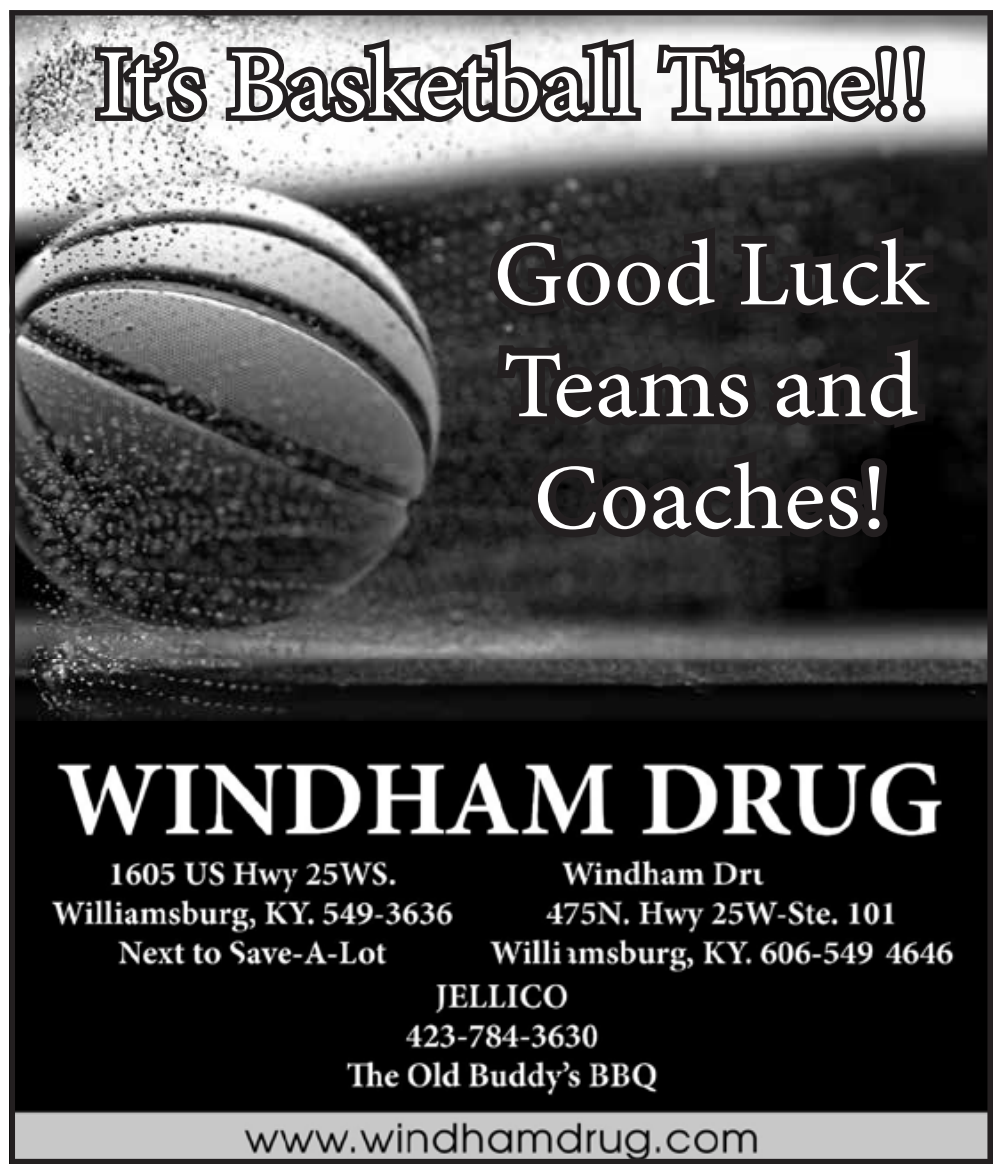
He understands the challenges that Corbin and Whitley County will present.

"I would say we are the favorites," Windlan said. "Whitley County and Corbin are very good as well so always a tough district to win."

The Lady Cardinals also expect to be among the top contenders for the 13th Region championship.

But until South Laurel can get past North Laurel, Windlan believes the Lady Jaguars deserve to remain ahead of his team in the regional pecking order.

"I would say we are No. 2 until we can beat North Laurel in the region, have been runners up last two seasons," Windlan said. "Knox, Corbin, Whitley County, Harlan County and Bell County will be other highly-ranked teams in region."



REDHOUNDS

Continued from Page 2

combinations are most effective.

Burton believes Corbin has enough experienced players to compete at a high level, although blending returning talent with newcomers and athletes transitioning from football will take time.

"We should have a good amount of experience," Burton said. "Blending everything together with new incoming players and football players will take some time."

Corbin enters the season with several players capable of making significant contributions.

Burton identified Evan Ellis, Trey Person and Madison Central transfer Grayson Burton as three of the team's most talented players.

Their development and ability to execute the new system could play a major role in determining how quickly the Redhounds come together.

"Evan Ellis, Trey Person, and Grayson Burton will probably be considered our most talented players," Burton said.

The Redhounds also have several additional players who have impressed their new coach during preseason preparations.

"Brendan Murphy, Brody Wilson, and Keaton Smith have performed well in the preseason," Burton said.

Football players Braxton Tolliver and Dalton Henderson are also expected to contribute once they make the transition to basketball.

"Braxton Tolliver and Dalton Henderson, both football players, were very productive during the summer," Burton said.

With a mixture of experienced players, incoming talent and multi-sport athletes, Corbin should have several options as Burton continues evaluating his roster.

The challenge will be getting everyone comfortable with the new system and developing the chemistry necessary to compete against quality opponents.

Burton believes the Redhounds have the personnel to become a productive offensive team capable of attacking opponents in different ways.

His system will emphasize versatility on both ends of the floor, allowing Corbin to adjust its approach depending on the opponent and game situation.

"Our strengths should be multiple and productive offensively," Burton said. "When football kids learn system of play, defense should be a plus productive part of our system."

The return of football players will be an important part of the team's development, particularly as those athletes become familiar with Burton's defensive expectations.

Unlike teams returning an established system, Corbin will likely experience considerable changes throughout the season.

Burton understands the Redhounds could look much different in February than they do when the season begins in December.

"It is not really a concern, but we could look very different in February as we do in December," Burton said. "As much as schematically and personnel. It will be a continual enjoyable work in progress."

That approach reflects Burton's emphasis on long-term development rather than expecting his team to reach its potential immediately.

For Corbin, success will depend on how effectively players learn and execute the new system.

"Executing our system of play at a high level," Burton said when asked about the keys to success. "We will be multiple both on offense and defense."

Burton isn't planning to ease into his first season leading the Redhounds.

Corbin is expected to face one of the more demanding schedules in the 13th Region, giving the team opportunities to test itself while continuing to develop.

"We should have one of the tougher schedules in our region," Burton said. "The idea is to improve throughout the season."

The difficult competition should provide valuable experience for a team adjusting to a new coaching staff and different system.

It will also help prepare the Redhounds for another challenging race in the 50th District.

Corbin, South Laurel and Whitley County are expected to be among the district's strongest teams, setting up what could be another closely contested battle for postseason positioning.

Last season, Whitley County earned the district's No. 1 seed, but Corbin captured the tournament championship with a four-point victory over the Colonels.

South Laurel also enters the season with a new coach in Brad Sizemore and a talented roster looking to return to regional tournament contention.

Burton expects little separation between the district's leading contenders.

"I would think the margin will be tight within our district between the top three teams," he said.

With three programs capable of competing for a district championship, regular-season matchups could have significant implications for postseason seeding.

Despite the changes surrounding the program, Burton isn't lowering Corbin's expectations.

The Redhounds have reached the 13th Region Tournament semifinals in each of the past two seasons, and the goal this winter will be to take another step toward a regional championship.

Burton recognizes that the 13th Region features several talented programs capable of making deep postseason runs.

North Laurel enters the season as the defending regional champion while Whitley County, South Laurel and other contenders will be looking to challenge for the title.

Burton believes Corbin belongs in that conversation, provided the Redhounds continue developing and remain healthy.

"It will be challenging because of the other talented schools in the region," Burton said. "With that and good health, we are still expecting to compete for the region title."

JAGUARS

Continued from Page 4

replace.

"We also lost senior Brayden Hampton to a knee injury in the preseason," Valentine said. "He brought a lot toughness to us on the defensive end that someone will have to provide."

Despite those losses, Valentine believes the experience gained by his returning players, combined with their offseason development, gives North Laurel a strong foundation.

"Our guys are a year older and have worked extremely hard in the offseason," Valentine said. "They have gotten stronger and expanded their game. We are still working to get everyone healthy in the preseason and we are excited to get our guys playing football back in the gym eventually."

North Laurel returns several players who contributed to last season's championship run.

Junior Corey Cunagin is the Jaguars' leading returning scorer after averaging 11.2 points per game last season.

Fellow junior Kaiden Allen averaged 9.1 points per game while senior Cooper Elza contributed 8.5 points per contest.

Senior Cam Anderson also returns after averaging 2.0 points per game.

Those four players give Valentine an experienced nucleus to build around as the Jaguars work to replace their departed scoring leaders.

"Our guys are a year older and have worked extremely hard in the offseason. They have gotten stronger and expanded their game. We are still working to get everyone healthy in the preseason and we are excited to get our guys playing football back in the gym eventually."

Valentine was particularly encouraged by the development of Cunagin and Allen during the offseason.

"I saw a lot of growth this summer," Valentine said. "It was good to sit back and see what guys could do. Kaiden and Corey took huge strides on the summer circuit and our younger guys gained valuable experience."

Elza is expected to provide stability at point guard, while Anderson's return from football should give North Laurel another experienced option.

"Cooper continues to be steady force for us at the point guard spot and keeps getting better," Valentine said. "Cam was much improved this summer as we are excited to get him back from football."

The continued development of those returning players will be important as North Laurel attempts to maintain its position among the region's top teams.

One of North Laurel's most intriguing newcomers is Clay County junior transfer Jacob Rogers, who averaged 12 points per game before joining the Jaguars.

Rogers is expected to provide additional scoring and defensive ability as Valentine looks to replace the production lost from last season.

"Jacob will be a nice addition with his ability to shoot the ball and defend on the ball," Valentine said.

Several other players are expected to compete for significant minutes.

Junior Trey Smith and junior Trendon Dykes have impressed during preseason preparations, while sophomore Ryder Davidson and freshman Rylan Robbins are among the younger players looking to contribute.

"Trey and Trendon have stepped up in the preseason as well and will be relied heavily on this season," Valentine said. "We also have a host of younger guys that continue to grow and challenge for minutes including Rylan Robbins and Ryder Davidson."

The Jaguars' roster also includes senior Cooper Elza, junior Kaiden Allen, sophomore Colton Stewart, junior Corey Cunagin, sophomore Colter Elza, junior Aiden Napier, senior Cam Anderson, freshman Easton George, freshman Peerce Chadwell and freshman Grayson Martin.

With a mixture of upperclassmen and younger talent, Valentine believes North Laurel has the potential to develop considerable depth.

That depth could allow the Jaguars to use different lineups and maintain offensive balance throughout the season.

"We will have very good balance this year offensively," Valentine said. "I feel like we can have really good balance and I'm excited about the possibility of the depth we have this year as we can play a lot of different lineups."

North Laurel won't have much time to ease

SEE **VALENTINE,** PAGE 13

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CAMP

Continued from Page 3

The Lady Wildcats played just one summer game, leaving the new coaching staff with fewer opportunities to assess the team against outside competition.

But what Shields saw from her players during that limited time left her encouraged.

"We were hired late in the summer and only got to play one summer game," Shields said. "But we found out our team has grit. It is made up of girls that want to get better and are willing to put in the work. We will show progress throughout the year. Our beginning scrimmages will show us what we need to work on most and we will start there."

With limited summer competition, the Lady Wildcats will rely heavily on preseason practices and scrimmages to determine their strengths, weaknesses and playing rotations.

For Shields, the early portion of the season will be particularly important as players adjust to new responsibilities and become more comfortable with the expectations of a different coaching staff.

The Lady Wildcats also face the challenge of developing a consistent offense after losing 85 percent of their scoring production from last season.

That makes the development of returning players and the emergence of new contributors especially important.

Although Lynn Camp lost three starters, the Lady Wildcats return several players who have gained starting experience during their careers.

Destiny Chancellor, Aubrey Hollin and Bella Fox will be counted on to provide leadership and production as the program begins its rebuilding process.

Chancellor returns as a post player and has shown improvement in her ability to contribute offensively around the basket.

"We have three returning players with some starts in their career," Shields said. "Destiny Chancellor, our returning post has shown progress in being able to take in the paint and we look forward to her continuing to do that."

Hollin is another player Shields expects to take on an expanded role.

After receiving limited starting opportunities previously, Hollin has impressed the coaching staff with her development.

"Aubrey Hollin saw limited starts but has shown a lot of promise in summer and practices," Shields said. "We look for her to be a key member of our offense."

Fox also returns and will be expected to contribute as the Lady Wildcats look for more consistent offensive production.

"Bella Fox is also returning," Shields said. "We expect her to continue the progress she has shown so far. And we want all three to step up as leaders of the team."

With a roster featuring several inexperienced players, the leadership of Chancellor, Hollin and Fox could be just as important as their contributions on the court.

Another player who could see an expanded role is Bri Morgan.

"Bri Morgan has shown a lot of growth over the summer and could be looking at significant minutes," Shields said.

Morgan's development gives the Lady Wildcats another option as they attempt to establish a dependable rotation.

One of the biggest challenges facing Shields will be determining which players are best suited for specific roles.

The Lady Wildcats feature a mixture of guards and post players, giving the coaching staff flexibility when developing different lineups.

"The overall makeup of the group is very balanced," Shields said. "We have several guards and several post players. We expect this to give us a lot of opportunities to create different looks depending on what is needed for each game."

That balance could become an important asset as Lynn Camp continues developing its offensive and defensive identity.

Several players who previously saw limited action could find themselves taking on considerably larger responsibilities.

"There are people who have played but haven't really had major roles in the team in the past," Shields said. "We also have several new players who are showing promise. They are all learning and growing as players."

Among those returning to the program are Jayden Petrey, Jylenda Lawrence, Lois Waite and Hailey Martin.

Shields expects those players to compete for additional playing time while younger members of the roster continue developing.

"Jayden Petrey, Jylenda Lawrence, Lois Waite and Hailey Martin have all come back out for the team this year," Shields said. "We expect them to see more playing time this season and are looking for our younger players to step out and take on roles on this team as well."

With so many opportunities available, competition for playing time should be an important part of the Lady Wildcats' development.

While Lynn Camp faces significant questions about its offensive production and overall experience, Shields believes the Lady Wildcats have already established one important strength.

Their willingness to work together.

The new coach has been encouraged by the relationships developing among her players and the way they have supported one another during the preseason.

"They have really bonded and created an atmosphere where everyone is supported and pushed to do their best," Shields said.

Shields also believes her players possess the determination necessary to overcome difficult stretches during the season.

"You can never underestimate a team that is willing to put in the hard

SEE **SHIELDS,** PAGE 14

VALENTINE

Continued from Page 12

into the new season.

The Jaguars will open their campaign on the road against Taylor County, a team Valentine expects to be among the top contenders in its region.

Taylor County has been particularly difficult to beat on its home court, winning 23 of its previous 24 home games over the past two seasons.

"We will once again play a very challenging schedule that will test us early," Valentine said. "We open the season at Taylor County who is picked to win the region and has won 23 of 24 games at home the past two seasons. It will give us a good indication of where we are early in the season."

North Laurel will also return to two prestigious events, the WYMT Classic and the WGM Classic at Lexington Catholic.

Those tournaments, combined with a demanding regular season schedule, should provide the Jaguars with plenty of opportunities to compete against quality opponents.

"We are excited to return the WYMT Classic and WGM Classic at Lexington Catholic," Valentine said. "We have eight games against the preseason top 25, excluding teams we will play in tournaments."

Valentine believes facing strong competition throughout the regular season is essential to preparing his players for the challenges of postseason basketball.

"I believe it's important to put our guys on the biggest stage to help them individually as well as help our team get ready for the post season," Valentine said. "We will be battle tested by tournament time."

Although North Laurel enters the season as the two-time defending regional champion, Valentine understands the Jaguars will face considerable competition in their pursuit of a third straight title.

The 13th Region features several talented teams capable of making deep postseason runs, and Valentine believes the race for the championship could be especially competitive.

"The region is extremely balanced again this year with a number of teams capable of winning," Valentine said. "We'll continue to test our team and improve all season to prepare for the tournament."

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WILDCATS

Continued from Page 3

McKeehan said. "Miguel Arribas, Dylan Sizemore, Cason Mills, Max Carnes, Shawn Reyes, Ethan Curry and Braxton Lewis to name a few."

That competition for playing time could become one of the Wildcats' biggest advantages.

McKeehan believes his team has more depth than it did last season, which should lead to more competitive practices and give Lynn Camp additional options during games.

"We have a good nucleus returning along with some new additions," McKeehan said. "Our younger guys have really improved too. Overall, we will have more depth and that makes for more competitive practices and we know that will help come game time."

The Wildcats' increased depth could be particularly valuable as McKeehan attempts to establish a consistent rotation.

Rather than relying on a small group of players to carry the majority of the workload, he believes Lynn Camp could have as many as 10 to 12 players capable of providing meaningful minutes.

"Putting all the pieces together with our returning guys and our new guys," McKeehan said when asked about the keys to success. "We will have 10-12 kids that can step in at any time and produce quality minutes for us."

Although Lynn Camp didn't have its entire roster available throughout the summer, McKeehan believes the Wildcats benefited from competing against quality opponents.

Injuries and other summer commitments forced players to take on different responsibilities, giving several Wildcats opportunities to develop their versatility.

The team participated in multiple camps and played approximately 45 games between its varsity and junior varsity squads.

"We didn't have all of our guys at times this summer due to injuries and the normal summer activities, but our kids learned different spots and we played a very tough schedule going to multiple team camps," McKeehan said. "We played around 45 total games between Varsity and JV and gained valuable experience."

That experience should help the Wildcats as they continue developing within McKeehan's system.

After spending last season adjusting to a different style of play, Lynn Camp enters the new campaign with a better understanding of what its coach expects.

"Our kids understand our system now, and they have all improved in the offseason," McKeehan said. "We hope that a year of experience and summer ball will help them translate to game action. As mentioned, a good nucleus returning with some new additions should only add to our depth."

McKeehan believes continued improvement will depend largely on his team's ability to maintain its focus throughout the season.

"We need to continue to work hard daily and stay focused on us more so than our opponents," he said. "I feel like if we do that, we can have a successful season."

One of the highlights of Lynn Camp's upcoming schedule will be the return of the Wildcat Classic.

The Wildcats will host the tournament December 19-22, welcoming a competitive field featuring opponents from both inside and outside the 13th Region.

McKeehan believes the event, along with the team's regular-season schedule, will provide valuable preparation for postseason competition.

"We feel like our schedule will prepare us for postseason play, we play a lot of schools similar in school size," McKeehan said. "We are also bringing back and hosting The Wildcat Classic, December 19-22. We are excited to host our annual tournament again this year and we feel it's a very competitive field with a good mix of region and non region opponents."

Lynn Camp will also compete in the 13th Region All 'A' Classic, an event McKeehan hopes his team can make a strong showing in.

"We always look forward to competing in the All 'A' Region Tournament and want to go compete well in it," McKeehan said. "These tournaments and our regular season will prepare us for our district opponents and postseason play."

Lynn Camp faces a difficult task in the 51st District, where Knox Central, Pineville and Barbourville are expected to provide strong competition.

The Wildcats went winless in five district games last season and will be looking to become more competitive against those opponents.

McKeehan understands his team faces an uphill battle, but he believes the Wildcats can make progress if they continue improving throughout the season.

"Right now, we know we are in a tough district," McKeehan said. "We want to keep making strides forward and hopefully we can knock one of them off on any given night. Pineville, Knox Central, and Barbourville are all good teams and we look forward to the challenge night in and night out against our district opponents."

For Lynn Camp, the goal is to put itself in a position to compete for a postseason berth.

After falling to Knox Central in last season's district semifinals, the Wildcats hope their returning experience and improved depth can help them close the gap.

McKeehan has set his sights on reaching the 13th Region Tournament at The Arena.

"We want to keep making strides forward and our goal is to finish the season at The Arena in the region tournament and compete in All A Region and our district games," McKeehan said. "Our kids have vastly improved and we want to give the Lynn Camp community a product that they can be proud of on and off the court. Our kids continue to improve daily and will work hard for our school and community every day."

OPPONENTS

Continued from Page 11

us learn each other and figure out what is going to be our best way to play."

For Sizemore, establishing a team-first mentality will be just as important as developing individual talent.

"Continue to be team-first guys, put the team success above everything else," he said. "Don't be satisfied and come to the gym every day to get better."

South Laurel won't have an easy path through the regular season.

The Cardinals will face several of the region's top programs while also testing themselves against quality opponents outside the 13th Region.

"We have a really tough schedule, we are playing all the main teams in the region," Sizemore said. "We have two solid holiday tournaments at LCA and in Pigeon Forge. And we will play some top out of region teams throughout our schedule. We think the last two weeks of tough games in a row will help especially heading into postseason play."

The Cardinals will also have to navigate what figures to be a competitive 50th District race featuring Corbin, Whitley County and Williamsburg.

Sizemore believes his team has the ability to compete for the district championship and position itself for a postseason run.

"I think we will be one of the better teams in our district and in the region," Sizemore said. "There are several good teams and we feel like we are going to be right there with a shot at winning it at the end of the year."

After missing the 13th Region Tournament for the first time in more than a decade, South Laurel enters the season determined to return to postseason prominence.

Sizemore isn't shying away from championship expectations.

In fact, he believes the Cardinals have enough talent to challenge for the region's top spot if they continue improving throughout the season.

"We feel like we can be a top one to three team in the region, depending on how we play each night," Sizemore said. "This group has the potential to make a deep postseason run. If we continue to improve each week and stay hungry this could be the best team I've put on the floor."

For Sizemore, the opportunity to lead the same program he once helped take to the Sweet Sixteen brings the chance to build another championship contender.

And with a talented roster and renewed expectations, the Cardinals are hoping his homecoming will mark the beginning of another successful chapter in South Laurel basketball history.

"We are really excited for the upcoming season, we have a great group of kids who have worked extremely hard and I hope they see the rewards of all their hard work at the end of the year," Sizemore said.

SHIELDS

Continued from Page 13

work," she said.

That mentality will be particularly important for a program attempting to improve after winning just six games last season.

Rather than focusing entirely on immediate results, Shields wants her players to develop the habits necessary to become more competitive over time.

She also recognizes that the program has experienced significant coaching turnover in recent years, something she believes has affected player development.

"Due to significant coach turnover in the past few years, there are gaps in their skill level," Shields said. "We are working hard to improve those areas and create a foundation to build a program that is successful."

For Lynn Camp, that means establishing consistency in practices, improving fundamentals and helping players become comfortable with their responsibilities.

Shields has identified several areas that must improve if the Lady Wildcats are going to become more competitive.

Among the biggest priorities are reducing turnovers and improving defensive execution.

Both areas presented problems last season, and Shields believes progress will be necessary for the team to take the next step.

"We need people to step up and fill roles," Shields said. "We also need to cut down on turnovers. That was a big area of concern last year. We need to make a lot of improvement in the defensive end of our game as well."

With much of last season's offensive production gone, protecting possessions will be especially important.

The Lady Wildcats can't afford to consistently give opponents additional scoring opportunities while trying to develop a new offensive identity.

Improved defensive play could also help Lynn Camp remain competitive as its younger players gain experience.

Shields hopes those improvements will become more noticeable as the season progresses.

Although Shields and her staff inherited a schedule that had already been established, she believes it provides the Lady Wildcats with opportunities to develop confidence and prepare for postseason competition.

The schedule was assembled by former coach Janet Jones, and Shields appreciates the opportunity it gives her team to grow.

"Since we are new, the schedule was already made but Coach Jones did a great job putting together a schedule that will help us build confidence and gain good experience for the postseason," Shields said.

The Lady Wildcats will once again face a challenging 51st District that includes Knox Central, Pineville and Barbourville.

Lynn Camp failed to win a district game last season, but Shields believes the competitive balance within the district provides opportunities for improvement.

"Our district is well-balanced since all but Knox are single 'A' schools," Shields said. "Every team is always very competitive. Given our balance and the girls work ethic, we think will be able to compete in District this year."

The Lady Wildcats' immediate goal will be to become more competitive against their district opponents while continuing to build toward postseason success.

Shields also believes the transition to the 13th Region's new Super Region format will present opportunities for programs throughout the region.

"With Region becoming a Super Region, I look for every team to have an opportunity to achieve their goals since this will be new for all of us," Shields said. "We would like the opportunity to show what we can."

While the Lady Wildcats would welcome immediate improvement in the win column, Shields is also looking beyond the upcoming season.

Lynn Camp expects to lose only one senior following the 2026-27 campaign, giving the program an opportunity to develop continuity over the next several years.

Shields understands the rebuilding process will require patience, but she is enthusiastic about the opportunity to lead the Lady Wildcats.

"I am happy to be a Lynn Camp Wildcat," Shields said. "I am looking forward to seeing how these girls can grow over the next couple of years. We only lose one senior this year and are looking forward to becoming a team that is competitive in both District and Region."

JACKETS

Continued from Page 7

"We will return seven players who have started a varsity game for us. Which is very uncommon for a school to do," he said.

Among those returning is Reece Hatcher, whose season was cut short by an injury last winter.

Bargo believes Hatcher's return could provide a major boost to the Williamsburg offense.

"Reece Hatcher returns for us after missing the last half of the year last year," he said. "He is as strong as any guard in the region and we are a better team when he generates paint touches. He was among the region leaders last years in free throw attempts until his injury."

Lane Jeffries also returns after establishing himself as one of the Yellow Jackets' leading offensive contributors.

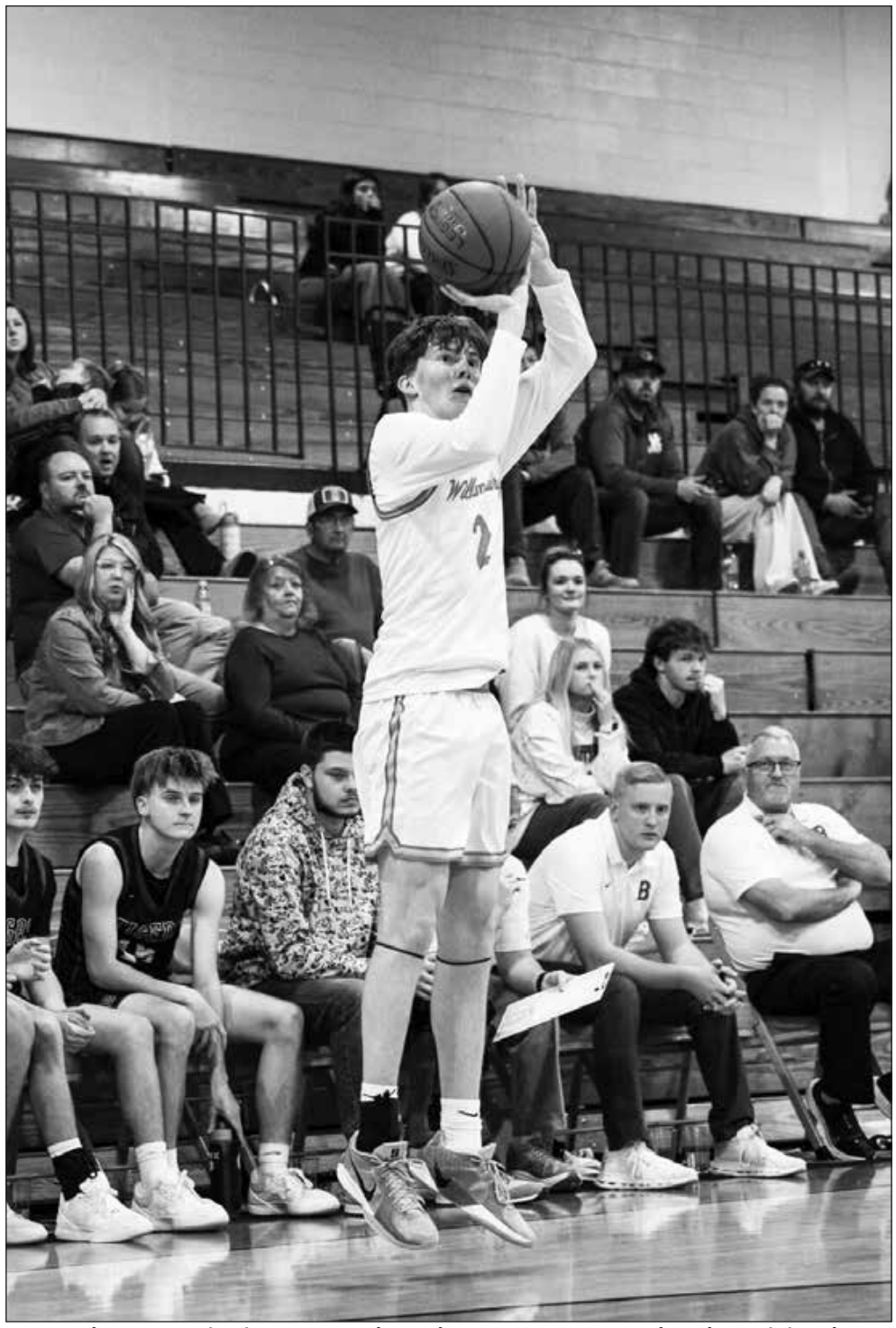
Jeffries averaged double figures in scoring last season despite having no previous varsity basketball experience.

"Lane Jeffries was a double digit scorer for us last season and he is just scratching the surface on how good he can be," Bargo said. "He had never played varsity basketball for us last season."

Another important returnee is TJ Cornett, whose athleticism and defensive ability could help Williamsburg create additional scoring opportunities.

"TJ Cornett returns and he is as athletic as anyone you can find," Bargo said. "He really can change the with his defense and getting us out into transition with his speed."

Freshman Landon White is another player Bargo expects to make an immediate impact.



Among those returning is Reece Hatcher, whose season was cut short by an injury last winter. Coach Bargo believes Hatcher's return could provide a major boost to the Williamsburg offense. | FILE

"Landon White is a big, physical freshman that is a guard who I have high expectations for and we are going to put a lot on his shoulders early," he said.

Senior Mason Rountree will be counted on to provide leadership, while junior Andy Shelton, freshman Asher Ellis and eighth-grader Eli Russell are also expected to contribute.

"Senior Mason Rountree will take over a leadership for us and we need him to do that," Bargo said. "Junior Andy Shelton, Freshman Asher Ellis, and 8th grader Eli Russell are all going to have roles on the team."

While the Yellow Jackets remain one of the younger teams in the district, Bargo believes their previous experiences have prepared them for the challenges ahead.

"We are youthful but have been battle tested," he said.

Williamsburg's offseason presented opportunities for several younger players to gain valuable experience.

With the team's two leading scorers unavailable during summer competition, Bargo was forced to rely on a lineup that included two freshmen and an eighth-grader.

Rather than viewing that as a setback, he believes those minutes will pay off.

"We absolutely showed growth here the summer," Bargo said. "Our two leading scorers from the season were not with us over the summer so we had two freshmen starting for us and an 8th grader. Those varsity reps for them were really very valuable."

The Yellow Jackets hope that development translates into better execution, improved decision-making and more consistent performances.

Bargo believes his team's physicality could become one of its biggest strengths.

"I think our size and physicality will carry us at some point, but also think our ability to get paint touches to generate offense," he said.

Williamsburg still has several areas that need improvement, particularly perimeter shooting and defensive consistency.

"I worry about our ability to make shots. We really need someone to step up and be a consistent threat from three," Bargo said. "We are still a work in progress defensively. We have to learn how to play defense without fouling but we also have got to better at playing team defense."

Bargo also stressed two statistical areas that could determine whether the Yellow Jackets can turn competitive performances into victories.

"Winning the turnover battle and winning the rebounding battle," he said when asked about the keys to success.

Williamsburg once again faces the difficult task of competing against Corbin, South Laurel and Whitley County in 50th District play.

With all three opponents expected to be among the region's stronger programs, the Yellow Jackets will have little room for error.

Bargo understands the challenges his team faces as the district's lone Class A school, but he also believes competing against quality opponents can accelerate the program's development.

"I think our district is phenomenal," Bargo said. "The other three teams in the district make are three of the top five teams in the region. We are excited about the opportunity that that will present us. Being the only single A team in this district presents challenges but challenges present opportunities."

The Yellow Jackets' regular-season schedule is also designed to prepare them for postseason competition.

"Our schedule puts us in the best spot to be successful once postseason play comes," Bargo said. "We will be battle-tested."

Rather than focusing exclusively on wins and losses, Bargo wants his team to concentrate on its daily improvement and overall execution.

"We are a process-oriented team," he said. "You can win games and play poorly, but you can also lose games and play well. So as long as we perform well everything will take care of itself.

"I am really excited for this group," he added. "It is November 14, and we still have not had one practice with our entire team there. So, we aren't dealt the same hand. We will be getting our football kids back on November 16 and will have nine days to install everything before our first scrimmage on November 25 — four of my starters are football players. So we certainly have unique challenges that other teams don't."

Because of those circumstances, Bargo understands that Williamsburg might need additional time before reaching its full potential.

"It will be mid January before we see what our peak can be as a team. But I'm excited to go to battle with this group," he said.

WILLIAMSBURG

Continued from Page 7

of our seniors, Braylee Evans and Abby Moses."

Evans and Moses will be counted on to provide veteran leadership for a team that has spent several seasons learning and growing together.

Douglas believes that continuity has helped her players develop a better understanding of the game and stronger relationships on the court.

"Most importantly, I believe this group of young ladies has made tremendous strides in their basketball IQ and team chemistry," she said. "As we move from last season into this season, we will continue to focus on building stamina, recognizing our strengths and numbers both as a team and as individuals, and continuing to grow together. I am excited about the progress we have made and look forward to seeing what this group can accomplish."

One of Williamsburg's biggest advantages entering the season is familiarity.

With every player returning from last year's roster and additional younger players joining the program, the Lady Yellow Jackets won't have to start from scratch.

Instead, Douglas hopes to build on the progress her team has made over the past three seasons.

"Everyone is returning from last year with an addition of younger players," she said. "This is a special group of young ladies who have spent the past three years working together to develop their skills and build strong team chemistry. They bring a wonderful mix of personalities, character, and charm to our program."

Douglas believes the team's attitude, accountability and willingness to support one another have become some of its greatest strengths.

"Each day, they come in with a positive attitude, a willingness to work, and a goal in mind," Douglas said. "I personally believe these attributes are among our team's greatest strengths, especially their ability to hold themselves accountable and remain consistent in their efforts. Their willingness to support one another, take responsibility for their growth, and continue striving to improve is what makes this group so special. I am proud of the bond they have built and excited to see how they continue to grow together."

Although Douglas would have preferred more opportunities for her team to compete during the summer, the Lady Yellow Jackets continued working on individual development.

With several athletes participating in multiple sports, balancing basketball activities with other commitments presented challenges.

"Unfortunately, we did not have as many opportunities to compete over the summer as I would have liked," she said. "With spring sports wrapping up and fall sports beginning their training seasons, it can be difficult to share athletes without putting them at risk of burnout."

Rather than focus on what her team couldn't do, Douglas used the available time to emphasize individual fundamentals and smaller workout groups.

"However, I have learned to make the most of the opportunities we do have, work with the athletes available, and focus on individual and small-group workouts," she said. "These sessions allow us to spend more time developing individual skills, strengthening fundamentals, and continuing to grow as a team."

The Lady Yellow Jackets hope those improvements will translate into more competitive performances, particularly against 50th District opponents.

After going winless in seven district games last season, Williamsburg understands the importance of continuing to

SEE **DOUGLAS,** PAGE 16



Braylee Evans (pictured) and Abby Moses will be counted on to provide veteran leadership for a team that has spent several seasons learning and growing together. | FILE

DOUGLAS

Continued from Page 15

close the gap against its competition.

Douglas believes the progress is becoming increasingly evident, even though there is still plenty of work ahead.

"I believe we are closer than ever to showing what this group is capable of accomplishing this season," Douglas said. "However, there is always room for improvement, growth, and introducing new levels of skill. We understand that we are still far from mastery, and there is always more to learn and develop. Our focus will continue to be on getting better each day, building confidence, and pushing ourselves to reach our full potential."

For Williamsburg, success this season won't be measured solely by wins and losses.

Douglas wants her players to continue developing confidence, establishing positive habits and taking responsibility for their improvement.

With a roster that has remained together throughout the rebuilding process, the Lady Yellow Jackets hope their experience and chemistry will help produce better results on the court.

"The keys to success for us this season will be maintaining a strong mindset, a consistent work ethic, and staying healthy," Douglas said. "I strongly encourage my players to develop positive team habits while setting both team and individual milestones."

As Williamsburg prepares for another challenging season in the 50th District and 13th Region, Douglas remains committed to the long-term development of her program.

"By establishing goals, holding ourselves accountable, and remaining committed to the process, we can continue to grow as individuals and as a team," Douglas said. "Success will come from our daily commitment to getting better, supporting one another, and staying focused on what we want to accomplish."

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