

## Young look deceiving for Grafton girls

Written by Steve Ostermann  
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### Junior-heavy team can count experience as one of its assets in preparing for North Shore battles

Looks can be deceiving, especially when it comes to Grafton girls' basketball.

Although the Black Hawks have only one senior this season, there's no dearth of talent on their roster.

Their lineup features a solid group of juniors from a squad that went 16-11 last season and reached a WIAA sectional final for the fourth straight year.

"We have a young team, but it's a good group, and I really like them a lot," Hawks coach Bob Maronde said.

"They've got a bit of a tough edge to them. They're like little Rambos running around out there.

"When they make mistakes, they bounce right back. There's a lot of resiliency."

There's plenty of skill, as well.

Grafton's lone senior is Abbey Benzschawel, a 6-foot-1-inch center whose improved play last season culminated in a 17-point, 11-rebound performance in a sectional final against New Berlin Eisenhower.

"Abbey really stepped up for us as a leader," Maronde said. "She started playing with great confidence."

The Hawks' other veterans include five juniors who contributed last year — forwards Hannah Eichler (5-11), Tess Safstrom (5-8) and Kimmi Schacht (5-11) and guards Carley Pfannerstill (5-3) and Emily Schreiner (5-8).

Eichler, a two-year varsity player, earned All-North Shore Conference second-team honors as a sophomore, when she averaged nine points, 6.5 rebounds, 3.5 steals and 3.5 assists per game. Her versatility allows her to play in the backcourt as well as the front line.

"I think this will be a breakout year for Hannah," Maronde said. "You can see that she has much more confidence now."

Pfannerstill has been pegged as the starting point guard. Her ball-handling skills and leadership will be crucial to the team's success.

"Carley has a great knack of knowing when to go and when to hold up offensively," Maronde said. "She is so quick, which makes it tough on other teams' guards."

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Likewise, Schreiner and Safstrom bring quickness to the wing positions and are “both solid shooting and handling the ball,” Maronde said.

Schacht will bolster the Hawks’ front line and “is very strong in the post and has a great mid-range jumper,” he added.

Giving Grafton strength in reserve will be players such as juniors Symone Wright (5-4) and Emily Volkmann (5-3), sophomores Audrey Dickmann (5-6), Sam Gosewehr (6-0) and Haley Orlowski (5-7) and freshman Amanda Hunt (5-11).

“Overall, I like us from No. 1 to No. 12,” Maronde said. “All the girls are good basketball players who can contribute.”

Even so, Maronde said his team’s youthful energy comes with a hitch.

“My biggest concern right now with them is their ability to focus for long periods of time,” he said. “They can be impatient and rush things, but I think it will get better over the course of the season.”

After winning conference titles in three of four seasons from 2005-06 to 2008-09, the Hawks slipped to fourth place with an 8-6 record last season. Reclaiming the top spot may be a long shot with defending champion Nicolet a heavy favorite to repeat.

However, Maronde is hoping his team will be among the league’s best, a list he thinks will include Cedarburg, Germantown and Whitefish Bay.

“A lot of it depends on how we handle December,” he said, noting Grafton faces a tough schedule early in the season.

The Hawks open play Tuesday, Nov. 30, by hosting Green Bay West in a 7:30 p.m. nonconference game.

They will face Milwaukee Washington on Dec. 3 and Milwaukee Bay View on Dec. 7 before opening NSC play against Homestead on Dec. 10.

Grafton then takes on Cedarburg and Nicolet in consecutive games.