

Improved Falcons shoot for success

By NEAL ZIPPER
SPECIAL WRITER

After a season in which his team hovered near the bottom of the Western Lakes Activities Association standings, Farmington girls basketball coach Brian Swinehart is hoping big things come in small packages.

Coming off a 5-17 season in his rookie year with the Falcons, Swinehart predicts improvement but will have to rely on an eight-player roster.

"I have eight kids who work hard and do things the way you want them to be done, instead of having to deal with attitude and kids who don't want to put forth the effort," Swinehart said.

The reason for the small number of players is due to commitment and a desire to play, Swinehart said. During the off-season, many players improved their games by attending camps and playing in summer leagues.

"The younger players were willing to put forth the effort and some of the older ones weren't," he said. "We have no juniors and only two seniors. Maybe some of the older players saw the effort and the improvement of the younger players and saw the writing on the wall."

"I'm not disappointed with eight players, though. I'm looking forward to this season and I think we definitely should improve on our five wins from last season."

Three starters and one part-time starter have graduated. Guards Danielle Salyer and Annari Platter and centers Becky Washnock and Rehekah King have left a void for the Falcons.

But center Tammy Allen returns for her senior year after leading the team in scoring (18 points) and rebounds (10 per game).

"I want Tammy to continue her strong rebounding and maybe pick up her scoring average to 20 a game," Swinehart said.

The other returning senior is

guard Nicole Bingham, who averaged five points and started in half the games.

"Nicole has improved her outside shooting," Swinehart said. "She's a tough and physical player, and she really gets on it on defense."

Sophomore Andrea Salyer, the tallest player at 5-feet 11, will have a big impact on Farmington's offensive output this season.

"She'll be running the point for us and also be playing the wing," Swinehart said. "She handles the ball well, and her strength is taking the ball to the hole."

Swinehart thinks sophomore guard Bridgette Fleet, a transfer from Northville, will improve this year's squad. Fleet will miss the first three games with a stress fracture in her foot.

Rounding out the roster are a pair of sophomores and freshmen. Sophomore Jennie Nea and freshman Stephanie Timock will add depth at the guards, while sophomore Stefanie Rennie and freshman Kim Washnock will spell the post players.

With the short bench, Swinehart won't turn conservative and go to a slow-paced game.

"We have girls that can get up and down the court, and we will run when we can," Swinehart said. "It will be important that we stay out of foul trouble. But in the past I've usually played only about seven players."

Swinehart remains optimistic about this season, partially because of the past performances of Allen and Salyer.

"Tammy is one of the top players in the league, and Andrea is not far from being one of the top," Swinehart said.

"This year we took the plunge down to eight players, but the kids we have are serious, willing to work hard and get it done on defense. I hope we will be competitive in all our games, but I think we will be better than last year."

Farmington's first test comes Tuesday in the Troy Tournament.

Marlins featuring youth movement

By STEVE KOWALESKI
STAFF WRITER

When Liz Weber starts at point guard tonight for the Farmington Hills Mercy basketball team, she'll join select company.

Weber will become only the third freshman to start the season opener in Larry Baker's 17 years as coach. The starting role not only reflects Weber's talent, it also shows Mercy's youth.

The Marlins last fall reached the Class A state final before losing to Detroit Martin Luther King. Graduated from the 18-12 team are Laure DeMatteis, Kathleen Berrigan and Mary Bleniewicz, who accounted for about 70 percent of Mercy's scoring.

Mercy plays a rugged schedule, starting with tonight's 7:30 home game against Walled Lake Central.

"The first thing that jumps out at you is our youthfulness and the strength of our schedule," Baker said. "The returning seniors provided the nucleus to last year's team. This year we're working hard to find our own identity and there's

less certainty about our roles."

Mercy's team resembles the one put on the floor two years ago by Plymouth Canton, now a state title contender.

Mercy has five returning seniors who lettered in '91, but Baker wouldn't be surprised to see Weber and 6-foot sophomore center Julie Angell lead the Marlins in scoring. The 5-1 Weber led Farmington St. John's last year to the Catholic Youth Organization championship and already is the Marlins' best three-point shooter, according to Baker.

Mercy also has a capable point guard backup, junior Maggie Clinton, who filled in nicely for Berrigan during parts of the Class A semifinal win over Saginaw last year.

"If Liz wasn't special, she wouldn't be playing," Baker said. "But she's got to earn her spots, too. Hopefully, she can continue our legacy of great point guards."

Angell, meanwhile, grabbed a combined 29 rebounds in last year's district games and scored 18 points

against Birmingham Marian and 16 against Saginaw later in the tournament. All that came after being promoted from the junior varsity. "Bringing up Julie Angell and inserting her in the lineup proved to be a catalyst for our journey run," Baker said.

A trio of seniors who lettered on last year's team is expected to bolster the front line. Katie Heffernan, a 5-8 senior forward, averaged about five points per game and will start for a third straight year. Baker said Heffernan has been one of the most steady Mercy scorers in preseason.

Dana Wade, a 5-10 senior post player, and Marahelle Brooks, a 5-8 senior post player, also return after grabbing 85 rebounds apiece a year ago.

Rebecca Calice, another senior post player, returns, is expected to contribute when she recovers from a stress fracture suffered earlier this month.

The shooting guard is a three-way battle between 5-4 senior Vallie Jones, 5-4 junior Zandra Simmons and 5-6 junior Nadine Clehonksi,

the most valuable player on last year's JV.

"I'm looking for someone to do the job at both ends," Baker said. "Vallie is the most experienced with the best skills, but she's been inconsistent during practice. Zandra has come on defensively, and the other girl with her hat in the ring is Nadine."

A trio of sophomores — Piper Metz (forward), Felicia Brooks (post) and Glenda Lee (a guard and transfer from Southfield High) — could also challenge for playing time, Baker said.

The Marlins are among tough company in the Catholic League's Central Division. Harper Woods Regina is the defending champion, and returns most of its players. Birmingham Marian has one of the state's best players (Stephanie Storen) and Livonia Ladywood is a rising team.

"This sure will provide big-time growing pains for our young players, but that's the best thing for them," Baker said.

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