

Wildcat Hoops

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scrimmages and, once again, I feel like we are in good shape in terms of being experienced, knowledgeable about the game and able to be flexible and do a lot of different things."

Leading the way for Ricks in year two are seniors Jared Nicholson, Darrell Johnson, Josh Thurman, Robert McLeod and Tyler Avera. Nicholson, a 6-5 center, averaged 12 points per game last season and provides a dominant presence around the basket. Johnson put in over six points per game as a junior and will be the quarterback on the court for the Cats this season.

"Jared should be our top rebounder and one of, if not our top scorer this year," Ricks said. "That should fit really well with the athletic ability and quickness Darrell brings to the table at point guard."

So far, Nicholson has posted a double-double in each of the team's four games and is averaging 16.5 points and 13 rebounds per outing. Johnson follows closely with an average of just over 13 points and 8.5 rebounds per game.

Ricks also likes the team's outside shooting ability, which will be led by Johnson, Josh Thurman and his younger brother Jacob. Anthony Calhoun, who will join the team after football season, along with Avera and McLeod will hopefully help bolster that part of the Wildcats' game.

Junior Josh Bolton, another player coming over off the gridiron, will provide good size and strength and depth in the low post. Sophomore Brock Green, who Ricks said played well at Vanleave in preseason action, is also expected to come off the bench and be a key role player.

So far, the product has looked pretty good. Despite being shorthanded and without a few football players on the court, the Cats are 2-2 with wins over Vanleave and Perry Central and close, competitive losses to East Central and George County.

They got balanced scoring in the season opener at Vanleave, including 3-pointers from the Thurman brothers, who each tallied six points in the 42-38 win. Nicholson and Johnson were both in double figures in scoring and combined for 21 rebounds, while Green put in four points.

They held a 1-point lead through three quarters at East Central in game two, but couldn't hold the lead down the stretch and dropped a 42-40 decision. Johnson had his biggest game of the season with 18 points and eight rebounds. They attempted just nine 3-pointers in the game, but made three, with Johnson and the Thurman making one apiece.

They followed that loss with a dominating showing against Perry Central in the late game Thursday in New Augusta. Nicholson was huge in the 61-33 win, putting in 22 points and pulling down 19 rebounds. He also had five steals and two blocks in the game. Johnson finished with 13 points, six rebounds, five steals and three assists, while Jacob Thurman had 12 points and Josh Thurman led the team with seven steals and three assists. Green had a well-rounded game with six points, six rebounds and two blocks.

They trailed a talented George County team, which features former Greene County player Max Noblitt at point guard, by a

single point. Lack of depth caught up down the stretch in a 50-43 loss, but there were a lot more positive takeaways from that game than negative ones. Nicholson led the team 16 points and 10 rebounds, while Johnson posted a double-double with 10 points and 12 rebounds. Jacob Thurman had eight points, while Josh posted five points and eight rebounds.

The arrival of several contributors from the football field house should bolster the team's production and provide needed depth as the team continues to prepare for the start of region play in mid-December.

Nicholson says there is reason for high expectations this season and he and his teammates are excited about the possibilities.

"As a team, we have high expectations for this season," Nicholson said. "We worked hard in the offseason and aren't settling for an average season. We plan on turning some heads this year."

"We do have little areas that need improvement and those have kept us from reaching our full potential, like free-throw shooting, finishing under the rim and boxing out for rebounds, but we will figure it out."

Nicholson said he sees a lot of strengths in the team, but none more important than the players' unselfish approach.

"We only care about finding a way to win, not the individual stats and that is a huge factor that a lot of teams don't have," he added.

Fellow senior Josh Thurman agrees, saying the Wildcats have a winning mindset that is demonstrated by this being the most selfless team he's been a part of since coming to GCHS as freshmen. Like Nicholson,



Photos by Makayla Puckett / Herald Contributor

Seniors Jared Nicholson (32), Darrell Johnson (20) and Josh Thurman are shown positioning for a rebound against the Rebels last Saturday. Shown behind Thurman is former Greene County player Max Noblitt. Show below is Nicholson getting fouled as he makes two of his 16 points in the game.



he believes if the team can clean up their play in a few key areas, GCHS can be a real force to contend with this year.

"We don't need any drastic improvements to reach our potential, but we do have a few things which we need to develop," Thurman said. "So far we have had too many turnovers, but this problem however should be an easy fix."

"Myself, along with Jared have already received a technical foul this year and Coach Ricks is not one that likes for us to talk trash. He has taught us that we need to be leaders to the underclassmen and he constantly tells us two things: "let your playing do the talking" and "if you hustle and make your free throws we'll win ballgames."

Thurman believes if the Cats fix those issues and continue to improve, a region championship is at their fingertips.



Sharing the ball...

The GCHS Wildcats pride themselves on unselfish play and the willingness to spread the ball around instead of putting any focus on their own offensive statistics. Shown are junior Jacob Thurman (12) looking for an open teammate, while sophomore Brock Green (21) looks to set a pick on a George County defender.

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