

BASKETBALL PREVIEW

December 4, 2024



THE MORNING SUN



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Dragon girls return four starters

By Brock Sisney
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The Pittsburg girls basketball program made significant progress during head coach Dalton Gromer's first season last year, upending Topeka Highland Park to reach the Class 5A sub-state championship game.

Pittsburg lost 47-41 in overtime to Blue Valley Southwest, falling short of a first state tournament appearance since 1999.

The Purple Dragons graduated four-year starter and Missouri Southern recruit Jacqueline Hall, but they return all their other starters and contributors from last season.

"We have a good returning group that's looking forward to something good this year," Gromer said. "It's one of those things where you're proud of the girls for how they battled through last year, and I thought we found our identity toward the end of the year."

"We're a tough team that isn't going to be an easy win. You bring that momentum at the end of the year into the summer and the start of this season. It's exciting with four returning starters who got that experience of

Dragons Schedule

Dec. 6 – at Joplin
Dec. 13 – at Lamar
Dec. 17 – Coffeyville
Dec. 20 – at Independence
Jan. 3 – Webb City
Jan. 7 – at Blue Valley Southwest
Jan. 10 – Chanute
Jan. 14 – at Fort Scott
Jan. 17 – Labette County
Jan. 23-25 – Bill Hanson Memorial Tournament
Jan. 28 – Parsons
Feb. 4 – Ottawa
Feb. 7 – at Coffeyville
Feb. 11 – Independence
Feb. 14 – at Parsons
Feb. 18 – at Chanute
Feb. 21 – Fort Scott
Feb. 25 – at Labette County

playing in a sub-state championship game in overtime and getting to come back and do it this year."

The Dragons' returning starters are senior guards Ava Heardt and Alyssa Hotze, junior forward Onna Jorge and senior post Gabrielle White.

"Gabby White, she's always been an emotional leader, a vocal leader," Gromer said. "She and Jackie were our two leaders last year, but the one thing I am big on is that there's more than one way to lead. We have two other seniors and I think they do a good job (leading) in their own way, Alyssa Hotze and Ava Heardt. Those three will be our biggest leaders this year."



Pittsburg girls coach Dalton Gromer addresses the starters between quarters Monday night in a jambo-ree at Frontenac High School. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN

Adessah Reed and Sophia Hertrich also gained starting experience last season.

"Everyone is excited for a new start to the year and finding their role and how that changes from year-to-year," Gromer said. "I know Sophia and Adessah, they played a lot more in their sophomore year from their

freshman year. They're ready to take on those responsibilities, and they're ready to go."

Teams generally improve during a head coach's second season, and Gromer touched on the differences between his first and his second season.

"Last year, it just felt like you were trying to get everything orga-

nized and put together and making sure that I am doing everything the right way," Gromer said. "I remember last year I was so excited for our first couple games and this year, I was just so excited for the first day of practice. Just being able to get my practice plan and get the girls better. It's been good for me to get ex-

perience from my first year to my second."

It also helps Gromer and the girls basketball program that assistant coaches Anita Walker, Ela Hendrickson and DeShaun English return this season.

"I was an assistant for two years before I became head coach and this is the first time

SEE DRAGONS, 7C

Dragon boys to build around Mitchell, Wesley

By Brock Sisney
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The Pittsburg boys basketball team returns two starters and five additional lettermen from last season's 17-5 Southeast Kansas League champion and Class 5A sub-state runner-up.

The Purple Dragons return senior forwards T.J. Wesley and Nate Mitchell, who provided most of the punch on the inside last season.

Pittsburg graduated its all-time leading scorer Mason English, who averaged nearly a triple-double with 33.3 points, 9.5 rebounds, 8.4 assists and nearly four steals last season, and key role player and Missouri Valley College recruit Joey Cronister.

The Dragons also lost transfers Jayden Brown to St. Mary's Colgan and Aiden Gazaway to Camden, N.J., as well as three other seniors who were key contributors to a league championship.

"Losing a lot with Mason English, our team will be looking for multiple players to step up and replace his scoring," Pittsburg coach Jordan Woods

Dragons Schedule

Dec. 6 – at Joplin
Dec. 13 – Riverton
Dec. 17 – Coffeyville
Dec. 20 – at Independence
Jan. 3 – Webb City
Jan. 7 – at Carl Junction
Jan. 10 – Chanute
Jan. 14 – at Fort Scott
Jan. 17 – Labette County
Jan. 23-25 – Bill Hanson Memorial Tournament
Jan. 28 – Parsons
Feb. 4 – Ottawa
Feb. 7 – at Coffeyville
Feb. 11 – Independence
Feb. 14 – at Parsons
Feb. 18 – at Chanute
Feb. 21 – Fort Scott
Feb. 25 – at Labette County

said. "It is a part of high school athletics, and we expect to have a team that will play hard and compete each and every night. With some senior leadership from our two returning starters, we will expect a lot from T.J. and Nate with production and building our team. Key Logan will also look to be a major contributor to our team as well. We're looking to see who else steps up and competes to earn playing time this year."

Mitchell was often the Dragons' second-leading scorer last season. For example, he scored 15 points during Pittsburg's 60-58 win Jan. 9 at home against rival Fort Scott,



Seniors and returning starters T.J. Wesley (24) and Nate Mitchell (23) are the two returning starters for the Pittsburg Purple Dragons. BROCK SISNEY/THE MORNING SUN

including an old-fashioned three-point play late in the proceedings that gave the Dragons the lead for good and closed out the scoring.

Wesley also had five points in the win against the Tigers.

Seniors Nolan Turnbull and Logan Mantooth, junior Kadin Navaratnam and sophomore Jamarcus Davis all saw limited varsity action last season.

Woods and assistant coaches Matt Butler,

Kiley Roelfs and Gavin Pytlowany know the SEK teams will show the Dragons no mercy as they develop a new identity.

"The league will be tough again with a lot of teams returning

experience from last year," Woods said. "Last season, we always received opponents' best efforts night in and night out. We will need to bring our best every night with teams

SEE PHS, 7C

Expectations the same for Colgan girls

By Kalon Fullerton
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It'll be a new look for the St. Mary's Colgan girls basketball team, but the expectations are still the same.

The Panthers have not lost a regular-season game since Feb. 19, 2021, against Frontenac. The Panthers have come close to the Class 2A state title, placing third in consecutive years. Last year, Colgan saw its hopes of an undefeated season end in the semifinals of the state tournament to eventual state champion Wichita Independent before defeating Valley Heights in the consolation game, finishing with a 25-1 record.

"The goals and the expectations haven't changed," Colgan head coach Abby Farabi said. "Our goal is to win state and win the league. It's going to be a little tougher."

Things will look different for the Panthers after all-state center Lily Brown graduated. Brown averaged 23 points and 11 rebounds per game in her senior year.

The Panthers also lost starter and All-CNC League honorable

mention player Polona Kalan to graduation.

"Life is different without our seniors," Farabi said. "A lot of our plays were for Lily; we had a lot of lob plays. We won't be as tall."

"We have five seniors this year and they're doing a great job of being leaders. The expectations haven't changed. Things will be different, but the standard will still be the same."

Leading the charge for the Panthers this season will be their two returning starters, senior forward Mariah Harris, who earned an All-League second team nod, and junior guard Jakayla Davis, who had a breakout sophomore season that included setting a school record with nine 3-point goals in a game.

Seniors Caroline Imhof, Lauren O'Brien, Katie Paulie and Khyla Osborn also return.

"Jakayla's coming out of her shell," Farabi said. "I haven't really seen a player in this area with the skill she has. She still hasn't quite shown how good she is."

"We return Mariah; she's played a lot of minutes for us. She's played in big games and

Panthers Schedule

Dec. 6—at Columbus
Dec. 10—Lamar
Dec. 17—Riverton
Dec. 20—at Liberal
Jan. 9—at Baxter Springs
Jan. 10—at Humboldt
Jan. 14—Galena
Jan. 17—Carl Junction
Jan. 23-25—Four State Raider Classic
Jan. 28—Frontenac
Jan. 31—at Girard
Feb. 4—Baxter Springs
Feb. 7—Columbus
Feb. 11—at Riverton
Feb. 14—at Galena
Feb. 17—at Independence
Feb. 21—at Frontenac
Feb. 25—Girard

I'm impressed with her work ethic.

"We bring a lot of experience back with Caroline and Lauren. We'll be deeper than we have in the past."

"We're putting a new offense in. We're not going to be very patient; we're going to run the floor. We're going to shoot a lot of outside shots but we have the athletes to knock down those shots and get the rebounds."

The Panthers will look to win their fifth straight league title. In addition to its CNC League schedule, Colgan will play in the Raider Classic as well as facing non-league opponents Lamar, Liberal,



Caroline Imhof, Jakayla Davis, Khyla Osborn, Lauren O'Brien, Mariah Harris and Molly Swezey (left to right) are Colgan's most experienced players. COURTESY PHOTO / ABBY FARABI

Humboldt, Carl Junction and Independence.

"We're excited for different challenges," Farabi said. "The CNC is a grind. Top to bottom, there's competitive

teams and upsets always happen. There's going to be some bumps in the road. We've been fortunate to not play in too many tough games, but I think playing tougher

competition will help us in the end. My biggest thing is to take it one game at a time. We want to be playing our best basketball in March."



From left to right, sophomore Brady Bettega, junior Klayton Adamson, junior Brady Crossland, senior Blake Wilkes, junior Brock Radell and junior Joe Lomshek are among the candidates to fill St. Mary's Colgan's vacancies in the starting lineup. COURTESY CLINT HEFFERN

Panther boys look to return to state tourney

By Kalon Fullerton
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The St. Mary's Colgan Panthers and third-year head coach Clint Heffern will look to return to the state tournament

after falling short last season.

After defeating Sedan in the sub-state semifinals, the Panthers ran into a hot Erie team and fell 50-48 in the title game.

"I told the boys to begin with the end in mind," Heffern said. "We had our players meeting and I showed them how our last two seasons ended. My first year, we beat a great

Central Heights team and made it to state. Last year, we beat Sedan and ran into Erie. It was just an awful feeling."

If the Panthers are to make a return trip to the Class 2A state tournament, Heffern will have to find a new starting lineup after losing all five of last year's starters to graduation.

"Definitely some big shoes to fill," Heffern said. "I think our guys are ready to step into those spots. We only have one senior this year, Blake Wilkes. He's been working hard and he has some great length."

"We have a great varsity class that has played a lot of minutes. The upperclassmen this year are ready for this opportunity."

"I feel like we have nine guys who can start. It might be a situation where our starting lineup changes from game to game. It's a testament to our guys. I'm really liking our depth."

Wilkes and Colgan's nine juniors, Brady Badart, Brady Crossland, Joe Lomshek, Carston Simmons, Klayton

Adamson, Anthony Schremmer, Caleb Garner, Bryson Lopez and Pittsburg transfer Jayden Brown, will look to earn a second straight CNC League title after the Panthers shared the title with Girard last year, finishing with an 18-4 record.

"It sounds a little cliché but it's going to be tough every night," Heffern said. "Definitely some big names from last year that are gone, but some big names are back -- Jack Perry at Galena, Scott Moore at Girard, Terry Richardson at Riverton, Jacob Grant at Baxter Springs. It's going to be a tough league. Hopefully it challenges us and gets us ready for the postseason."

Heffern enters his third year as head coach with a 29-16 overall record.

"Last year I learned a lot," Heffern said. "I'm still learning, but I really like where our program is going. The freshmen I had in my first year are juniors now. They know how we operate, things like handing the ball to the

Panthers Schedule
Dec. 6—at Columbus
Dec. 10—Lamar
Dec. 17—Riverton
Dec. 20—at Liberal
Jan. 9—at Baxter Springs
Jan. 10—at Humboldt
Jan. 14—Galena
Jan. 17—Carl Junction
Jan. 23-25—Four State Raider Classic
Jan. 28—Frontenac
Jan. 31—at Girard
Feb. 4—Baxter Springs
Feb. 7—Columbus
Feb. 11—at Riverton
Feb. 14—at Galena
Feb. 17—at Independence
Feb. 21—at Frontenac
Feb. 25—Girard

official, small non-basketball related culture things that make a program. I think they really understand that. Our high schoolers were really involved with the freshmen coming in. They went to the junior high games and practices. I think we have our foundation set."

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Raider girls roster includes eight seniors

By Brock Sisney
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The 2024-25 Frontenac Raider girls basketball squad returns two starters and three other varsity contributors from last season's 9-12 team.

Frontenac will rely on a deep senior class that includes returning starter Addy Myers, as well as Tenley Sullivan, Ella Sullivan and Skylar Hutchison. Myers contributed five points and four assists per game last season.

"I'm excited to get to work with a great group of girls," Frontenac coach Scott Fields said. "We feel like we have one of the most balanced groups we have had in a long time, which has led to some very competitive practices. We have eight seniors that have done a great job of working hard, competing hard and still balancing that with building great relationships with younger players."

The Raiders' other returning starter is junior Marlee Stout, who averaged nine points and six rebounds last season.

She is also the leading returning shot blocker from last season.

Other seniors are Alana Sullivan, Kayci McGown, Avery Johnson and Taylor Kyser. Most of these seniors played on either the state championship softball team last spring or the state-qualifying volleyball squad earlier this fall. Fields served as an assistant on the softball team.

"Our strengths are our leadership and our team depth," Fields said. "Our goals are to have great practices, build great relationships and try to get as close as possible. To have patience, play physical and celebrate together are the keys to a successful season."

Stout and Myers were already starting to play strong at the end of last season, as they each led the Raiders with nine points during their 47-36 sub-state home loss against Columbus.

The Raiders saw their run of consecutive state tournament appearances end at four.

Frontenac opens the new season Friday at home against Labette

Raiders Schedule

- Dec. 6 – Labette County
- Dec. 10 – at Riverton
- Dec. 17 – Anderson County
- Dec. 19 – at Lamar, Mo.
- Jan. 10 – Galena
- Jan. 14 – Baxter Springs
- Jan. 17 – Girard
- Jan. 23-25 – Frontenac Invitational
- Jan. 28 – at St. Mary's Colgan
- Jan. 31 – at Columbus
- Feb. 4 – at Parsons
- Feb. 7 – Riverton
- Feb. 11 – at Galena
- Feb. 14 – at Baxter Springs
- Feb. 18 – at Girard
- Feb. 21 – St. Mary's Colgan
- Feb. 24 – Columbus

County, and the Raiders start out with their homecoming contest.

The Raiders also step outside the CNC League against Anderson County (Dec. 17), Lamar, Mo. (Dec. 19) and Parsons (Feb. 4), and host their annual tournament Jan. 23-25.

Frontenac opens double round-robin league play Dec. 10 on the road against Riverton.

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Frontenac girls coach Scott Fields and players, including senior Skylar Hutchison (23), celebrate a Raiders 3-point basket during the jamboree Monday night at home. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN

Raider boys led by Collier, Houghton

By Brock Sisney
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The 2024-25 Frontenac Raider boys return two starters and four contributors from last season's 11-11 team in seniors Jayden Houghton, Vinny Collier, Kaden Gatewood O'Bray and Julius Courtney, junior Jake Wegner and sophomore Brogan Smith.

Houghton and Collier are the returning starters for head coach Ryan Varsolona.

"We have had seniors have a really good off-season in the weight room, which has trickled down to the underclassmen and we hope to see pay dividends for us this year," Varsolona said. "Seniors have really stepped up as leaders, and I really like the way they are encouraging to our young guys and showing them the way we want things done. They have also been really good teammates."

Collier earned all-CNC League honorable mention last season, but the Raiders graduated their leading scorer Trey Cramer and fellow all-league selection Abram Frankenbery.

The Raiders' season ended with a 67-49 loss in the Class 3A district semifinals against district champion and state qualifier Riverton. O'Bray led the Raiders with 15 points off the bench. Collier scored 11 points during Frontenac's 53-34 win against Baxter Springs in the district quarterfinals.

O'Bray, Houghton and Collier get their chance in the spotlight during their senior season after being key support-

Raiders Schedule

- Dec. 6 – Labette County
- Dec. 10 – at Riverton
- Dec. 17 – Anderson County
- Dec. 19 – at Lamar, Mo.
- Jan. 10 – Galena
- Jan. 14 – Baxter Springs
- Jan. 17 – Girard
- Jan. 23-25 – Frontenac Invitational
- Jan. 28 – at St. Mary's Colgan
- Jan. 31 – at Columbus
- Feb. 4 – at Parsons
- Feb. 7 – Riverton
- Feb. 11 – at Galena
- Feb. 14 – at Baxter Springs
- Feb. 18 – at Girard
- Feb. 21 – St. Mary's Colgan
- Feb. 24 – Columbus

ing players last season.

"I'm always excited to watch a new team form and guys grow into different roles and see how they adjust to that role," Varsolona said. "I like our length, and I feel like we can roll out a few guys in that 6-2, 6-4 range. If we stick together playing as a team and we are all pulling in the same direction, good things can happen. We are really trying to just get 1% better every day. If we can find a way to do that, it should give us a chance for a successful season."

The Raiders upended league co-champions St. Mary's Colgan and Girard at home last season. Collier and O'Bray scored nine and eight points, respectively, in Frontenac's 58-48 win over Girard. Collier scored a game-high 16 points as the Raiders gave Colgan its first league loss last season, 65-55.

Frontenac opens its season Friday at home against Labette County, and the Raiders have already announced it as their homecoming



Frontenac seniors (left to right) Vinny Collier, Jayden Houghton, Julius Courtney and Kaden Gatewood O'Bray and their teammates open their season Friday at home against Labette County. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN

game.

The Raiders play Anderson County (Dec. 17), Lamar, Mo. (Dec. 19) and Parsons (Feb. 4) outside the CNC, and host their annual tournament Jan. 23-25.

Frontenac opens league play Dec. 10 on the road against Riverton.

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Trojan girls look for repeat state trip

By Kalon Fullerton
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The Girard Trojans will look for a return to the state tournament, where they were two free throws away from tying the game with less than a minute left before falling 32-30 against defending state champions Goodland last season.

The Trojans earned a 17-7 record last season and won sub-state for the first time since 2017.

Girard returns two starters from last year's team, losing four seniors.

"Last year we had wonderful leadership from four great seniors," Girard head coach Brad Herlocker said. "They helped teach the kids how to play basketball and be great humans. The kids coming back are confident, but there's going to be some bumps and bruises."

Juniors Maddie Coester and Erika Boatman lead the charge. Coester earned an All-

CNC League honorable mention nod for the Trojans last season. Seniors Jeriah Adolph and Lillian Ripper, junior Bailey Walker, sophomores Kennedy Keller and Marli Sisney also return.

"Maddie, Jeriah and Erika just bring that veteran energy," Herlocker said. "Jeriah played really well down the stretch and earned everybody's respect. We've got a lot of youth. Three of our top seven are sophomores. They're very driven. Hopefully we can combine the youth with the experience the upper-classmen have."

"Every season is different. We lost four very good players and leaders. A lot of players are going to take new roles and step into new shoes. Some of our younger players will have to take that next step and become shutdown defenders and explosive offensive players."

The Trojans finished second in the CNC last year, going 10-2 in

Trojans Schedule	
Dec. 6	-at Parsons
Dec. 10	-Nevada
Dec. 13	-at Galena
Dec. 17	-at Chanute
Jan. 7	-at Baxter
Jan. 10	-Columbus
Jan. 14	-Riverton
Jan. 17	-at Frontenac
Jan. 20-25	-Burlington Tournament
Jan. 28	-Fort Scott
Jan. 31	-St. Mary's Colgan
Feb. 4	-Galena
Feb. 7	-at Anderson County
Feb. 11	-at Columbus
Feb. 14	-at Riverton
Feb. 18	-Frontenac
Feb. 21	-Baxter Springs
Feb. 25	-at St. Mary's Colgan

league play with their only losses to Colgan. The Trojans defeated Cherryvale 50-36 in the sub-state championship game.

In addition to their league rivals, the Trojans will play games against Nevada, Fort Scott, Chanute and Anderson County in addition to playing in the Burlington tournament.

"Our league has become one that is proven year in and year out," Herlocker said. "We've had some major play-

SEE TROJANS, 7C



Junior Maddie Coester, senior Jeriah Adolph and junior Erika Boatman (left to right) are Girard's experienced players. COURTESY PHOTO / BRAD HERLOCKER

Trojans look for second straight league title

By Kalon Fullerton
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The Girard Trojans will try to get to the state tournament in 2025 after falling one game short last season.

The Trojans finished with a 16-6 record and advanced to the sub-state championship game where they fell to Riverton 52-40 to end the season. The Trojans beat the Rams twice during the regular season.

Leading the way for the Trojans this season will be their four seniors, including 6-foot-5 center Scott Moore.

"We've got several kids still competing for playing time," Girard head coach Rod Wescott said. "We want to see who's going to be there at the end of the game. To me, that's more important than who's starting."

"Scott's a big body. He's hard to guard in practice. He's taken over the leadership role."

Moore is one of two returning starters, joined by 5-7 senior Ranson Born.

Also returning for

Trojans Schedule	
Dec. 6	-at Parsons
Dec. 10	-Liberal (Mo.)
Dec. 13	-at Galena
Dec. 17	-at Chanute
Jan. 7	-at Baxter Springs
Jan. 10	-Columbus
Jan. 14	-Riverton
Jan. 17	-at Frontenac
Jan. 20-25	-Burlington Tournament
Jan. 28	-Fort Scott
Jan. 31	-St. Mary's Colgan
Feb. 4	-Galena
Feb. 11	-at Columbus
Feb. 14	-at Riverton
Feb. 18	-Frontenac
Feb. 21	-Baxter Springs

the Trojans are juniors Levi Blair and Sylar Sammons. The Trojans lose three starters, including leading scorer Aiden Troke.

"We lost three good players," Wescott said. "Good seniors that contributed on both sides of the floor. We have to find out our identity. We still have a long way to go but so does everybody. We're excited. The kids are working hard and trying to be better."

"We've got several kids still competing for playing time. We've got four seniors, Ranson, Scott, Levi Blair and Sylar Sammons. They've



Levi Blair, Ranson Born, Sylar Sammons and Scott Moore (left to right) are Girard's four seniors. COURTESY PHOTO / ROD WESCOTT

all been in the program for a long time, they're going to lead us. We've got several juniors, Adrian Newton, Seth Wilson, and a couple of others that haven't seen time. We've got several sophomores that are competing for playing

time ... Blake Brokob, Perrin Smih, Kam Smith. They've done good things. Our numbers are not big but our players are committed."

The Trojans won a share of the CNC League last season, finishing 10-2 in league

play and splitting the title with St. Mary's Colgan. It was the first time the Trojans have won at least a share of the league since 2019.

"The league will be evenly matched," Wescott said. "On any given night you can get

beat."

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Good Luck Trojans!

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Southeast girls return four starters

By Kalon Fullerton
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Southeast girls basketball head coach Derek Sanders will lead a Lancers team with plenty of experience in 2025.

The Lancers will bring back four starters from a team that finished 13-10 last season and fell to Class 2A powerhouse St. Mary's Colgan in the sub-state championship game.

"We've got a lot of experience coming back," Sanders said. "We finished the season really strong last year. Hopefully we can pick up from where we left off and build from there."

The Lancers return seven seniors, including two All-Three Rivers League players from a season ago, seniors Teagan Warner, who earned a first team selection, and second team member Eliz White.

Other returning starters are senior Bella Tavernaro and junior Braelyn Sutton. Southeast loses just one starter, All-Three Rivers League first team member Kinzey Cassidy.

"These seniors only had four girls older than them when they

Lancers Schedule

Dec. 6-at Erie
Dec. 9-Mo/Kan Classic
Dec. 10-at Jasper
Dec. 13-Mo/Kan Classic
Jan. 3-at Crest
Jan. 7-at Uniontown
Jan. 10-Jayhawk-Linn
Jan. 14-at Northeast
Jan. 17-Pleasanton
Jan. 20-25-Lancer Classic
Jan. 28-St. Paul
Jan. 31-at Central Heights
Feb. 4-at St. Paul
Feb. 6-at Riverton
Feb. 11-at Pleasanton
Feb. 14-at Jayhawk-Linn
Feb. 17-Commerce
Feb. 20-Galena

were freshmen," Sanders said. "They've been playing varsity basketball all four years. And my juniors have been playing a lot of varsity, and the sophomores have, too. There's a lot of experience coming back and they have good game experience, not just mop-up duty."

"Right now, we've got about seven girls competing for those five starting spots. Bella, Teagan and Braelyn all started last year. (Sophomore) Camryn Sanders has been running with the first team as well as (senior) Charlee Gideon."

Last year, Southeast hosted sub-state, defeating Sedan 52-36 and

SEE SOUTHEAST, 7C



Southeast's four returning starters are (left to right) senior Teagan Warner, senior Eliz White, senior Bella Tavernaro and junior Braelyn Sutton. COURTESY DEREK SANDERS

Lancers look for growth under coach Leach

By Kalon Fullerton
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It's the second year for Southeast head coach Wes Leach, and the Lancers are expecting to take a jump in 2024-25.

"Last year we finished on a good note," Leach said. "We played a really good Oxford team in the first round of the playoffs, but I think we have a good opportunity to pick up where we left off. We want to compete in everything we do."

The Lancers finished 9-12 in Leach's first year, falling 58-45 in the first round of sub-state.

"At the end last year we were really young," Leach said. "At the start I relied on my seniors, and then some of my younger kids stepped up and fought. And now they're back."

The Lancers return starters Tyler Warner, Andrew Phillips and Colton Jameson. Jameson and Warner earned All-Three Rivers League second team nods while Phillips was honorable mention. Warner was cleared to play for the start of the season after injuring his collarbone during football season.

"Tyler's cleared to play," Leach said. "His collarbone is good, coming off an injury. It takes you a while to get game shape. It'll take a while but he'll be ready. He's moving well and he's looking good."

"We have Colton, who started the last 15 games and had a really successful last five games. He had a great game last year against Pleasanton, scoring 28 points and seven rebounds."

"Our big problem is there's one pie and everyone's gotta eat. We're trying to find who is in charge of what, who's going to be responsible for bringing the energy. I think all of our guys can score

Lancers Schedule

Dec. 6-at Erie
Dec. 9-Mo/Kan Classic
Dec. 10-at Jasper (Mo.)
Dec. 12-Mo/Kan Classic
Jan. 3-at Crest
Jan. 7-at Uniontown
Jan. 10-Jayhawk-Linn
Jan. 14-at Northeast
Jan. 17-Pleasanton
Jan. 20-25-Lancer Classic
Jan. 28-St. Paul
Jan. 31-at Central Heights
Feb. 4-- at St. Paul
Feb. 6-at Riverton
Feb. 11-at Pleasanton
Feb. 14-at Jayhawk-Linn
Feb. 17-Commerce (Okla.)

20 points when they're on. Colton is going to be our energy guy. I wish I could take his motor and give it to every kid I've coached. Blake Robinson, he transferred from Parsons, he played one varsity game and scored 17 points. He's very smooth and coordinated with the ball and he can shoot the lights out. Drew Phillips is a senior. He's brought a new energy and he's doing the things he needs to do to compete. Emery Wilbert is a 6-2 guard, long and lanky. He's good and fast. Garrett Burger, he's a big wide body who can come off the bench and get me 15 rebounds every night."

The Lancers finished second in Three Rivers League play after winning three straight league titles. They'll hope to regain that title, unseating Uniontown.

It's a new format for the league this year, with the teams splitting into two groups.

"Uniontown has a good chance of repeating," Leach said. "They have a couple of good players coming back. We added Central Heights, which is exciting. My guys are hungry and they want to raise another banner."

Leach will hope to grow his program in the second year after replacing longtime head coach Dan Wall.



Southeast boys basketball players (left to right) Andrew Phillips, Emery Wilbert, Ty Ferguson and Colton Jameson pose before practice. COURTESY PHOTO / WES LEACH

"Last year it was a little touch and go, just trying to get to know the kids," Leach said. "This year we have a lot of positive relationships. Very growth worthy, that's what I enjoy. I want all my kids to play basketball, but not all of them do, so we want to focus on what's next. We want to help our kids be successful. I have a kid who wants to be a barber and I told him to bring his clippers and he gave me a haircut. Things like that are why we become coaches. We want to further their lives."

"Last year we were 9-11, we started out 0-4. We were 9-7 after Christmas break. I think if this team is firing on all cylinders and is healthy, we can be 17-3. We have some kids that really want it. The sky is the limit."

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Northeast head coach Brandon Sigmon talks with the Viking girls players during a break in the jamboree at Riverton. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN

Viking girls feature small, inexperienced roster

By Brock Sisney
bsisney@morningsun.net

The Northeast Viking girls basketball team enters the 2024-25 season with only eight players on its roster.

Head coach Brandon Sigmon will be calling on senior Jasmine Sigmon, juniors Destiny Hagan, Addison Coates and Jaycee Maples and sophomore Allie Wade in the starting lineup and freshmen Ava Riddick, Adrienne Hoffman and Hunter Jones off the bench.

Sophomore post Haley Smardo opted not to play basketball this season and junior Brooklyn Jackson has a torn labrum. Coach Sigmon said that Jackson might return by February.

"I think it's going to have to be a collective effort of all the girls chipping in a little bit more individually and as a team," Sigmon said. "That's probably going

to be our best bet to fill some of those kids that are missing. It's going to have to be a collective effort because we don't have a single kid that I can point to and get the same thing out of them we got from the kids that are missing."

Hagan led the Vikings' offense her sophomore season, and her responsibilities are even greater for her junior campaign.

"Our strength is that we're a little bit more guard-oriented," Sigmon said. "We didn't handle the ball very well (in the jamboree last Wednesday against Riverton and Southeast), so we need to do a better job in that area because we're not very big."

"Our point guard (Hagan) is the heart of our team. We ask her to do pretty much everything. She's asked to handle the ball, guard

the other team's best player and score for us. She's got a lot on her plate, but she's been used to that and I expect her to handle it very well."

Missing their interior presence from last season, the Vikings will play a different style this season.

"We have to try and push the basketball this year and not play as slow because we don't have the girls that can get us easy shots inside," Sigmon said. "So, if Hagan is not creating off the dribble, it's going to have to be a team effort. Hopefully, we can get some good looks in transition."

The Vikings cannot afford too much foul trouble or any further injuries given their numbers available to play.

"Definitely going to be a challenge," Sigmon said. "Especially con-

sidering that six, seven and eight are all freshmen right now. To ask freshmen coming up to play on the varsity level doesn't happen very often. Typically, you're either really good or you're in a situation like we're in and really low on numbers."

"I know the game is going to be sped up for those girls to start with, and high school varsity basketball is a big change. I expect to see quite a few struggles out of them early in the year. We just have to make sure that we continue to work with them and keep their confidence up. They just have to understand that it's a different beast when you're going from eighth grade basketball to playing against 11th and 12th graders."

The Three Rivers League has expanded to 15 schools with Central Heights, Erie and

Southern Coffey County now in the fold.

"We won't play everybody this year in league play," Sigmon said. "I think we just played one of the better teams in our league (Southeast). We got a pretty good look at them, but definitely night in and night out, you're going to have to be ready to play because I don't think there's any off nights in the league. Everybody's going to beat up on each other, so I think each night is going to present a challenge and we just have to be ready to rock and roll every night that we play."

The Vikings open their season at noon Friday against Liberal, Mo., and they also step outside TRL play Dec. 16 at Bronaugh, Mo., Feb. 6 at home against Galena and Feb. 18 at home against Neodesha.

Northeast also plays in the Marmaton Valley

Vikings Schedule

Dec. 6 – Liberal, Mo.
Dec. 10-13 – Marmaton Valley Tournament
Dec. 16 – at Bronaugh, Mo.
Jan. 3 – at Jayhawk-Linn
Jan. 7 – at St. Paul
Jan. 10 – Crest
Jan. 14 – Southeast
Jan. 17 – Central Heights
Jan. 20-25 – Tony Dubray Classic
Jan. 28 – at Uniontown
Jan. 31 – at Pleasanton
Feb. 6 – Galena
Feb. 13 – at Erie
Feb. 14 – Pleasanton
Feb. 18 – Neodesha
Feb. 21 – Oswego

(Dec. 10-13) and Liberal, Mo. (Jan. 20-25) tournaments.

The Vikings start league play Jan. 3 at Jayhawk-Linn.

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New faces to lead Northeast boys

By Brock Sisney
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The Northeast Vikings will have four new starters along with new head coach Zach Vance for the 2024-25 boys basketball season.

Vance, a former Pittsburg State wide receiver who attended Wellsville and earned Class 3A all-state honors twice in football (2017-18), has been a football, baseball and girls basketball assistant during the past two school years at Northeast. This is his first high school head coaching position.

The Vikings' returning starter is senior Spencer Wade.

"We have half a returning starter," Vance said. "He started for half of the season last year. I expect him to have a really big season and be a leader for us. He's put a ton of work in during the summer. I expect him to be that senior captain for us looking forward."

"Then, we have a bunch of young guys. If you look at our roster, it's a bunch of freshmen and sophomores who are going to give us quality time. We're going to have to lean on Spencer early."

The Three Rivers League will feature 15 schools this basketball season, with Central Heights, Erie and Southern Coffey County added to the mix. The league will be divided into two divisions by



Northeast head coach Zach Vance discusses basketball matters during a break in the jamboree last Tuesday. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN

enrollment size; Northeast will draw Central Heights and Erie in the larger division.

"Adding Central Heights and Erie, I mean Central Heights is a heck of a program, especially their cross country," Vance said. "They're winning state championships ... and Erie went to the state tournament last year. Our league has got better by adding those two teams, and I'm glad because I want to play those teams. It will make us better."

Northeast's other seniors are Devin Smith, Justice Sigmon and

Jaden Whetzell, who is a transfer from Pittsburg.

The Vikings' younger players include freshmen Conner Hill, Jaxson Payne and Camryn Stansbury and sophomore Tayven Willard.

"We have a lot of weapons that are young kids that can help us," Vance said. "Our strengths will probably be our speed. We don't have very much size, but we have a bunch of quick, fast kids. We're undersized, so that makes us have to play that way. I would say our biggest strength is our speed and quickness."

Sophomores Tim Stansbury, Bruce DeBusk, Andre Fleury and Kale Nunn and freshmen Tegan Mitchell, Korbin Smith, Dalton Sherman and Brayden Seaford round out the Vikings' 16-player roster.

The Vikings open their season Friday at home against Liberal, Mo. The teams are hoping to start a new tradition for years to come with starting times at noon and 1:30 p.m. for the girls and the boys, respectively. Northeast plans to allow elementary, junior high and high school students to at-

tend, while Liberal will bring its sixth through 12th grade students in an effort to pack the gymnasium.

Northeast plays in the Marmaton Valley (Dec. 10-13) and Liberal, Mo. (Jan. 20-25) tournaments. The Vikings step outside the TRL against Bronaugh, Mo. (Dec. 16), Galena (Feb. 6) and Neodesha (Feb. 18).

Northeast opens league play Jan. 3 on the road against Jayhawk-Linn.

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Vikings Schedule

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Feb. 21 – Oswego

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DRAGONS

CONTINUED FROM 1C

we've had the same staff from one year to the next," Gromer said. "It makes my job easier because my assistants do a fantastic job. Coach Walker helps me with so many different things, and DeShaun and Ella do, too. It's good for the girls to see familiar faces and keep consistent voices in the locker room."

The coaches and players all learned some valuable lessons after their overtime loss to Blue Valley Southwest.

"We've been trying to hammer home the little details are very important," Gromer said. "Take care of the small stuff. We weren't 15 points away from going to state last year; we weren't 20. We went into overtime in the sub-state championship game, so how do we make sure that we take care of the little things and get that one more point that we didn't last year. It starts in practice and that stuff bleeds over into games."

Pittsburg opens its season Friday on the road against Joplin, Mo., and the Dragons

also draw Lamar, Mo. (Dec. 13), Webb City, Mo. (Jan. 3), Blue Valley Southwest (Jan. 7) and Ottawa (Feb. 4) outside the Southeast Kansas League.

The Dragons host the Bill Hanson Memorial Tournament (Jan. 23-25) and open league play Dec. 17 at home against Coffeyville.

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PHS

CONTINUED FROM 1C

returning players from last year and gaining more experience."

The Dragons are 65-23 overall in Woods' first four seasons as head coach. Woods had been the top assistant under former head coach Roelfs, whose Dragon

teams won 248 games from 1999-2020.

Pittsburg opens its new season Friday on the road against Joplin and the Dragons' other foes outside the SEK are Riverton (Dec. 13), Webb City, Mo. (Jan. 3), Carl Junction, Mo. (Jan. 7) and Ottawa (Feb. 4).

The Dragons host the Bill Hanson Memorial Tournament on Jan. 23-

25 and they open their league schedule Dec. 17 at home against Coffeyville.

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SOUTHEAST

CONTINUED FROM 5C

West Elk 39-32 before falling 58-31 to Colgan. The Lancers begin the season on the road against Erie on Friday.

"One of our goals is to win the league,"

Sanders said. "We talked about the sub-state game last year, how cool that atmosphere was. It was a good experience. It would be nice to get back there and then go to Manhattan (site of the state tournament), but we have to stay

healthy."

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TROJANS

CONTINUED FROM 4C

ers at the state level. The rivalry between Girard, Frontenac and Colgan has been special ever since I was a kid. It's a challenge."

Girard opens the season against Parsons on Friday.

"As the season goes on, we should get better and better," Herlocker said. "We just have a lot of new roles, we kind of have to reestablish."

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2023-2024 season in review



Pittsburg's Alyssa Hotze draws a foul during a game last season against Pittsburg. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN



Southeast's Teagan Warner pulls up for a short shot last season during the Lancer Classic against Riverton. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN



Girard's Erika Boatman launches a 3-point basket last season against Frontenac at Ted R. Taylor Gymnasium. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN



Colgan's Brady Bettega scores two points in the Class 2A sub-state championship last season against Erie at Southeast High School. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN



Colgan's Jakayla Davis hoists a floater in the lane last season against Frontenac at the St. Mary's Colgan Fieldhouse. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN



Northeast's Destiny Hagan drives to the basket last season against Bronaugh, Mo. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN



Pittsburg's Nate Mitchell finishes inside the lane last season against Fort Scott. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN



Frontenac's Vinny Collier lays in two points last season against Louisville. BROCK SISNEY / THE MORNING SUN