

CM Girls Basketball Going To Take It One Game At A Time - Keep Goals Simple Heading Into 2022-23 Season

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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BETHALTO - Civic Memorial girl's basketball head coach Mike Arbuthnot wants to make one thing clear this season, just like last, it's not "state or bust."

Even though the Eagles went on to take fourth place at the IHSA Class 3A state tournament last season, he says it's something that the team just doesn't even think about.

"We don't talk about it," Arbuthnot said. "It's one of those things that's just game to game and practice to practice."

"We'll see," he said about making another deep run.

The Eagles took it game by game last year on their way to a 32-6 season including a 13-game win streak to start off the year.

But for Arbuthnot and the team, that was last year, in the past. They're moving forward.

"I like the makeup of our team," Arb said heading into the 2022-23 season which begins in about two weeks' time.

The team is made up of four seniors (Olivia Durbin, Hannah Meiser, Maya Tuckson, and Aubree Wallace), one junior (Avari Combes), and is filled out by a plethora of freshmen and sophomores.

Arb thinks that his upperclassmen are the keys to success this season agreeing that they all want to be leaders for the team.

"Really all of them do in their own way," he said. "They've been with me for three years and they know me. They know that I'm looking for leadership from the upperclassman."

"They've all got good attitudes. Some of them are more vocal, and some of them lead by example. It's a very good senior group that has the experience, state experience, and a lot of big-game experience. They've been there, which helps our freshman and sophomores."

"It's kind of weird," Arb said. "We had that run last year and we lost some kids, but we've got a lot of kids back that have a lot of experience."

The team graduated four seniors: Madaline Brueckner, Emily Williams, Kelpie Zupan, and Claire Christeson.

Christeson was sidelined all season after dealing with an injury and Brueckner usually came off the bench.

Williams was one of three players that played in all 38 games last season, usually making the start. She scored 155 points last season which was fifth on the team. She could usually be found posted up under the basket as she was a rebounding machine with 110 last year.

Zupan, arguably the team's best all-around player last year, will sorely be missed. She scored 434 points and appeared in 33 games. She was averaging 13.2 points per game and 4.4 rebounds per game. She snagged 146 boards which was second on the team to Durbin.

Durbin will return after leading the team in nearly every statistic a year ago. She scored 533 points, 345 of which came from behind the three-point line. She put through 115 threes which was a team-high. She was shooting nearly 40 percent from behind the arc. She also led the team in boards with 192, 125 of which were defensive.

Wallace returns this season, although dealing with an injury herself, is unsure when her first game back might be. She went out in the state third-place game last season and was confirmed later to be out for at least a year with a torn ACL and meniscus.

She scored 138 points last season and had a team-high 221 assists and 118 steals.

Aubree's return remains up in the air.

"We just want her to be healthy," her coach said. "We just want her to have a really good senior year experience playing athletics."

Meiser and Tuckson will have big shoes to fill until the eventual return of Wallace. As will sophomore Meredith Brueckner who played some crucial minutes during last year's postseason run.

As per the team's game plan this season, it's a lot of the same as last year; shoot lots of threes.

"I think we might shoot more threes than last year," Arbuthnot said.

His team set a school record with 296 made three-pointers, a number that puts them in 4th place in IHSA history in single-season scoring.

"We do have some kids that can shoot it and it's one of those things where sometimes you live by it other times you die by it," he said.

"We want to play fast, we want to get shots off. We know there's a shot-clock coming, so we play like there's a shot clock."

His team was seen going through the motions of various three-point set plays Wednesday afternoon at practice.

"That's just what we're known for, getting quick shots up and being a three-point shooting team," Combes said after practice.

The Eagles just began practicing as a team again on Monday and go five, or even six times a week. Arbuthnot mentioned that he likes to hold Sunday practices because the team usually has a lot of games scheduled on Mondays. He said that if his team hasn't practiced since Friday afternoon and then has a game on Monday night, he hasn't seen them for almost two and a half days.

Overall, Arb is happy with the turnout this season. The program has 24 girls out.

He mentioned that the goals pre-season are just like everyone else, win 20 ball games and push for a regional plague. After that you just go from there he said.

"We have a good ball club, but there are some things that need to go your way, just to even win the conference."

He mentioned that everyone in the Mississippi Valley Conference got better. Since Arbuthnot has been coaching at CM, the Eagles haven't lost a conference game. He thinks that's going to be a lot tougher to do this season.

While the schedule isn't out yet, Arb did confirm that his team will open the season again in the Taylorville Tournament, the same one they won a season ago.

The girls are most definitely looking forward to it and getting back out onto the court.

"I know we had a good season last year and we lost a couple of people, but I feel like we're still the same place we are," Durbin said.

The Eagles have the pieces to make another run and are in some ways better than last year, but they're still going to go ahead and take it one game at a time.