

Could be long year for area cage teams

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

IS THE WESTERN Lakes Athletic Association boys basketball league turning into a perennial two-team show?

Upon a cursory glance at the rosters, it seems Plymouth Salem, last year's WLAAs champs, and Livonia Stevenson will again be the teams to beat.

But, if you look a little closer, or listen to the early season optimism of some of the coaches, you know that Northville is going to be very big and tough to beat. Livonia Churchill seems to have improved upon its Western Division championship team of a year ago. And teams like Plymouth Canton and Livonia Bentley are sleepers who on any given night could wake up and upend some of the league's powers.

Here are some early assessments of the WLAAs squads:

PLYMOUTH SALEM

The Rocks are out to break an ugly habit this year.

For the last two seasons, Fred Thomann's teams have won the WLAAs and won their district.

No, that's not the habit the Rocks are looking to break.

They have lost their first regional tournament contest in each of the last two seasons. They would like to put a stop to that.

To do that, they are going to have to survive a tough WLAAs schedule. But, Thomann thinks he has the potential to go that far.

"This team will be able to score," Thomann said. "This team can create the turnover and score in transition."

"We have two to three legitimate jump shooters, we've got size, we move

the ball — we have good ingredients. The success of this team will depend on how well we play team defense and how well we limit the second and third shots."

Rick Berberet, a 6-6 three-year starter, LeSean Haygood, Scott Jurek and Erich Hartnett give the Rocks some size, strength and quickness up front. Barry Bell and Jeff Arnold are potentially as good a guard tandem as there is in the league. Off the bench, guard Mike White will add much speed to the Rock lineup.

This is a solid Rock unit.

LIVONIA STEVENSON

With Tom Domako (6-7) and Bob Sluka (5-5) back from last year's 21-4 team that went all the way to the regional finals, only to fall to Catholic Central, George Van Wagoner's contingent looks formidable.

"If we play as a team and improve our defense, it could be a good year," Van Wagoner said.

Domako, All-League and All-Area last year, averaged nearly 19 points a game and 7.5 rebounds. Van Wagoner says Domako is a "potential All-Stater."

Sluka, the muscular post player, averaged 11.3 points and nearly nine rebounds per game last season.

The Spartans also have a good supporting cast. Ric Rozman, who was the backup point guard last year, will run the show this year. Other returners likely to see time are Mark Kleinknecht, Todd Baggett and Brian Porter.

Van Wagoner also likes what he's seen of newcomers Ed Gilbert, Pete Paddy, Vic Nettie, Matt Burdiss and Steve Rizzo.

The Spartans have the talent to be very effective offensively.

basketball

LIVONIA CHURCHILL

Sixth-year coach Don Albertson can hardly wait for the season to begin. He is very, very optimistic about his team this year.

"Most coaches at this time of the year better be optimistic," he said. "I feel this is potentially one of our best teams to come out of Churchill since I've been coach. It looks as though the other teams in our area and league are going to be very competitive. It looks to me like an exciting season."

Albertson returns five players from his 12-9 division championship team of last year.

Craig Hunter, an All-Western Division performer last year, returns and is hoping to improve on his nine points, six rebounds per game average. John Gryzbek (seven points per game), Steve Judawikis (five points, five rebounds per game), Doug Klucevek, and Rob Foust round out the returners.

Albertson wants his team to run the break as much as possible, but if unable, he is more than willing to play half-court basketball. Defensively, Churchill is a zone-oriented team.

Chris Semik, Jim Merner, Mike Hermanson, Mike Pangania, Mike Meehan and Dave Andrus, are battling for playing time.

PLYMOUTH CANTON

Run, gun and scrap. That's the key for Dave Van Wagoner's Chiefs this year. The Chiefs will be one of the smaller

WLAAs contingents this year, but they will be one of the more feisty.

Van Wagoner, in his third year, seems to have the Canton program on the rise.

"We will be competitive," he said. "Hopefully, we will contend for our division title."

His optimism is buoyed by the emergence of 6-2 Elijah Rogers. A bench warmer last year, Rogers worked on his game all summer and appears ready to handle the post for the Chiefs.

Co-captains Mark Bennett and Gary Thomas, two starters from last year, will be the catalysts of the Chief attack. Bennett, an outstanding passer, averaged 11 points, six rebounds and five assists per game last year. Thomas, a good outside shooter, averaged six points and four assists.

Jim Schlicker (eight points and six rebounds per game), and Mike Jennings round out the starting five. Kevin Hawkins, Brent Slater and Joe Bono will also see time for the Chiefs.

This team should be much better than its 10-11 finish last year.

FARMINGTON HARRISON

When you look at the players on the roster — John Miller, Dave Quarles, Geoff Bissell, Vince Enright — you think, "Man, this would be a great football team."

Indeed, the nucleus of the Hawks attack is made up of outstanding football players. But, coach Mike Teachman's job is to mold them into a successful roundball team.

Four starters are gone from last

year's 5-14 team. Last year's junior varsity Hawks compiled a 1-17 record. Still, Teachman says his team is much improved.

"After our recent scrimmage, I'd say we are going to be a lot better than people will give us credit for," he said.

The starting five, according to Teachman, is tentatively Don Lacey at center, Miller and Quarles at forwards and Dave Younger and Bissell at guards.

Brian Hickey, who had 103 assists last season, has been out with mononucleosis. Teachman hopes to have him back after the Christmas break.

Enright, Ron Karbowski and Lance Berg will also see some action.

FARMINGTON

The Falcons, coming off a 9-11 season and losing its top player Don Zang to graduation, are in for a tough season, according to coach Richard Roy. "We're very young. It's going to be a real challenge," he said.

Scott Hayash, who transferred to the Falcons from Catholic Central last season, averaged 11 points per game. He, along with Tim Carruthers and Dave Wylie make up the nucleus of the Falcons' squad.

Roy is counting on help from sophomore Bruce Kratt and 6-6 junior Matt

Lundh. Tim Berry and Greg Feenstra will also see action.

Roy said his team will try to run the fastbreak as much as possible. He also hopes to be able to play pressure man-to-man defense.

LIVONIA BENTLEY

The big news here is new head coach Tom Niemi. He comes to the Bulldogs after 10 years at the helm of the Belleville Tigers. He coached Livonia Franklin four years prior to that.

He takes over what might have been the worst team in the WLAAs last season.

But, there is hope. The reason is big 6-8 center Phil Graczyk. He will be counted on for much of Bentley's scoring and rebounding.

Co-captains John Turner and John White will also start.

Steve Carl, Marvin Rons, and Sal DeMillo are also battling for starting roles.

Jeff Placzek, a 6-5 senior, would also be in contention for a starting job but a series of injuries have set him back. He was injured after a drill short-circuited, in his hands last summer. Then he sprained his ankle. Ouch.

John Scruggs and Steve Gregor will also see some playing time.

Elks Hoop Shoot is on

The Ewald hot shots are on to the Pontiac Silverdome.

M.J. and Tracey Ewald of Canton Township have advanced to the area finals of the Pepsi Challenge/NBA Hot Shot competition, which will take place Dec. 20 and Jan. 4, 1984 at the Dome. Tracey Ewald took first place at the

regional competition for 9-12-year-olds. Older brother M.J. placed fourth in the 13-15 category.

The Ewalds are the first brother combination to make it to the finals from Canton. Andy Goe from Canton made it to the finals in 1981.

It's Marlins vs. Pilots

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the ball inside against Bentley's man-to-man. The recipient of Wise's penetration was, more often than not, junior Angle Middleton.

"And Middleton responded with 31 points, 20 in the first half."

"She was the best player I've seen this year," Lang said.

How many times have you seen a girls basketball team pull off an alley-oop play? Wise and Middleton pulled it off twice — Wise caught the lob pass and Middleton catching it and laying in the shot before coming down off her jump.

BENTLEY FOUGHT with Murray-Wright early. After falling behind 5-0, the Bulldogs employed an

effective 3-2 zone press, which quickly got the score even at 5-5.

After a quarter, Bentley trailed 21-15. But in the second quarter, Middleton caught fire. She fired in 11 straight points and added four more before the half to put the Lady Pilots comfortably ahead 40-23.

"We just couldn't board with them. They were just taking it easy."

Bentley also didn't shoot very well, hitting five of 20 from the floor and 13 of 22 from the free throw line in the first half. Bentley didn't make a basket in the second quarter. The Bulldogs eight points came via the free throw.

Bentley got within 13 early in the second half, but that was as close as it would get.

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