

Griffins' year of experience will serve them well as basketball season begins

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GLEN CARBON – It's often been said that there's absolutely no substitute for experience, and in the case of the boys basketball team at Father McGivney Catholic, that experience will be valuable as the Griffins begin their second varsity season. And there's plenty of good expectations ahead.

“I think we do,” said Griffins coach Rich Beyers of his team now seasoned. “We've got four seniors; it'll be the first class that we'll have where I've had them all the way through from freshman to seniors. So, we're pretty excited about that, hoping for big things for them. They've worked hard, they've put in a lot of time, and had a good summer.”

In addition, the underclassmen are looking to make solid contributions to the Griffins' success in the 2017-18 campaign.

“We've got a good crop of freshmen as well that are coining in,” Beyers said, “a good crop of sophomores. We've got a solid junior. A little bit weak in our junior class, but you know, I think our sophomore class can help make up for that.”

McGivney returns its top three scorers, seniors Alex Loeffler, Logan Shumate and Dan Jones. Those three are expected to be the Griffins' key players.

“We expect big things out of them,” Beyers said. “They're probably going to carry the load again this year, between the three of them. Logan averaged pretty much a double-double last year, and lead us in pretty much every statistical category. Everything that's possible, he lead us in.”

Sophomores Zach Brasel and Kellen Weir are also expected to make contributions to the Griffins as the season goes along.

“They've got to step in and do a good job this year for us,” Beyers said, “in order to round out our varsity team this year.”

Jones and Loeffler have both made big impressions as the preseason workouts have gone on.

“Dan Jones, he's shooting the ball really well right now as a senior,” Beyers said. “His confidence just seems to be pretty high in practice, he's showing good leadership. Alex is shooting the ball well, better than I've ever seen him shoot. And they're showing some pretty good leadership in practice.”

In addition, three freshmen — guards Luke Deakos, Justin Wenos and Andrew Dupy — have caught Beyers' eye in practice, and could make an impact as the season goes on.

“I think those three, based off of what I've seen from the summer, and their commitment to being everything, they could be big contributors,” Beyers said.

In addition, Dan Jones' younger brother, freshman Jacob Jones, also has an opportunity to help the Griffins this season.

“He's got an opportunity to do some things if he shows a little bit more commitment,” Beyers said, “if we can get him to play a little more sense of urgency. But he's doing a great job in practice.”

Other players who could help the Griffins' cause this season include senior Matt Taphorn, junior Elijah Burns, sophomores Caleb Tanzyus, Clayton Scott, Evan Yasitus, Nathan Cook and Nicholas Antonini, along with freshmen Christopher Horn, Joshua Horn, Tanner Fox and Tyler Guthrie.

The Griffins open the season on Thanksgiving week at the Mulberry Grove Tournament, a change from last season after a tournament at Trenton Wesclin was discontinued. The home opener will be Dec. 15 against East Alton-Wood River, and the schedule features teams such as New Athens, Bunker Hill, Civic Memorial, and a return to the Vandalia Holiday Tournament.

The important thing for the Griffins is that the team has that year of varsity experience, and knows what to expect during games.

“The physicality of the game last year, I think, got to us a little bit,” Beyers said. “No excuses this year as far as not being ready for that, or expecting that. The one thing, though, that I think will help, I wish we got it a little earlier. But we did get a weight room this summer as well. And the boys have been working hard, they've got early bird weight lifting classes in the morning.

"I know that's helping them get stronger, starting to finish a little more in traffic and that sort of thing. It's a big jump. I think that a lot of people don't realize, really what varsity entails, but it's nice to have that experience with at least five, six, seven of our guys.”

And most importantly, the players have worked hard and are prepared for the journey ahead.

“Like I said, the biggest thing is they've bought in, they're working hard, and that's the biggest thing,” Beyers said. “We've seen them fundamentally better from where they were at this time last year. And even over the summer, we saw our freshmen come in, and they had a good summer. They competed on the JV level all summer long.”

