



Caleb Burke - Richland



Anderson Franklin - Greater Johnstown



Vince Fyock - Shade

2019-20 BOYS
BASKETBALL

Full-court pressure

Pack of area heavyweights face big expectations

By Mike Mastovich mmastovich@tribdem.com

Richland High School boys basketball coach Greg Burke kept a close eye on the Rams state semifinalist football team. Of course, Burke's son Caleb was a standout playmaker on the football team that won 13 games. But Coach Burke also expected the Rams to enjoy a deep playoff run, which ultimately would impact Richland's basketball preparation because several key players participate in both sports. "We got a late start to the season, which is great for our football program," Greg Burke said. "We highly promote multi-sport athletes at Richland. We're going to take the first month to get our feet under us and condition. Our goal is to be as good as we can be in February." The Rams are coming off a 22-7 season that included a runner-up finish in the Laurel Highlands Athletic Conference title game and a District 6 Class AAA title. Richland advanced to the PIAA Class AAA quarterfinal round before falling to Lincoln Park. Two seasons ago, the Rams reached the state championship game and took the silver medal. "With the success we've had the last couple of years, we have some tenured people with Caleb, Koby (Bailey), Kellan Stahl and Jordan Ford," Greg Burke said, listing four returnees who also stood out on the football team. Point guard Caleb Burke scored his 1,000th point during the loss to Lincoln Park and is nearing his 750th assist. He will be a four-year starter in basketball who is headed to the University of New Hampshire to play football. Greater Johnstown coach Ryan Durham's Trojans haven't had to cram for the season. Greater Johnstown has put in a lot of work during the spring, summer and fall. The Trojans have two starters back and six lettermen from a 20-3 team that won the District 6-AAAAA title in a wild 75-71 overtime game against Bellefonte. Greater Johnstown advanced to the second round of the state playoffs before losing to Lower Dauphin. "I can't be any happier with the work we put in during the offseason," Durham said. "Between spring games, summer league ballgames, open gym, weight room sessions, we were well over 100 days in the gym." Senior Anderson Franklin returns as one of the most dynamic playmakers in the LHAC. Seniors Gershon Simon and Izir Britt also return. "This team is little bit different than some teams we've had in the past," Durham said. "But from a standpoint of basketball skill guys, guys who can dribble, pass and shoot, from top to bottom I think this is the most talented group we've had." The Trojans and Rams should be contenders in a deep LHAC that includes traditional front-runners Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic, the defending conference champion, and Bishop Carroll Catholic. Bishop Carroll has three starters back from a 20-6 season. Coach Cosie Aliquo's Huskies are led by senior guard Tristan McDannell, who has a chance to become the program's all-time leading scorer; 6-foot-7 senior Nolan Burk; and 6-3 forward Scotty Semelsberger. In District 5, Shade is the two-time defending Class A champion. Coach Wade Fyock's team returns six players who started from a 22-5 squad that reached the second round of the PIAA playoffs. Coach Fyock is closing in on the 300-win milestone, entering the season with 290. His nephew, junior Vince Fyock, begins the year with 933 career points. "The 2019-20 Panthers are still relatively young," Coach Fyock said. "However, we will have a core group that has been in the fire a lot over the last two district championship runs." North Star went 23-4 and won the 5-AA championship last season under coach Randy Schrock. The Cougars have experienced returnees in senior Andy Zuchelli, junior Hunter Stevens and junior Drew Lane. "We return three starters from last year's team and our underclassmen have developed well," said Schrock, who led North Star to its first District 5 crown since 2011. "We expect to compete at a high level in an effort to achieve our team goals." Berlin Brothersvalley has appeared in four consecutive District 5 title games, finishing as 5-A runner-up to Shade last season after winning three 5-AA championships from 2016-18. Coach Tanner Prosser begins his 15th season with three returning starters back from a 20-6 team that went 14-1 in the WestPAC. Senior Cole Blubaugh and juniors Elijah Sechler and Will Spochart are back as starters, and junior Abe Countryman is experienced. "We look forward to working hard each day and are hoping to improve to the point that we are playing our best basketball at the end of the season," Prosser said. Two-time defending Heritage Conference champion Ligonier Valley advanced to two straight 6-AAA title games, falling 68-64 in overtime to Richland last season and beating the Cambria County Rams 58-54 two seasons ago. Senior Michael Marinchak is a key returnee. Former United standout Kyle Silk, who played football at Kiski School this fall, will join the Rams for basketball season, according to the roster on MaxPreps. Mike Mastovich is a sports writer for The Tribune-Democrat. Follow him on Twitter @masty81.

OPENING NIGHT

Friday opens the season with a variety of regular-season and tournament games across The Tribune-Democrat's coverage area.

Northern Bedford at Bedford, 6:30 p.m.

Turkeyfoot Valley at Johnstown Christian, 6:30 p.m.

Derry Tournament

Ligonier Valley vs. Nazareth Prep, 5 p.m.

Kiski vs. Derry, 7:30 p.m.

Hilltopper Classic

Conemaugh Valley vs. United, 6:15 p.m.

Ferndale vs. Westmont Hilltop, 9:15 p.m.

Homer-Center Tournament

Berlin Brothersvalley vs. Bishop Canevin, 7 p.m.

Juniata Valley vs. Homer-Center, 8:30 p.m.

Northern Cambria Tip-Off Tournament

Claysburg-Kimmel vs. Saegertown, 6 p.m.

Harmony vs. Northern Cambria, 7:30 p.m.

Pine Grill Roundball Classic

North Star vs. Everett, 6 p.m.

Shanksville-Stonycreek vs. Somerset, 8 p.m.

Ron Davidson Roundball Classic

At Central Cambria

Conemaugh Township vs. Penn Cambria, 6 p.m.

Penns Manor vs. Central Cambria, 7:30 p.m.