

Boyd braces for season's second half

BY JEFFERY SIMMONS
Sports writer for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

Preaching patience was on both Brent Warren and Jamie Brock's to-do list when the Boyd basketball season started. The Broncos and Lady Broncos had made it a habit of hanging banners in each of the last two seasons, but many of the players responsible for titles graduated in May.

Through the first two months of the season, both Boyd coaches realize rebuilding the roster will be a season-long process.

"A lot of the girls have never studied game film or stats and actually game planned based on film because our team being so young," said Warren, the leader of the Lady Broncos. "They are starting to understand how to use these tools to get better and it's showing on the court. Our last three games, we averaged 56 points and held each opponents to 33 points or less."

Three straight wins pushed to the Lady Broncos to 6-5 overall. The Boyd girls are also mounting an early case at a title defense in the Middle Tennessee Athletic Conference, starting 3-0 in conference games.

Coach Brock, who has seen his Broncos start 3-9, has seen his young team go through growing pains.

"Our season to date has been much like our games - inconsistent," said Brock. "We played very well at times with outstanding performances by individuals and the team as a whole. We really struggled at other times and lost some games we shouldn't have."

"Our youth and limited game experience have certainly contributed to the lack of consistency."

Consistency is what Warren believes his Lady Broncos showed in late December, particularly in their best performance - a 55-31 victory over Franklin Christian.

"We were at home and

played well all four quarters," said Warren. "The last three games, we have played well on offense and defense. We had some players step up from the bench and our team chemistry is starting to come together."

Rising to the challenge in the moment is something Brock is still wanting to see his Broncos do night-tonight, but he saw glimpses of what his boys team is capable of on Dec. 7 on the road against Lancaster.

"The win against Lancaster was our best performance. It was a back and forth game, but we were able to put things together at the end," said Brock. "The thing that makes that one stand out is the way the team came together in the second half and worked together for a win."

Brock believes with a set lineup - the Broncos have dealt with several injuries among their starters - that the second half of the season can be great for his team.

"I'm very excited to get back to action. I see the progress we're making and I know there are several wins headed our way," said Brock. "I believe we will surprise teams. By the time the tournament gets here, we will be that team no one wants to play."

Warren is also confident his Lady Broncos can mount a title defense, but he wants to take his time getting his team ready.

"We are taking it one game at a time. The next game is our focus," said Warren. "We will continue to have that mindset the rest of the year. If we do that, we will be right where we want to be at the end of the year."

Boyd gets back in action with a home game Tuesday, Jan. 9 against Riverside Christian. It kicks off a three-game homestand, one which ends Saturday, Jan. 13 when the Broncos and Lady Broncos play host to crosstown rival Covenant.



Jeffery Simmons photos
Above, Erica Cantrell fights for a rebound in traffic during a home game against Franklin Christian. Cantrell and the Lady Broncos enter the second half of the season at 6-5 overall and 3-0 in Middle Tennessee Athletic Conference games.

At right, Joel Smith surveys the Holloway defense during a December home game. The Broncos are looking to rally after starting the season 3-9. Boyd will be back in action Tuesday, Jan. 9 at home against Riverside Christian. Varsity games begin at 6 p.m. A home boys JV game is also on slate this Saturday against Daniel One Academy at 6 p.m.

Making NFL playoff predictions



Jacob Dodd photo
If the Titans are to make a playoff push, they'll need more from Derrick Henry.

James Harrison is looking to make a Super Bowl run with the Patriots just two weeks after being released by the Steelers.

The Minnesota Vikings are looking to be the first team to play a Super Bowl in their home stadium, despite having backups at QB and RB.

The Titans, well they're just happy to slip into the NFL playoffs after outlasting a Jacksonville team Sunday in what will go down in history as the Mistake-Filled Bowl.

Analyzing the brackets, it appears we're in store for a wild playoff ride. The New England Patriots have been established as the Vegas favorites largely because they're always the favorites and always seem to win.

The Buffalo Bills have the longest odds at 200-1, followed by our beloved Titans at 80-1.

I give the Bills a fair shot of winning their first-round matchup against the Jags in Jacksonville. Jags QB Blake Bortles has thrown 5 picks the past two games, proving once again he is a symbol of affliction.

I'd rate the Titans as heavy under-



dogs in their Saturday game in Kansas City. The Chiefs have explosive playmakers and a dependable QB. The only thing explosive about the Titans offense has been its ability to self-destruct.

For a Titans team that prides itself on running the football, RB Derrick Henry was held to 1.8 yards per carry against the Jags and was continually stuffed on short yardage plays. The Titans most effective offensive play this season has been for QB Marcus Mariota to scramble wildly from the pocket. The team can't pick up a first down on third-and-1 by running up the middle.

As predictable as it may seem, I like the Steelers to face the Patriots for the AFC title. They have the two best QBs in the conference and a

knack for winning big games.

In the NFC, I like the draw of the L.A. Rams, who start the playoffs against the surprisingly mundane Atlanta Falcons. I expect the Rams to win and advance to play the Eagles, who limp into the postseason with a struggling Nick Foles at QB.

The Eagles aren't the same team with Foles throwing the ball as they are with Carson Wentz. I see Philly as a one-and-done team.

The Vikings are big and physical on both sides of the ball. Defensively, they can pancake the run, get after the QB, and defend the pass with a big-play secondary. I look for the Vikings to edge the shifty Saints and face the Rams for the NFC crown.

In the AFC, injuries could play a huge role if Steeler WR Antonio Brown is hobbled by a calf injury. Brown has been the best WR in football and he would draw attention away from rising rookie WR Juju Smith-Schuster.

When the dust settles, my pick is for the Vikings to beat the Steelers and win their first Super Bowl.



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