



WINTER SPORTS

INSIDE: MASON COUNTY CENTRAL AND HART

Mason County Central boys basketball

Spartans learning as they go in '21

BY DAVID BOSSICK
MANAGING EDITOR

The Mason County Central boys basketball team enters the 2021 abbreviated season with a young group, and they've already started the learning process in the first couple weeks of the season.

The Spartans are starting a group that includes several sophomores with only one of those — Will Chye — having any varsity experience. But, longtime Mason County Central coach Tim Genson likes the smarts and skills of his youthful group.

"I think these guys, the sophomores in particular, are a pretty basketball-savvy



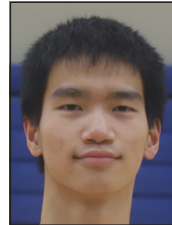
Rae'Kwon
Simpson



Ethan
Johnson



Jackson
Kimes



Thomas
Wagner



Carter
Beerman

group of kids," Genson said. "I think they seem to pick up on things pretty good. I think they're pretty sharp in that respect. I don't see us knocking down 100 3s. I think we have the capability of hitting perimeter shots. And, we have the capability of getting to the rim.

"The last two years, we rode Jeffery (Carrier) pretty hard. We had to play a certain way. I think we've got a little more diversity to who we are."

Carrier, now playing at Division II Davenport University, is one of the major losses from last year's

team. Carrier rightfully had much of the focus on him by other schools, and he delivered quite a bit alongside his teammates last year. This year, though, the Spartans will need to have more work done by several players to be successful.

What will help is that

many of the players coming up from the junior varsity team from last year, the sophomores such as Jayden Perrone, Jack Vanderhaag and Nick Trivisonno but also juniors Jeremiah Patterson and Zach Draper, have experienced winning several games, and that should assist in the Spartans' chances, too.

"The nice part with these sophomore boys, in particular, is they've done some travel ball. They've had some seventh and eighth grade success. They had a good second half to their JV season. I think they went 9-1 to close out the year," Genson said. "There's a different

mindset when they line up to play. I think that was a real challenge for our kids the last couple of years."

The Spartans do return a handful of players for their senior year that saw a mix of playing time. Rae'Kwon Simpson played in the post for Central for some critical minutes. Ethan Johnson played some, but was bothered by injuries and returns to full strength after being up as a sophomore. Jackson Kimes, Thomas Wagner and Carter Beerman played late in games a year ago.

Central's roster:

SEE BOYS, PAGE 5

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Mason County Central girls basketball

MCC blending leaders, newcomers

BY DAVID BOSSICK
MANAGING EDITOR

Mason County Central's girls basketball team return several players from last year's team that underwent a bit of baptism by fire.

And the start of this year was a bit of more of the same for the younger girls on the team.

In the first nine days of the abbreviated 2021 season, the Spartans were scheduled to play six games. It included games on back-to-back-to-back nights in the first week followed by two more games on consecutive nights this week.

Spartans coach Mike Weinert said with five girls having experience, and a mix of youngsters coming in, he had high hopes as the season was about to tip.

"It's a talented group. There's a lot of good pieces. Not having the summer to have played together, (it will be different)," Weinert said. "I expect good things out of this group, but it might take a while to have it all come together."

The Spartans returned Adria Quigley and Nyah Tyron, a junior and a senior, to the team that played as guards last season. Senior Reagan Wiese returned as

did junior Abby Lyon and sophomores Gabby Jensen and Charlie Banks. Out of that group, Jensen and Banks started at times last season.

Weinert said that although much of the off-season was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, some of his players were able to get some work in.

"Adria, Charlie and Gabby put a lot of work in," he said. "I expect them to make a pretty good (step forward) and be better."

Tyron figures to be an anchor for the Spartans, especially on the defensive end of the floor, Weinert said.

The Spartans' roster:

SENIORS: Reagan Wiese, Nyah Tyron, Mia McHenry, Arianna Jensen.

JUNIORS: Abby Lyon, Adria Quigley, Alivia Steiger, Jaden Petersen.

SOPHOMORES: Gabby Jensen, Charlie Banks.

FRESHMEN: Wren Nelson, Grace Weinert

The Spartans add a couple of players from the junior varsity team with Alivia Steiger and Jaden Petersen. Central has a couple of freshmen, too, who could contribute with Wren Nelson and Grace Weinert. One that showed to be a



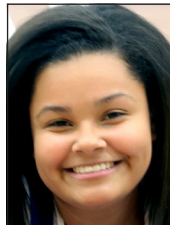
Nyah
Tyron



Reagan
Wiese



Arianna
Jensen



Mia
McHenry

bit of a difference maker early on in the season is freshman Nelson.

"Wren Nelson is a capable post player, but she's really young," Weinert said. "She's something we haven't had down low for a while. She's 6-foot, 2 1/2-inches and strong. She does a real nice job down there."

Because of Nelson, Weinert said he's able to run some different things for when she is in the game and for when she is out of the game.

"We're probably as ath-

letic as we've ever been. We've got some really good athletes," he said. "We've got some really good length, and they're smart."

While the Spartans are young with only a handful of seniors, Weinert said many of the teams in the West Michigan Conference return significant portions of their rosters from a year ago.

"Every team in our conference basically has their best players back," he said. "Our conference is very top heavy with juniors and seniors. Montague, who was 18-2 and won the whole thing started five juniors. They have five seniors back that went 18-2. Hart was 17-3 or 16-4 and lost one girl. Ravenna didn't lose anybody, and they beat Montague."

"It's going to be tough. We're going to learn a lot. It's going to be a tough league. I think we can make some noise, it's just how soon can we get all of these pieces together and play their best."

And with this season being so compact, Weinert said he plans to keep an eye on his players for the physical and mental toll as they sprint the to district.



DAILY NEWS FILE

Mason County Central's Nyah Tyron fires a pass into the post against Shelby during the Spartans' season opener last week in Scottville.

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Mason County Central wrestling

Spartans led by Quinn on mat

BY DAVID BOSSICK
MANAGING EDITOR

Mason County Central's wrestling program is much smaller than in years past, and it's for a variety of reasons according to coach Kendall Trim.

"We lost a lot of guys to graduation," he said. "I think, with our circumstances, any marginally-attached kid is not out. I kind of figured that would be the case."

What was a team of 16 wrestlers is down to eight — and they're without any seniors. But the Spartans have two very good wrestlers to lead the way in the room — juniors Andrew Quinn and Carter Hirschfeld.

"They should have really good seasons. They both qualified for state a year ago, and with Quinn being a medalist, I expect big things," Trim said.

Central's roster:

JUNIORS: Andrew Quinn, Carter Hirschfeld, Jacob Maidens, Ethan Wood

SOPHOMORE: Colton Bartlett
FRESHMEN: Aiden Hirschfeld, Zane McCabe, Gavin Wagner

The Spartans other two juniors, Jacob Maidens and



JEFF KIESSEL | DAILY NEWS FILE PHOTO

Mason County Central's Andrew Quinn wrestles in the 215-pound weight class against Pine River during last Saturday's wrestling quad. Quinn won his match by pin. Quinn, a state-medalist a year ago, is set to lead a slightly smaller Spartans squad this winter.

Ethan Wood, return to a smaller degree. Maidens wrestled last year, but he started the season nursing an injury. He was able to only do some of the conditioning

work when the teams were allowed to do so in January. Wood last wrestled in middle school, but he's starting to relearn many of the things he did on the mat.

Colton Bartlett, a sophomore, was on the varsity team a year ago, and the team adds a trio of freshmen, Aiden Hirschfeld, Gavin Wagner and Zane

McCabe. Trim said Aiden Hirschfeld and McCabe have experience from youth wrestling.

"Even though they're freshmen, I expect them to do pretty well," Trim said. "They know what they're doing. They're familiar with our system."

The other freshman, Wagner, moved to the district from Cedar Springs.

The duals season — which nearly all events will be as only four schools can wrestle at the same site — will even tougher because Central's lineup not only lacks wrestlers for some weight classes, but some wrestlers are around the same weight. Trim said Quinn is expected to be at 215 or 189 pounds, Carter Hirschfeld will hold down a spot at 140 or 145 pounds and Wood is expected to be at 130 or 135 pounds.

"Everyone else is under 125 (pounds)," Trim said. "Between 112 and 125 is the rest."

That means moving kids around might be a bit tough in the lineup. But Trim is thrilled with the group of kids that are out and working.

"The kids who have been

there are working hard. There's no attitudes and no issues. We're starting to teach, and when we teach, they're getting it fast," Trim said. "It's not like teaching someone how to wrestle for the first time. This is what we've got, and this what we have to do. I might have six weights (filled), and we've got six good kids."

Like all schools and sports, the Spartans understand that this season will be blink-and-you'll-miss-it.

"The whole thing is going to be over in eight weeks," Trim said. "We're doing the best we can. One of the best things is to be prepared. We haven't done this before. We won't be changing a lot, it'll be how do we make little changes and what things I have to cut out. We'll see how do we best adapt to the current situation. I feel like we're going to do well."

As for who could make a run to state, that was difficult to predict. The Spartans are in a fairly tough district and regional. The regional will likely have state powerhouse New Lothrop.

"I think all of these kids have shown the potential to be that level of wrestler," Trim said.

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Mason County Central competitive cheer

MCC ready for quick season

BY DAVID BOSSICK
MANAGING EDITOR

For most years, the competitive cheerleading team at Mason County Central uses weeks and weeks to set and refine its three rounds of cheerleading for the judges.

Obviously, 2021 is not a typical year.

"We typically would start practice the second week of November. We would not be ready with our first Round 3 (routine) until the first of January, and that's iffy," said Central coach Cheri Stibitz. "This has been a huge challenge."



Jasmin
Baugus

But, not one that won't be overcome. The Spartans are using the same words they did in Round 3 last year, but with different stunts and tumbling. Stibitz, after the Spartans competed at the Houghton Lake Invitational last weekend, said many teams across the state are doing the same thing.

"Luckily, the words are embedded in their minds," she said.

The Spartans, too, are lucky to return most of its team from a season ago. Seven girls are sophomores that were on the team as freshmen, and also returning are



DAILY NEWS FILE PHOTO

Jazmin Baugus and the Mason County Central competitive cheerleading team compete at the Spartans' invitational during the 2019-20 season. Baugus is the sole senior with the Spartans this winter.

junior Ashlyn Rose Kelley and senior Jasmin Baugus. Central's roster:

SENIOR: Jasmin Baugus

JUNIORS: Ashlyn Rose Kelley

SOPHOMORES: Angeleah Arnold, Leah Brooks, Sarah Houston, Keyara Peterson, Emma Ried, GERALYN Soberalski, Brooke Wood.

FRESHMAN: Emily Adams

Stibitz said the large group of sophomores are part of a group that first started to watch the cheer teams in sixth grade, competed as a middle school group in seventh and eighth grade and they continue to return in their high school

is going to be a big struggle that I know we'll overcome," she said.

Another restriction because of COVID-19 is that competitions are limited to just four schools at a time. When the Spartans competed at Houghton Lake, there were only three other schools there with them. Once they finished, they left so another four schools could compete.

What that does, though, is contracts the amount of time a competition lasts. Instead of conducting a round and waiting for several schools to finish the same round before heading to the next, the time between rounds has greatly been diminished.

"It was done in an hour and a half," Stibitz said of the experience at Houghton Lake. "These competitions are going to go really fast... It went so fast that you don't have any downtime to transition. That (downtime is) really important both psychologically but also physically, especially in that third round. You don't have that hour-long break to mentally prepare for what you're about to do."

Because of the restrictions because of COVID, the playoff format has yet to be determined. Stibitz, though, is glad her girls have an opportunity to compete.

"I know it's going to go fast. These athletes and kids just deserve this," she said. "I'm excited they're given this opportunity to do this (for) this season."

BOYS

FROM PAGE 2

SENIORS: Rae'Kwon Simpson, Ethan Johnson, Jackson Kimes, Thomas Wagner, Carter Beerman.

JUNIORS: Jeremiah Patterson and Zach Draper

SOPHOMORES: Will Chye, Jayden Perrone, Jack VanderHaag, Nick Trivisonno.

The West Michigan Conference elected not to crown a league champion this season because not all of the schools could play each other twice as in normal circumstances, and a COVID outbreak at a league school could be devastating to not only the school with it, but the other schools it is scheduled to play. Instead, the Spartans — like every other school — loaded up their schedule with several instances of three games in a week and many of those are taking place on back-to-back nights.

"I don't see as much scouting or preparation like in the past this year," Genson said. "It will be more like, this is what we do, this is what they do. We'll see who can do it better for that given night."

Genson, too, recognized that although the teams and schools across the state did what it could to bring basketball and other winter sports back, this season will be over quick, and a COVID-related outbreak can put a halt to a season for any school.

"You don't have a lot of time to figure it out. When this (got) started, it's... fast and furious. Before you know it, we're going to go, 'Holy cow, it's March 22' (and the start to the district)."

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Hart girls basketball Pirates take aim at third straight district title

BY ANDY ROBERTS
OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL

Hart came within a whisker of swiping a West Michigan Conference title last year, and repeated as district champions. The Pirates hope they're on course to bring home more trophies this season.

They have a great place to start in junior Jayd Hovey. The Pirates' star has earned All-State mention each of her first two seasons and is the driving force behind Hart's offense, while also being a very capable defender. She averaged 15 points, five rebounds and five assists per game last season despite drawing increased defensive attention.

Four other players who have started multiple games for Hart are also back, including Kendall Williamson, who missed most of last season with a knee injury but is now healthy. Last season's freshman breakout player, Aspen Boutell, returns as well, as do steady performers Rylee Noggle and Cassidy Copenhaver.

The Pirates' biggest issue is likely finding the person who will replace the all-around game Nicole Rockwell brought to the team. Rockwell is the team's biggest of five graduation losses.

"Nicole played four years of varsity basketball, and her knowledge of the game and scoring ability will be missed," Pirates' coach Travis Rosema said. "That said, I am confident in the players who will be replacing the seniors we have lost."

Williamson and Boutell seem the most likely candidates to fill in the gaps left behind. Williamson was an honorable mention all-WMC player last year despite missing much of the season, and Boutell is a gifted ballhandler and defender.

Noggle, who made several key plays in the postseason last year, will be looked to for consistent performance, and Copenhaver joins her in the post. Each forward is very athletic and plays with high energy, a perfect match for the Pirates' speed in the backcourt.

Morgan Marvin, who played a big bench role after being called up from the (junior varsity) to replace Williamson last year, will likely fill a similar role this year. Marianna VanAgmael also comes up from the JV. Each player should see their moment to shine in 2021.



ANDY ROBERTS | OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL
Hart's Jayd Hovey (left) and Marianna VanAgmael pressure Whitehall's Greta Hosticka during earlier this season in Whitehall. The Pirates' defense was a huge factor in their 38-28 win.

While the off-season was disrupted repeatedly by the coronavirus pandemic, Rosema said his players did a good job doing what they could, including some playing on summer travel teams.

"We have a great group of players who have bought in and taken ownership," Rosema said.

The Pirates have beefed up their schedule to the best of their ability, highlighted by a scheduled non-conference battle on the road against Division 3 powerhouse Kent City. Hart will also face Muskegon Western Michigan Christian and Fruitport Calvary Christian.

Rosema said his team is trying to stay focused on what's within its control amid the pandemic uncertainty — playing good basketball.

"The challenges presented by the COVID pandemic are not unique to Hart," Rosema said. "We are facing the same challenges as every school throughout the state."

Hart boys basketball Hart leaning on young players this season

BY ANDY ROBERTS
OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL

Hart struggled in the win column last season, earning just four victories, and the Pirates will have to fill in a lot of scoring from their top graduated seniors to improve on that mark this season.

The Pirates graduated Ayden Beachum, Hunter Tubbs and Gabe Gamble from the 2019-20 squad, and coach Adam Jerry said that trio combined for about 20 points per game that now needs to come from other sources.

What Hart has going for it is a solid core of returning players, including several young sophomores that got some playing time late last season. Among those up-and-comers are Parker Hovey, Tony Rayo and Kellen Kimes. Seniors Zach Bitely and Delfino Hernandez are on course to lead the Pirates, and Kody Charon, a junior, will also be a key factor.

"Speaking statistically, I'm expecting the numbers of this group to jump tremendously, both because they need to in order to fill a void and due to maturity and off

'Even if we were outmatched on the court, that doesn't mean that we can't come to compete and improve ourselves moving forward.'

Adam Jerry
Hart boys basketball coach

season work," Jerry said.

Like for all school sports teams, that off-season work was conducted largely in isolation due to restrictions put in place to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Jerry said his players did a good job remaining flexible during the spring and summer as conditioning and other work that would normally have taken place together in the gym had to be done themselves. He said Bitely in particular has played a big role in keeping himself and his teammates ready to go whenever the season begins.

"Zach Bitely has always

put in extra time on his own and comes to all voluntary workouts," Jerry said. "He has stepped up in trying to encourage others to do so and has been more vocal about pushing the team harder this season."

Jerry pointed out that the pause on winter sports preparation changed the way the season got underway. The normal four weeks or so of practice prior to the first game was sliced down.

"I am excited to get this season going, and I know the boys are also," Jerry said.

Like all other schedules, Hart's was up in the air initially. The Pirates didn't win any league contests last year, but Jerry hopes to see improvement this year, both by earning more victories and by performing better in games where his team faces long odds.

"I would like to see competitive games every night," Jerry said. "Even if we were outmatched on the court, that doesn't mean that we can't come to compete and improve ourselves moving forward. Do the things that make us successful and don't deviate from our game plan."

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Hart wrestling

Pirates prepared for challenges

BY ANDY ROBERTS
OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL

Hart wrestling had one of its finest seasons on record in 2019-20, winning the regional championship and reaching the final eight for the first time since 1990.

The Pirates will have a tough time repeating, especially since they are moving back up to Division 3 this season. However, Hart is certainly going to try, and the Pirates should again have a very good team.

Hart did lose four great seniors to graduation, including all-state performers Tanner Breitwisch and Jerry Brandel, regional qualifier Fabian Vilches-Mendoza,



OCEANA'S HERALD-JOURNAL FILE

Hart's Mason Cantu (top) works towards a pin during a first-round match against Sand Creek's Collin Reckner at the 2020 MHSAA state finals tournament in Detroit. Cantu won the match and went on to finish in second place.

and Andy Rendon. However, many Pirate returners boast strong resumes and give the team a solid base to start

with. Four all-state wrestlers and five wrestlers who won at least 40 matches are back,

including returning state runner-up Mason Cantu. Trayce Tate, who took fourth last year, the highest finish ever by a Pirate freshman, is back, too, as well as all-staters Chance Alvesteffer and Thomas Tanner. State qualifiers Leo Guadarrama, Trenton Swihart, Spencer VanderZwaag and Braeden Carskadon are back, too, and Bryce Jorissen is poised for a big year as a returning starter. The Pirates are loaded with talent.

The rest of the lineup is where the questions will begin, not least because, of course, athletes have not been able to do much wrestling since last season ended

because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

"It makes it hard to develop the younger wrestlers with no contact allowed," Hart coach Brad Altland said. "(That) will really present a challenge for our program. Loss of camps, spring and summer out-of-season competition and summer workouts will prove a hurdle we will have to get through."

No one knows what sort of schedule Hart will have this year, but if the Pirates are able to go through the West Michigan Conference, they'll be tested. Whitehall has ruled the conference for the past six years and is loaded again; the Vikings are also

in Division 3, so they could meet Hart at some point in the tournament. Hart is headed north in the state tournament, though, and Altland looks at Gladstone, Grayling, Kingsley and Reed City as potential challengers early in the bracket.

More than anything, though, Altland and his Pirates were ready to hit the mat.

"A successful season will be (that we) get to start, and the kids will be as focused as they were last season," Altland said. "With all the new changes and distractions, if they work hard as a group as they did last year, we will have a good season."



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