

Lady Cats Hoops

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GCHS junior guard Kat Garrett is shown coming out to guard freshman Lisa Johnson as the Lady Cats work on defensive sets under the ever-watchful eye of veteran coach Dale Kimble during practice on Monday.

"The starting lineup could be fluid and ever-changing, this year, but that is a positive.

At this point it could be a combination of any number of players and we hope players will step up when challenged." There will be immediate opportunities for 'stepping up' for the Lady Cats as last year's team leaders Sha Sha Winborn, McKay Lee Bray and Nyke Bolton have moved on, leaving some big shoes to fill. But, the senior trio of Bre Brown, Taylor McLeod and Destiny Eubanks say the team is ready for the challenge.

"We are strong in every position on the court," Taylor said when asked about the team's depth and competition among players. But you can improve anything and we are always pushing each other and working to get better."

Brown said she feels really good about the team's prospects for her senior year. She echoed Taylor's thoughts on the team's work ethic and made a special note to talk about the feeling of family within the program.

"I believe in my heart that we are going all the way this year, no doubt," Brown said. "I see us getting better in each practice and each game. We will coninue to work hard as a team and together as a family."

Brown can be dominant in the post and has made big strides on the defensive end. She averaged 8.1 points and 5.7 rebounds per game as a junior, but through the first two games of the season has pushed those averages to 20 points and 10.5 rebounds per outing. She earned her first double-double of the year last Tuesday with 23 points and 15 rebounds, including eight on the defensive end, as GCHS rolled past Gulfport 54-45.

McLeod is another strong presence near the basket for Kimble's squad and should see an expanded roll this year.

Eubanks will start for the Lady Cats at shooting guard. Kimble says she is an excellent shooter and is also strong when driving to the basket. She averages seven points and 4.4 rebounds per game as a junior and gained valuable experience competing in Australia this past summer. She hasn't gotten off to a blazing start this year, but Kimble says she is beginning to come into form. That appeared to be the case against Gulfport as Eubanks put up 11 points against the Lady Admirals, while also pulling down five rebounds, dishing out six assists and making five steals on the

"Our goal is to continue to come together as a team and go through the whole season undefeated," a confident Eubanks said this past weekend. "Our biggest strengths are how we play together as one unit and how we never quit until the end."

defensive end.

A strong crop of juniors is also expected to play a big role in any success the Lady Cats have. Kat Garrett, Serenity Blakely, Gen Walley and Kelsie Mitchell will see a lot of minutes for Kimble this year, with Garrett and Blakely projected to be regular starters and Walley and Mitchell playing key roles off the bench.

Garret will be the team's other shooting guard and like Eubanks is well-rounded and be expected to knock down shots from the perimeter. Blakely and Walley will play at the forward positions, while Mitchell will play guard.

"Serenity is an excellent defensive player who can take it to the basket and has really improved her shooting,"

Kimble said. "Gen complements Serenity with her ability to shoot the 3-pointer and play down low, and is possibly our best shot blocker.'

"Rounding out our possible starting lineup will be Kelsie, sophomore Charlee Meadows, and freshmen Lisa Johnson or Reanna Moody. All four of those girls will play multiple positions and be expected to enhance our team."

Kimble said sophomores Shalekia Silas and Charity Walley will see considerable playing time as well. Silas could play multiple positions throughout the year, while Walley will expect to contribute in the low post.

"Returning starters like Bre are expected to do well, but we need

Photos by Russell Turner / Herald Editor

Senior Taylor McLeod is shown putting up a basket during a varsity scrimmage last week. McLeod is a post player that is expected to see considerable minutes this year.



a well-rounded team with all players contributing," Kimble said. "We play to have a better more efficient up-tempo game and use the dribble drive offense some with some set plays."

"I believe we have the pieces that should allow us to compete for a division championship. We have been in the state playoffs for four consecutive years and expect that to continue."

Kimble clearly has good reason to be optimistic, but competing in Region 7-4A is no cakewalk. Last year's region champion, Lawrence County, has been replaced by Stone County, who was dominant in Class 5A last year. The nonregion schedule is tough as well, but should help the Lady Cats prepare for the games that count the most.

"Stone County should be our strongest competition in region. They had a record of 25-2 and return the bulk of their line- up. The remaining schools in our region should be improved with most having a large number of returning starters, so the region should be very competitive."

"Our schedule has been upgraded significantly, due to the fact that some schools dropped us from their schedule. Forest, Gulfport, Yazoo County and Lamar Christian are all very strong teams. Forest was 23-6 last year, Lamar Christian

was 32-3 and won a state championship. Yazoo County made it to the third round of the state playoffs and Gulfport returns all their team and should be much better."

After a bit of first-game jitters the Lady Cats cruised to a 55-28 win over Forest to open the season.

"We settled down and became more focused and handled their press well," Kimble said. "We played a very focused second half and put them away."

"We had a strong second half against Gulport as well, with Bre Brown and Gen Walley leading the way. We switched our defenses the second half, but mostly we matched and exceeded Gulfport's intensity. Our girls did another very good job of handling the press to get one of the biggest non-conference wins for this program."

The Lady Cats will be back in action this weekend, competing in the Perry Central Tournament in New Augusta.



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