

GIRLS BASKETBALL: Depth should provide boost for O'Fallon



The 2009-10 season for the O'Fallon girls basketball team can be divided into two distinct parts - one good, one bad - but coach Ryan Massey believes the Panthers can learn from both.

O'Fallon was 15-15 last season, including a 6-8 record in the Southwestern Conference. After a 12-2 start, the Panthers lost 12 of their next 14 games before beating Belleville West in the first round of the Class 4A Belleville East Regional. Their season ended with a loss to East St. Louis in the regional final.

"Toward the end of the year, we were playing much better," Massey said. "We started off with a rather light schedule at the Taylorville Tournament and won five in a row there. We won a lot of games early and then we played West around Christmas. We were up by 11 or 12 points and they came back and beat us in the fourth quarter.

"That sent us on a downward spiral, but we played very well against West in the regional. We had seven kids graduate from that team, including three starters, but I'm very excited about this team. For the first time in my tenure at O'Fallon, we've got competition for positions."

The returning starters are junior guard Taylor Klingelhofer, who averaged a team-high 12.8 points per game, and 6-foot-2 sophomore forward/center Katie Roustio, who led the team in rebounds with 6.2 per game while averaging 8.4 points per game.

"Taylor had a great game in the regional semifinals against Belleville West with 28 points," Massey said. "She's done a lot of individual training over the summer and I look for her to be an integral part of our offense. "Katie, a lot of times, is the best athlete on the floor. She runs, she jumps and she shoots the ball very well."

Beyond Klingelhofer and Roustio, the Panthers have limited varsity experience.

"We've got some roles to fill, but we feel like we've got some girls who can step into those roles," Massey said.

Juniors Kaitlin Kendall and Kendall Butler could fill the three and four-spots.

"Kaitlin Kendall is a tremendous shooter from the outside, while Kendall Butler is a tremendous mid-range shooter," Massey said.

Senior Sabre Flager, who saw some varsity action last season, will start at point guard, enabling Klingelhofer to move to shooting guard. Victoria Ham, a 6-foot junior, also moves into the varsity rotation. Rounding out the top seven is senior Ashley Porter, a solid defensive player and rebounder.

O'Fallon opens the season Friday and Saturday in the Taylorville Invitational, which continues on Nov. 23 and Nov. 26-27.

"One of our major goals as a coaching staff is to see where these girls fit in," Massey said. "It's been kind of cut and dried the last five years about where girls are going to play, but this year it feels fresh and new. I think the sky is the limit for these girls.

"We have the capability of competing with the top teams in our conference, but we're also going to show some growing pains. There will be times when we look really good and there will be times when we don't look like we know what we're doing. Our aim right now is to play at a high level and be competitive in every game."