

Sports

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Mercy coach rebuilds starting lineup

Clinton lone returning starter

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Larry Baker's 14th year as coach of the Farmington Hills Mercy basketball team may be one of his more challenging endeavors.

After losing four starters to graduation, the Marlins won't bear much resemblance to the ballclub that went 15-8, won a district championship and nearly upset mighty Plymouth Salem in a regional final.

The lone returning regular is point guard Jenny Clinton, whom Baker heralds as a potential all-star and heads an impressive junior class.

In fact, the heart and future of Mercy's program lies with its juniors and sophomores, but Baker is quick to add the Marlins will need contributions from their three seniors, also.

"We certainly would be the last program to concede anything in a given season," Baker said, "but we are operating on a short-range and long-range plan simultaneously."

TO ENSURE A smoother transition the next two years, Baker and junior varsity coach Mike King are combining practices this year, and Baker plans to give the sophomores varsity experience on a rotational basis.

"I'm going with the seniors in '88, but we've got the sophomores on a fast track," he said. "As long as they understand they're not being demoted and promoted from game to game, it should work real well."

But the key this year will be the juniors, which includes 5-foot-10 center Lee Albrecht and 5-foot-9 wing Jo Stephens, who transferred from Detroit Country Day where she was a starter.

Clinton, who averaged four assists, once again will run the show. Her floor leadership will be even

more important since she is the only returning starter.

This is radical rebuilding we're doing," Baker said. "Suddenly, Jenny Clinton goes from being a role player on a senior team to the catalyst on a junior-senior team."

But Clinton, whom Baker compares to former Mercy star Annette Ruggiero, who is playing at Colorado State, is the right player in the right position to fill that role.

"I THINK I'VE got an all-state point guard," Baker said. "She's playing now at a level I expected her to be at for her senior year."

Clinton will be passing the ball to different people, however. The Marlins graduated all-area player Jan Herberholz (forward), Adrienne Clark (guard), Patty Chapp (wing) and Jennifer Slosar (center). Clark followed former Mercy all-star Yvette Mason to Drake University, and Slosar is on scholarship for volleyball at Notre Dame.

"No question, we lost a lot of talent, but that's part of coaching high school sports," Baker said. "We have a tough schedule and very little experience against that kind of competition."

Clinton was reunited with former teammates when Stephens and junior Jennifer Basford, a transfer from North Farmington, switched to Mercy. All three played grade school basketball together at Our Lady of Sorrows. The 5-foot-8 Basford is the younger sister of former Marlin standouts, Denise and Sarah.

Stephens, who will be the swing player, takes the ball the hoop well and has a nice perimeter shot, Baker said. Two broken toes have kept Basford, who is slated for backup duty, on the sidelines.

Albrecht, who spent two years on the JV squad, is three inches shorter than Slosar but an excellent rebounder and effective scorer around the basket, according to Baker.

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"LEE IS A true power forward who will be asked to do a lot inside, because we don't have good size," he said. "The key is how much she plays without getting into foul trouble."

The seniors are Amy Edward, Pam Thompson and Jenny Gondek. Edward and Thompson round out the starting unit, while Gondek — "our Luis Salazar," she can play anywhere and contribute" — will be the first player off the bench.

"How far we go depends on what the seniors contribute with their Mercy foundation," Baker said. "They've all come through the system, and it will be a test of what they've learned over the years."

The 5-foot-8 Thompson will play forward, along with Albrecht, is one of the most improved players. She is playing with great confidence and becoming a strong all-round player, Baker said.

The 5-foot-4 Edward, the star pitcher on Mercy's softball team, will be the off guard. The leading scorer on the JV two years ago, she is definitely an outside scoring threat.

"SHE'S OUR BOMBER," Baker said. "She's got the green light to shoot the three-pointer."

In the Central Division of the Catholic League, all but Redford Bishop Borgess lost key people, and Baker believes Mercy was hit the hardest hit by graduation.

The Marlins open Thursday, Sept. 8, against Salem, will be host for the annual Mercy Hoops Classic on Thursday and Saturday, Sept. 15 and 17, and face Trenton and Saginaw before starting division play.

"The tradition, dedication and spirit is there," Baker said. "The experience, size and depth aren't. Those are our challenges."



RICK SMITH/staff photographer

Two of the best point guards in Observerland girls basketball go head-to-head as Mercy's Jenny Clinton (right) guards Plymouth Salem's

Jill Estey last season. Both are back this year, with Clinton being the key player for the Marlins.

Falcons eye '88 turnaround

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Diana Fair, girls basketball coach at Farmington, believes the Falcons can duplicate what the Detroit Red Wings did in 1986-87 and go from last place to first in one season.

Farmington was 1-9 in the Lakes Division of the Western Lakes Activities Association last fall, but Fair sees a wide-open race this year.

There are two reasons for her optimistic outlook.

The first is that defending champion and Class A semifinalist Plymouth Salem was dethroned by graduation, sending prep All-American Dena Head on to the college ranks.

Secondly, the Falcons, who were 8-13 overall, have one of the more veteran teams in the division, returning five key players.

"I THINK WE can be in contention this year," Fair said. "Things have changed in the league. We want to be up there with the best of them."

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Farmington lost Stacy Swanderski, a swing player who averaged 13 points, forward Linda Hacker and guard Kelli Koss to graduation, but the quality of the varsity returnees more than offsets the losses.

The Falcons figure to have a solid frontcourt with Maria Ferrari, a 5-foot-9 senior, in the post and Erika Hatcher, 5-foot-11 junior, and Kristen Norman, 5-foot-10 senior, at the forwards.

Ferrari is an aggressive rebounder, averaging seven a game last year. Hatcher, who came up from the JV in mid-season, became a strong scorer after getting acclimated to varsity competition. She averaged 10 points over the last six games.

Ferrari's obvious forte is rebounding, and Fair

hopes a little more production from Hatcher and Norman will make the Falcons a force difficult to contend with on the boards.

Farmington averaged in the neighborhood of 46 points a game, and Fair expects the team to maintain or improve on that because of the potential for more offensive rebounding and scoring.

"WE DIDN'T DO too much of that last year," she said. "With three big girls, we should be scoring off the offensive boards, and that's a big goal for us."

Melissa Tisdale, 5-foot-8 senior, will play the point, and junior Jennifer McGlinch, a transfer from Livonia Franklin, was apt to start the season at the shooting guard. Lisa Rockatell, 5-foot-7 senior, is the fifth returnee who will divide playing time with McGlinch.

Farmington was dealt a blow at the guard positions when junior Carrie Maier decided not to return for another season of basketball. She opted to

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Quick guards key to North hopes

By Dan O'Meara
staff writer

Coach Greg Capling describes North Farmington's girls basketball team as being "small, scrappy and scrappy."

The Raiders, not blessed with great height, plan to offset that by taking advantage of their strength: depth and experience in the backcourt.

Capling's strategy calls for North to play an aggressive, pressing defense that will enable the Raiders to use the full floor as much as possible on offense.

"The guards will be the strength of our team," said Capling, who enters his third year as North's coach.

"We're hoping to score quite a few points in transition. The kids do a good job of getting the ball out and filling the lanes."

THE KEY player in the whole scheme could be 5-foot-3 Kim Gurecki, a junior who started at point guard last year.

She is one of six returning players Capling is counting heavily on. Gurecki and fellow guards Debbie Weintraub, Kelly Coulson and Lynn Pennala are expected to shoulder much of the scoring load.

"Kim should be one of the top guards in the league," Capling said. "She may not be as good as (Plym-

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outh Salem's Jill) Estey, but she does a lot of things right for us.

She's improved her court sense, seeing the whole floor and where other people are instead of charging to the basket. I just wish she was a little bigger."

Weintraub, 5-3 senior, started opposite Gurecki much of last season, which saw the Raiders finish in fourth place with a 3-7 record in the Lakes Division of the Western Lakes Activities Association.

Coulson, 5-5 senior, missed all of last season with a knee injury but Capling has high expectations for her this year. But she will miss the start of the season after landing on a teammate's foot while rebounding and suffering a twisted knee. Pennala, 5-7 senior, will help coming off the bench again.

"(COULSON) HAS A lot of speed and a chance to be in the starting lineup when she comes back," Capling said. "We played three guards all summer. We have to work on rebounding, but we hope to make up for that with quickness."

The rebounding largely will be

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STEVE FEIGHT/staff photographer

Kim Gurecki, another of the area's top point guards, returns to the starting lineup at North Farmington. She heads a strong backcourt for the Raiders.