

Familiar faces in new places for Larned first-year coach Smith

By Mike Gilmore

There's a share of newness in the Larned boys' 2016-17 season. But there's a share of the familiar, too.

After five years in second chair on the Indians' bench, Jarrod Smith takes over as chief of the boys' basketball program. The Indians went 14-8 last year with an all-senior starting lineup that took a share of the Tribe's length as well as experience. Smith, however, has more than a few notes from a year with former head coach Kevin Brown and the past four with head coach Don Zimmerman as well as the knowledge that adjustments will be made.

"As an assistant for five years, I'm comfortable with it," said Smith, who is a member of a four-generation Pawnee County farm family that has seen more than a few minutes on the hardcourt for LHS. "The biggest reason why I wanted it was I knew that since we graduated five starters – if we brought a whole new philosophy in – it would just be a complete reset. With me coming back and assistant coach Mike O'Neill coming back, a lot of the same language, ideas and philosophy that coach Zimmerman had would just carry over, with different people.

"I've had the junior varsity all the way through high school. From C-team to JV. We're basically all moving up, the JV boys from last year, and me – moving up to varsity together."

There will be some tweaks, but not a lot to start, Smith noted. "You're going to see a lot of similarities. As the years go, we will probably wean off some of the things that Coach Zimmerman did, but not completely.

It starts with defense. "I'm a firm believer in man-to-man defense," Smith said. "We're doing recreation clinics for third-, fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders. We tell those coaches we would prefer that those young kids play man. In order to play a zone well, you have to know how to guard your man; otherwise, you just stand and watch. We're putting a big emphasis this season on tough-nosed man-to-man defense. We know we are going to be playing teams that are a lot longer than we are. Our tallest player is 6-3; we

still will have to be able to pull a 6-5 guy out of the lane so he's not keeping us from penetrating. We've got some athletic kids that are quick and can run the floor; that leads to our guards capable of penetrating and kicking to our shooters."

Offensively, the Indians will be guard-heavy; early games will focus on transition opportunities and then working for a patient shot from the perimeter, Smith said. "We've been doing a lot of transition drills in practice," Smith noted. "There will be times when we've got four guards on the floor. I would anticipate at some point, maybe after Christmas break, we'll work a 5-out, motion offense in, because there may be times when we'll have all five as guards on the floor."

"We're still working on an offensive identity," Smith said. "We'll have five new starters and we're returning 5 points and two rebounds from last year in Johnathan Herter (a 6-1 senior post) and Dalton Bright (a 5-9 senior guard/forward) I can't really tell you today who is going to start for me. I've got a good idea, but not with 100 percent certainty."

Along with seniors Herter and Bright, 5-9 senior point guard Mason Schartz returns to the roster. Schartz played in 13 games last season before being sidelined with a medical issue. Senior Thomas Robinson, at 6-3, will add length from the bench. Juniors include Carson Smith, Thomas Harmon, Keelan Castro, Alex Barger, Damontay Phillips, Nick Orth and London Whittington. Adding senior Colton Massey (6-0 guard) Smith hopes to build his roster for the upcoming Keady tournament.

Tonight's pre-holiday season begins in the Larned Middle School gymnasium against a representative member of an always-tough Central Kansas League. The Pratt Greenbacks come to Larned with a share of newness as well, with a new coach and the return of junior big man Samson Kohman, who was sidelined with a knee injury last season.

The CKL will be stacked top to bottom. Hopefully, Smith said, the Indians will hold their own somewhere in the middle.



2016-17 Larned Indians

"Realistically, I would like to be .500 this year," Smith noted. "You look at the league – Hesston, Pratt – Smoky Valley is going to be good. A couple years ago they had a phenomenal freshman class who are juniors now. I wouldn't be surprised if their starting lineup's not all juniors. Haven will be good.

You get to the bottom with Hoisington and Lyons – Hoisington always plays a physical game and Lyons beat us at their place a couple years ago. You can't take anyone in the league lightly. Night in, night out, we're going to have to come to play. We could wind up at the bottom of the league if we don't."

Smith's short-term goals also includes winning at least two games in each of the tournaments that the Tribe competes in. That includes the Tribe's own 10th annual Gene Keady Classic, in which the Indians open opposite Hoisington. St. John, which impressed coaches as the top pick in Class 2A's preseason poll, and Spearville, which opens the season in the top-10 in Class 2A, will also be in attendance next week at LMS.

"After Pratt, we'll know where we are, for sure," Smith said. "We will match up with Hoisington size-wise; they are going to struggle to score but they always play us hard.

"We're going to have to come out looking to shoot the ball. If our perimeter shots come quick in the offense and they're guarded, that's going to be a bad thing. But, if we get shots off dribble penetration and then kicking out, or run good cuts and get them where we're shooting with space, we can live

with that. We're going to have to have kids step up and knock shots down."

The Tribe has been adjusting to Smith in his new role in the first few days of practice. "Coach Zimmerman was pretty hard-nosed; that's the usual role of a head coach," Smith said.

"As his assistant, I was pretty much the comic relief. That's how the boys have perceived me. As a head coach, that's not really the relationship you want to have with the team.

"I could tell in the first few practices we were a little bit goofy. I did get mad (over the weekend) for the first time. That caught them off-guard, because those senior boys had never seen me do that. That's probably the toughest challenge in transitioning from an assistant to a head coach.

"I enjoy coaching, I enjoy the game, I'm



Coach Jarrod Smith

competitive," Smith said. "It's a great way for an old, out-of-shape guy to remain part of the game. I'm going to be burning a lot

of energy on the sideline. I can get into the game and play from the sideline, but thankfully I don't have to run as much as they do."

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