

Marlins enter volleyball season without key players

BY BRAD MONASTIERE
STAFF WRITER

Injuries are a fact of life for just about every athletic team in any sport. Farmington Mercy's volleyball team has already gotten a harsh lesson in that reality, and its season hasn't really started yet.

The Marlins, coming off a 45-11 season in 2001-2002, enter the new campaign minus two of their top performers: senior Deidre Jones and junior Christine Ohman. Both players are done for the season and were expected to add key height and athleticism to the team. But coach Ed Ruhl says he expects his team to still remain as competitive as it was a year ago.

"I'd like to say we'll be there at the end," Ruhl said. "But the kids we do have are very nice and fair. I want to see more killer instinct, and we'll go with what works the most for us."

One part of the team Ruhl is confident will work nicely in the form of 6-foot-3 middle hitter Tessa Kuykendall. A dominant player headed to Rice University next year, Kuykendall can control a game single-handedly, not just with her height, but power and quickness along the front line.

"I don't let her get away with

being average. She had 20 schools offering her full-ride (scholarships), and she's certainly one of our weapons."

Senior captain Anne Roosevelt will be the team's 1-A option along with Kuykendall up front. Roosevelt will play both sides as a hitter and complements Kuykendall.

"I push Anne and Tessa the hardest. They have all the tools to be great players."

PREVIEW

The third senior captain is senior Sara Larson, who will play mostly on the left side. Seniors Chloe Kraft and Mary Warbelow will also alternate sides and are excellent athletes.

Leading the team's junior class is Katie McDonald. She is a defensive specialist, and according to the coach, the

team's best server. "We expect a lot of aces out of her."

Juniors Hilary Conlisk and Cassandra Varcoe will share the setting duties as the season starts. Ruhl said he will wait and see which player has the best on-court connection with Kuykendall.

Ruhl characterized his team as small, in both team height and numbers. The roster reaches a total of 11, rounded out by

juniors Jillian Arambula and Velista Turner.

"We don't have a lot of varsity experience on the roster. Part of the problem we have is that Tessa and Anne are so much more skilled than everyone else, it's tough to pump them up during games. But that's why we have them as captains," Ruhl said he expects his team to once again compete for the Catholic League championship,

along with perennial contenders Birmingham Marian and Livonia Ladywood.

"I'd like to say we'll be there. We definitely have the weapons, but we're a little younger than those teams as well."

Mercy played in Saturday's tournament at Carleton Airport along with highly regarded teams like Fraser and Temperance-Bedford.

TV event misses the point

ESPN2 is televising nationwide a high school basketball game between an Ohio school with a player who is presumed to be jumping from high school to the NBA and a Virginia school that follows no rules and regulations but its own. And the promoters say this is the wave of the future.

God help us!

For a century, high school sports have been an American tradition unlike any place in the world, a time for schools and communities to come together to cheer their friends and neighbors in cross-town and cross-county rivalries.

Covered by local newspapers and radio, the focus has been on education more than winning, on teams more than stars, and on local rivalries and league titles more than state championships and beyond.

It is a program that has as many participants and contests at the sub-varsity level as varsity level. It has been a pure, wholesome, amateur, unsophisticated, even sometimes corny setting.

And if it tries to compete for the glitz and glamour of major college and professional sports, it not only cannot win, it will become spoiled, damaged goods - giving up its gentle spirit for guile and greed.

The ESPN2 telecast is being described as a defining moment for high school sports, using phrases such as "the quintessential act of the way things will be in high school basketball... a microcosm of the way basketball is moving into the future."

In fact, this event is an aberration in school sports, a wart on the face of high school basketball.

There are promoters who consider this view out of date, who believe this is "an avalanche that's moving down the mountain," a revealing choice of metaphor given that avalanches destroy everything in their path.

High school athletics is changing, but not nearly at the pace of an avalanche and not necessarily for the good. Those who care about a school sports program that serves all kinds of students, male and female, tall and short, in many different sports, in schools of all sizes, types and locales have other, better plans for interscholastic athletics.

A generation or two of students from now, those who care about broad and deep school sports programs may not have won the struggle for the soul of school sports, but they are not going to be buried anytime soon.

John E. "Jack" Roberts is the executive director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association, which governs nearly 750 of the state's 850-plus high schools.

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