



Members of the Clearwater basketball team are: front from left, Nick Middleton, Ethan Jameson, Taylor Hicks, Heath Ayers, Gage Keller, Karson Fay, Jesse Holmes; back, Richy McKinney, Jesse Pinkley, Nathan Maughn, Jackson Henson, Trent Miller, Joey Holmes, Benton Lashley, and Daylan Conner.

New Coach to Lead Clearwater This Season

Clearwater will be a team that area basketball fans will want to watch this season. The Tigers' team is loaded with talent. Clearwater also has a new coaching team.

Zac Moore is the new head coach. He is joined on the bench by assistant coaches Assistant Coaches: Richie Ayers and Garrett Alexander.

Coach Moore has been a coach since 2003. He was assistant coach for Poplar Bluff High School 2003-2005 when the Mules were back-to-back state champs. Since 2005, he has coached at the Oak Hill Academy Summer basketball camp coach. He coached at the University of North Carolina Summer basketball camp in 2006 and 2007 and at the Southeast Missouri State Summer basketball camp coach from 2007 to 2010. He was Jackson Girls Assistant Coach

2010-2011, Jackson Boys Freshman Coach 2011-2012, Cape Central Girls Freshman Coach 2012-2013, Doniphan Girls Head Coach 2013-2015, and Dexter Boys Head JV and Freshman Coach 2015-2017.

Coach Moore said that the Tigers' starting five will be Karson Fay, Nathan Maughn, Gage Keller, Taylor Hicks, and Heath Ayers. Last season, Ayers was all-conference in both the OFC and BRL and received all-district honors.

"We will be pressing as compared to sitting back in a 2-3 zone and looking to push the ball on offense," Moore stated. "We will be speeding the game up and pressing. We have a good core of players coming back that saw lots of time at the varsity level and will be quick on defense. Our weaknesses are lack of height and lack of depth.

The Black River League and Ozark Foothills Conference are going to be very competitive. "We are looking to go out and play on the right side of the bracket and compete for championships," Moore said.

The JV team will be small in size, but can really shoot the ball, according to Coach Moore.

Clearwater's team philosophy this season is, "Being a hard working team, working on the fundamentals daily. We are developing a new culture with new standards. Holding each other responsible, and ones self-accountability. We are also working on getting comfortable being uncomfortable and by that pushing each other to be their absolute best. We want to play at a fast past and play tenacious defense. We all also want to develop young men who can be

great leaders later on in life and applying the life skills they learn through the sport of basketball."

The Tigers have set high goals for the season. They want to play on the right side of tournaments, and compete for championships

Heath Ayers is the tallest player on the team at 6'3". The shortest players on the team are Daylan Conner and Richy McKinney at 5'5".

Gage Keller will be looked on to fill many roles on the team. He is expected to impact the team for scoring and will also be guarding the other team's best player

Five players on the team have varsity experience—Heath Ayers, Taylor Hicks, Gage Keller, Karson Fay, Nick Middleton, Trent Miller, and Nathan Maughn.

Coach Moore foresees his

team as having a balanced scoring attack. "I can see the team having a different leading scorer each night," Moore said.

When asked if he foresees any playing having a breakout season, Coach Moore responded, "Taylor Hicks is a player I

see ready for big year." Gage Keller and Nick Middleton are two players to watch; both have over 30-inch verticals.

"I can see Karson Fay stepping up and being a floor general this year and running point for us," Moore said."

Panthers

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Dinkins said. "We are expecting to see that repeat itself this year and enjoy how hard he works to make his team better."

Three freshmen will be seeing playing time on the varsity team—DJ Prater, 6'0", Drenin Dinkins 5'8", and Champ McMurry 6'0".

These three freshman will fill several key roles on this year's varsity team," Dinkins said. "Fortunately, over the past several years, they have worked extremely hard on their skill sets and knowledge of the game. We believe the work they have put in and those past experiences will enable them to adjust quickly to the varsity game and make major contributions.

Comment on this year's conference: The BRL Conference is wide open once again this year. The conference should have many exciting games this winter. Lesterville, Ellington, and East Carter will have teams that can win the Conference. Clearwater should also be very competitive.

With South Iron's low numbers, the coaches are uncertain if they will be able to play a full JV game this year.

Lesterville

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ed to take notice and circled them on the calendar. I think this year they will be better prepared to handle those expectations and they know what they need to do to succeed."

Lesterville's strength is its ability to go deep into its bench during games. Depth is invaluable in Caruso's opinion, especially late in the season.

"We also have a high IQ and good understanding of how the game should be played on both sides of the floor," Caruso said. "A weakness may be our lack of size. It can help us some nights and it may hurt us some nights."

This year the BRL is going to be a slug fest. Coach Caruso is not positive that there is an outright favorite right now. Every team knows what each other has and will bring their best at you. Teams may walk out of the conference black and blue this year, according to Caruso.

Depending on numbers, Lesterville may not have a JV team. Lesterville's team philosophy this season is, "Simply outwork, out hustle, outplay, and do the small things to win games. But most importantly have fun."

"We have some team goals that we keep in house, but we hope to compete at a high level in the conference and come districts we hope to be at our best," Caruso stated.

Ellington

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be Will Copeland, Rylee Hunter, Austin Grimes, Brycen King, and Kyle Conkright.

Will Copeland is a 6'1" senior guard/forward. He averaged 10 points per game, 5 rebounds per game, and three assists per game. He has the ability to fill many roles on the team. "Offensively and defensively, Will can play anyone on the floor," said Coach Peterson. "He is one of two leaders on the team."

Senior Rylee Hunter is a 6'0" guard/gord. He averaged 7 ppg and 4 rpg last season. "We will rely on Rylee to guard and rebound consistently and get us 8-10 points per game," said Coach Peterson.

Austin Grimes is a 6'1" junior forward. He averaged 2 ppg and 3 rpg last season. "Austin will get the task of guarding the opponents best player; he has improved his overall game in the last couple of years," Peterson said.

Sophomore Brycen King is a 6'0" guard. He was the leading scorer a year ago. "He can flatout shoot it; he needs to get more rebounds for us this year and more defensive consistency," Peterson said. King averaged 14 ppg and 2 assists per game. He hit 76 of 186 three-points (41 percent).

Kyle Conkright is a 5'10" sophomore point guard. Last season, he averaged 10

ppg, 4 apg, and 2 steals per game. "He along with Will Copeland are our two leaders," Peterson said. "He's a true point guard that can also score."

"At some point in the season, hopefully earlier than later, we need Caleb Whitehead (who is returning to us after sitting out his sophomore season) to fill that huge sixth man role," Peterson said. "We're also going to have to have some other sophomores such as Trevor Copeland, Carson Anderson, and Carson McNail to come up from the JV and give us some valuable varsity minutes.

Lady Whippets

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man. She is a very versatile player who is one of four freshmen who will be asked to make an immediate impact at the varsity level. "She is going to have to handle the basketball a lot more this season than she has had to in the past," King said.

Gretchen Hackworth is a freshman. She is also going to be asked to fill a variety of roles on the team. "She is a very explosive player and aggressive player, who will do whatever is asked of her," King said.

Abbi Harper is another of the team's freshmen. "She has been working very hard on the defensive end in practice so

far," King said. "She is a very smart defender and takes price in defense."

Laura Gore is another member of the hardworking freshmen class who is being asked to make an immediate contribution. "Laura has become more of an outside scoring threat in the off season," King stated.

Coach King said Tyler Conkright has the ability to fill many roles and is going to be very versatile. "She is capable of palying every position and will be asked to do so," King stated.

Three of the Lady Whippets have varsity playing experience—Hannah Fitzgerald,

ald, Kyra Moyers, and Gracie Price.

"This year's Lady Whippets will be looking to pressure other teams and outwork their opponents," King stated.

"We're going to be looking to our 6'2" junior, Gracie

Price, to play a big part in our team's success," King continued. "We will also be counting on our freshmen to make an immediate impact at the varsity level."

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