

Larned cage teams look to add to last season's progress

By Mike Gilmore

Most first-year coaches don't think about postseason out of the gate. There's too many other things to do.

Larned girls' coach Ashley Crosby found herself in that situation last March, however, as her Lady Indians earned a sub-state title and a berth in the Class 4A Division II state tournament.

Last year in Pratt, The Lady Indians won their first sub-state trophy in years, downing Central Kansas League foes Nickerson 45-32 and Haven 40-32, to land opposite third-seeded Jefferson West in the first round at the 4A-DII tournament. The Lady Indians had a respectable showing against Jefferson, losing 51-37, while the Lady Tigers advanced to the state championship game to finish runner-up against top-seeded Girard.

Larned finished the season 13-9 – not bad for a team posting 20 wins over the previous five years.

Crosby, who served as assistant coach for three of the Lady Indians' "lean years," had the Lady Indians running last year from the getgo. Crosby infused her squad with the same grit she experienced as a part of the 1992, 26-0 Southwestern Heights championship team that was inducted into the Kansas Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in June 2016.

It was evident in the girls' first game of the season, as an aggressive Lady Indian ballclub posted its first win over

CKL opponent Pratt in the Larned Middle School gym. The Lady Indians had the Lady Greenbacks' number, posting a perfect trifecta that included a matchup in Pratt's last of a long-running girls' tournament. Larned downed Ulysses in the championship game 41-36 for the final tournament trophy.

With regular-season wins over Nickerson and Haven, the sub-state title not only seemed in reach, but inevitable.

The Lady Indians are back running the hardwood in 2017. "We are going to continue our man-to-man defensive pressure and quickness to create turnovers," Crosby noted.

Although the Lady Indians return two starters – Ivy Muldrow, a junior guard at 10 points per game and Baylea Perez, a junior point guard at 5 ppg. – first on the agenda will be point production. Graduated seniors Haley Skelton and Kelsey Parr averaged a consistent 12 ppg.

Alyssa Clark returns as the lone senior on the roster. There are eight juniors: Moldrow, Katelyn Sanger, Katie Fischer, Brooke Butler, Perez, Monica Clark, Kristin Anderson and Shaylee Nesby. Sophomores include: Kaylee Mead, Brylee Rupp, Kendra Grandy and Lynzi Myrick. Halle Barker, Eden Evers, Abby Towery and Trista Flock are freshmen.

Larned boys rebuilding for season – Second year boys' coach Jerrod Smith is rebuilding again. Last year, Smith



2017-18 Larned Lady Indian basketball team



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took over a senior-laden program with no returning starters and very little varsity experience. The Indians battled through a tough Central Kansas League to finish 1-9, and 4-17 overall.

"We're rebuilding again, but we've got a better start at it than last year," Smith noted. "Last year, we had two points per game coming

back; this year we've got 17. We had several players compete in summer league, camps, fall conditioning workouts and fall league.

"A year of maturity and a sense of what varsity basketball is all about will aid in slowing the game down to allow for better decisions to be made."

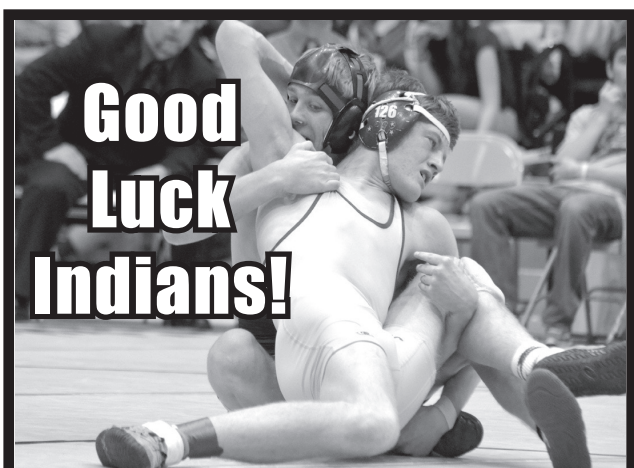
Five seniors return as letter winners, that

include Carson Smith, a 5-10 senior guard; Damontay Phillips, a 6-3 senior forward (3.6 ppg.); Thomas Harmon, 5-11 senior guard (5.7 ppg.); Alex Barger, 6-0 guard; Keelan Castro, 6-2 senior forward.

Chance Sanger tops a talented sophomore trio with 8.4 ppg.; Mason Perez, 6-1 guard and Brock Skelton, 5-11 guard, will be

looked to for quality minutes.

"Our success hinges on the boys' settling into roles and playing within the system," Smith noted. "A realistic goal from a coaching standpoint is to win 10 games this season. If everything falls into place and the kids continue to mature, we could be better than that."



Good Luck Indians!

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