

LADY DEVILS HAVE EYES SIGHTING 20 VICTORIES

Blue Devil B'ballers Return Veteran Group of Girls Plus 1

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Three years ago, a very young group of Westfield High School basketball girls, which included four talented freshmen, inherited a team that was rock bottom at 0-23 the year before. After finishing the season with a 9-13 record, that young group, minus one talented girl, improved to 14-10 last year. Now, with that talented girl back in the lineup, these veteran Blue Devils are aiming even higher.

"We are looking to win 20 games this year. If we can win 20 games, a lot of good things will happen. We want to make the states and finish up there in the county," commented Blue Devil Head Coach Joe Marino.

What was apparent in their recent practice session was the level of quiet intensity, while focusing on agility and conditioning drills.

"We were in the weight room about three times a week. We do a lot of

pliametrics (flexibility) and we do a lot of agility. We are hoping to get faster and stronger," said Marino. "We try to condition throughout the whole practice."

Of the 13 or 14 girls who Coach Marino plans to use at the varsity level from time to time, 10 could be considered veterans. Seniors Katie Cronen and Casey El Koury, last years Co-Captains, and senior LeAnne Skorge, along with juniors Erin Miller, Gab O'Leary, Danielle Infantino and Stephanie Slodyczka, and sophomores Gabby Jakub, Tara Handza and Charlotte O'Leary have varsity experience. Sophomores Keri Pringle and Cyndel Matthews and freshman Diana Venezia are expected to get some varsity action.

Due to an injury, Slodyczka sat out the entire 2005-6 season but, in her freshman season, she led the team in rebounds with 179 and was second in scoring with 252 points. Slodyczka is

obviously expected to be a boon under the boards, as well as an excellent scorer.

"She is very interchangeable. She could be a center. She could be a forward. A lot of these girls are interchangeable," said Marino.

Last year, Cronen, El Koury and Skorge were also very effective under the boards in pulling down rebounds. Cronen was second on the team in rebounds and also knew how to put the ball in the net with 102 points. El Koury was the Devils' second-leading scorer with 179 points and third-leading rebounder with 99.

Last year, Infantino, who pulled 91 rebounds, demonstrated that she had an outside touch by sinking 110 points. Handza came off the bench and pumped in 93 points, several from 3-point range and Jakub showed her ability in grabbing rebounds.

Miller netted 362 points last year to bring her two-year total to 738. When fouled, she could reap the points, hitting 89-138 in free throws. She could drive to the basket and was effective outside, with a team-leading 25 hits from three-point range. Miller also led the team in rebounds with 153 and steals with 88 to elevate her two-year theft total to 166.

Point guard Gab O'Leary, who led in assists with 88 to bring her two-year total to 173, was also deadly in 3-pointers with 15 and totaled 173 points. Her quick hands earned her 42 steals.

"They all bring something special to the table. It's a privilege to teach these types of kids because they work hard in practice. They are very coachable. They listen and they want to win. They are very intense and they are very aggressive," said Marino.

The Blue Devils will get the opportunity to demonstrate their intensity when they host Linden on Friday, December 15, at 7 p.m.



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
GOING THROUGH THE DRILLS...Blue Devil Danielle Infantino works on a dribbling drill during practice.

MURPHY, LARKIN, MILLERS NAMED SP-F CAPTAINS

Raider Swim Boys/Girls Look Forward to Rewarding Season

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

High expectations, for good reasons, are on the minds of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School girls and boys swimming teams this season. Both teams return a multitude of talent, which should put them in contention for county and sectional titles.

Last year, the Raider girls won their second straight NJSIAA Public B title with an 88-82 upset victory over then No. 4 ranked Haddonfield. The Raider girls also beat Westfield, 92-78, in the season opener but the Blue Devil girls returned the favor by edging them for the Union County Tournament title, 206-199.

The Raider girls annihilated Montgomery, 118.5-51.5, for the NJ, Section 2, Public B title and beat Princeton, 95-75, in the Public B semis before topping Haddonfield. In 2005, the Raider girls won their first NJSIAA crown with a 95-75 victory over Princeton. Under Head Coach Jessica Hulnik, the girls have won three sectional titles.

The Raider girls graduated four fine swimmers: Christine Albanese Demair, Danielle Koch, Kate Kosenick and Kristen Henkels. They will, however, get a lot of mileage from several of their returning girls.

Junior Melissa Helock and senior

Co-Captain Jillian Murphy, whose girls almost always touched the wall before their opponents last year, could be counted on to reap many team points on individual events, as well as, in relays. Helock will be especially strong in the 200 and 500 freestyle events and Murphy, an "Iron Horse" - non-rusting of course - who would swim any event needed, will be very strong in the sprints. Senior Co-Captain Brittany Larkin will be strong in the distance events.

"Their experience and leadership should prove very valuable," said coach Hulnik.

Jennifer Gaglioti, Carol Montiero and Alex Sabalao round out the seniors. More depth and talent come with juniors Mary Henkels (back-

stroke, sprints), Becca Fox (IM, breaststroke), Katelyn Cavanaugh (sprints), Alyssa Weinberg (breaststroke) and Kate Johnson (backstroke) along with sophomores Kim Rizzo, Allison Haggan, Sephanie Glover, Annie O'Halloran and Mary Poillon. The freshmen include Stephanie Baliko, Kelly Gajdzisz, Becca Dunn, Kelsey Rossi, Kim Many and Perry Sandrock.

"As in past years, our strength lies

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ZAZZALI, MAINS SELECTED AS TEAM CO-CAPTAINS

Lady Raider B'ballers Expect As Good if Not Better Season

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Graduating four super athletes after the 2004-05 season and returning just two varsity players, few would have guessed that the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School girls basketball team could follow with another fine season. But the Raiders finished 21-8 to extend a 20+ wins season for the fifth-straight year and feel that they can achieve that success this season.

Last year, the Raiders placed a scrappy group on the courts and nothing much has changed this year except they may be an even more intense group.

Seeded second in the Union County tournament (UCT), the Raiders rattled Roselle Catholic in the quarterfinals, dropped a heart-breaker in the semifinals against Roselle but quickly recovered to defeat Union, 42-36, to grab third place. In the sectional tournament, the Raiders defeated Ferris of Jersey City, 43-30, hammered 23-3 Mendham, 65-51, and stunned South Plainfield, 49-45, before falling short to No. 1 Shabazz in the final.

The Raiders graduated Lauren Benovengo, who was a dominant force under the boards, and point guard Loni Kaye but senior Co-Captain/guard Allie Zazzali, who had a team-leading 362 points, while sinking 29 three-pointers and hitting 71 percent of her free throws, and Co-Captain Lauren Mains, one of the toughest players on the court, will lead a young veteran group.

"We should be able to adequately replace them," Raider Head Coach Bruce Davis said of Benovengo and Kaye. "Overall, we should be as good or better as a team."

Sophomore Kaylan Jaichon, who will take over the center spot, "is looking a lot better. She got herself in really good shape over the summer. She went to a couple of camps," said Davis who added, "The point guard, we may have to swing some people around. A couple of my forwards, (sophomore) Jackie Law, and (junior) Brianna Character are both forwards who can move out from under the basket. We may move Allie to that spot."

Other candidates for the point guard spot could be sophomores Kathryn Cataldo and Saxony Nielson. With that flexibility, the Raiders may be able to adequately adapt to the particular character of the opposing team.

"We may, instead of playing three guards, like we did last year, we may go two guards and three bigs a lot more," said Davis.

As a freshman last year, Law was very strong offensively, with 267 points, and defensively, grabbing a team-high 258 rebounds and leading the team in steals. Junior Molly

Meehan and Emily Meehan also experienced plenty of playing time last year. New to the varsity are sophomores Laura Degman and Nicole Mineo who will add to the depth chart.

"We will run a lot. I don't lose a lot when I go to my bench. From my fifth player through my eighth and ninth players, there is not much of a drop," said Davis.

The leadership of Zazzali and Mains may define the character of this year's Raiders.

"They will run all day. They will run through walls. They will dive. They

will be all over the floor," Davis said of Zazzali and Mains. "Last year we had a pet phrase. 'It's our turn now!' We had to make a name for ourselves. The colors here at Scotch Plains are Blue and White. With Mains and Zazzali, Jackie Law and Molly Meehan, other teams, the next morning, you know they are going to be sore. These kids will play hard from the time they throw it up until the time they chase them off the court. This year our real colors are Black and Blue."

The Raiders will host Shabazz on Friday, December 15, at 4 p.m.



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
READY TO BATTLE FOR THE BALL...Raider Co-Captains Lauren Mains, left, and Allie Zazzali have a little fun before practice.

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