

Talented transfers could make Lahser tough

By BOB GROSS

After winning five consecutive league championships, what do you do for an encore?

And what do you do after losing the three seniors who formed the core of your team?

If you're Nick Conti, you rebuild and look for your sixth consecutive Metro

Suburban Association basketball championship.

Conti, basketball coach at Bloomfield Hills Lahser, lost three quality players off last year's team in Shawn Santa, Scott Pritchett and Rob Podor.

He does have, however, two returning starters and a crop of talented transfer students.

Co-captains Scott Brown and Tim Waun provide some continuity from last year's team. Brown, a 6-foot-4 senior, is playing his third year of varsity basketball. Conti calls him a good, strong scorer and expects him to play the small forward.

Waun, a 6-foot-4 senior guard, is in his third season as a regular on the var-

sity. A deadly outside shooter, Conti expects Waun to carry a large share of the offensive burden for the Knights.

"I AM OF the opinion," said Conti of Waun, "that he is the best shooting guard in the Detroit metropolitan area."

Joining Waun in the Lahser backcourt is Steve Hirsch, a 6-foot-1

point guard. Conti had praise for both his leadership ability and his quickness. "Hirsch probably has the quickest first two steps of anybody I've ever coached in 12 years," said the Lahser coach.

Transfers Milton Carthens, a 6-foot-5 forward, and Glenn Cross, a 6-foot-9 center, round out the Lahser starting five. Carthens and Cross, together with Brown, give the Knights a very tall and strong front line.

Conti obviously has the talent. His problem is fitting it into his complex offense.

"At this stage," he said, "it is very much a jelling process as opposed to last year's squad."

"We very definitely need all the time we have prior to our first game to get things set."

CONTI EXPLAINED that his teams run a multi-pattern, multi-play offense. In such an offense, the point guard brings the ball up the floor while the rest of the team runs patterns under the basket in an attempt to get a player open for a pass.

He contrasted his multi-pattern offense with the motion offense played by most teams. In a motion offense, according to Conti, the point guard brings the ball up while the rest of the team more or less runs free-lance patterns. The point guard tries to read the defense and hit the open man with a pass.

Conti admitted that teaching his of-

fense does take time. He explained that he not only has to teach the basic cuts on each play, but also the cuts to be used when the defense counters. "Somedays it clicks," said Conti, "and somedays it's like you're teaching the wall."

It probably clicks more times than not — Conti expects his Knights to be the pre-season favorites to win the MSA title for the sixth time.

That's in a league which should be much stronger than last year. Conti said Royal Oak Dondoro should have one of its best teams of the past few years. Southfield-Lathrup should have a young, talented squad and Birmingham Groves should be "very, very formidable."

The Knights also face a very tough non-league schedule. They play cross-town rival Andover twice. They also play Ferndale, picked as the top team in the Southeastern Michigan Association, Detroit East Catholic, Detroit Osborn and Pontiac Northern.

They also play Birmingham Brother Rice, a team they lost to by one point, 71-70, in the final 13 seconds of last year's meeting.

"It (the schedule) is going to test us every Tuesday," said Conti. "We are going to have dog fights on our hands every time we go out on Tuesday night. I think it is going to help us in the long run."

Lahser starts its schedule Friday by hosting Bloomfield Hills Andover.

Southfield has rough opener

By DENNIS O'CONNOR

How good is Southfield High's boys' basketball team this year?

Well, it won't take second-year coach Greg Sliwka long to find out.

The Blue Jays open the cage season at home tomorrow night against powerful Detroit Catholic Central — considered by many the best high school basketball team in the state this season.

But a tough schedule is nothing new to Sliwka. In fact, the Jays' mentor would rather have it that way.

"My philosophy is the only way you get better is by playing the tougher teams," Sliwka said. "Recordwise, we

may not be as impressive, but I think the kids learn."

Sliwka's philosophy held true last season, as the Jays finished with a 12-9 overall record, but won the Southeastern Michigan Association (SMA) title with a stout 8-2 mark — the only two losses coming from Royal Oak Kimball.

This year it doesn't get any easier as Southfield battles the likes of Redford Bishop Borgess, North Farmington, U-D and Southfield-Lathrup on its non-league schedule. The Jays competed in the Boys' Club of Detroit summer league in the off-season with the likes of Catholic Central, Brother Rice, Saginaw and Detroit MacKenzie.

Sliwka HOPES this year's squad

strives for more consistency, and hints that overall team speed will help the transition game.

"We have consistent height, and we're fast," the Jays' coach said. "We work on it (the fast break) quite a bit. We work a lot on defense — team defense — we think that will be our strength."

The Jays' biggest loss to graduation is Dave Combs, a strong center who was a large force in Southfield's championship season.

Southfield will be tough at forward, however, thanks to 6-3 senior Vincent Bean, the All-State football player, and 6-4 junior Darryl Darden, who played a lot of varsity ball as a sophomore last year.

"We gave away a little strength inside," Sliwka said about graduation, "but I think we've gained at forward and guard."

John Piper, a 6-foot senior guard, is a three-year varsity player returning to the Jays. He is a point-guard, but can carry his load of shooting.

Junior Paul Chaben is the top player from last year's junior varsity and should be an asset at guard, although he needs varsity experience, according to Sliwka.

The Jays' coach tabs Ferndale as the team to beat in the SMA and sees Hazel Park as a bigger and more experienced team. And there's always Kimball.

First, however, Sliwka must worry about Detroit Catholic Central.

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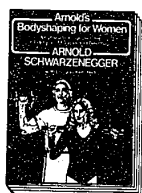
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