

## Don't count Sarah-less Grafton girls out just yet

Written by Steve Ostermann  
Tuesday, 24 November 2009 15:54

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### Player of Year has left, but Hawks have plenty of talent back for another run at top

What does a basketball team that went 24-2 and won a state championship do for an encore?

Some people might expect the Grafton High School girls' squad to simply reload and take aim another title.

But it's not that simple — especially when four of your starters, including the state's best player, have graduated.

"We lost our top player and a lot of other talent, so there are some big pieces of the puzzle missing," said Grafton coach Bob Maronde, whose team rode the hot hand of forward Sarah Eichler last season to its second WIAA Division 2 title in three years.

"Going into last season, we had a lot of players to replace, but we also had kids who were in the program for two or three years, and they knew what to expect.

"This year, we will have six sophomores, and only one of them has varsity experience. It's one of the youngest teams I've ever coached."

The Black Hawks lost key members of last season's North Shore Conference co-championship team to graduation. Besides Eichler, who's playing basketball at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, the list includes Hilary Wellnitz, Mary Kalies, Shauna Binsfeld and Ashley Pfannerstill.

That's not to say Grafton will be hurting for talent, though.

Starting center Myranda Tyler, a 6-foot-1-inch senior who averaged seven points and seven rebounds per game, is back along with sophomore Hannah Eichler (5-11), junior Abbey Benzschawel (6-1) and seniors Ali Lorge (5-7), Kaitlyn Brandenburg (5-5), Christie Collins (5-8) and Emily Van Langen (5-4).

Eichler, a forward, averaged just four points per game while playing in her sister's

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shadow last year but is a strong defender and showed her offensive skills at the state tournament.

"Hannah will be a real key for us," Maronde said. "She's only a sophomore, but she's got a lot of varsity experience and will be one of our leaders."

Other sophomores expected to contribute are Carley Pfannerstill, Emma Fatla, Tess Safstrom, Kim Schacht and Emily Schreiner. The list includes members of a junior-varsity team that was 16-4 last season.

"They're all about 5-8 or 5-9 and can play a variety of positions," Maronde said. "They're young, athletic and should really be able to get after people."

"I think we will be athletic and exciting, but we may turn the ball over a lot. When we're good, I think we'll be very good, but when we're bad, I think we could be really bad."

A major concern, Maronde said, will be offensive leadership for the Hawks, who relied heavily on Sarah Eichler's 21-point average last season.

"A big question is who's going to score for us," he said. "We had such a good go-to player last year, but we're going to have to have a much more balanced attack this time."

The Hawks won their third conference title in four years last season by sharing the top spot with Nicolet, which Maronde pegged as a clear title favorite.

He sees Germantown as the next-strongest team, with his own in the next tier.

"I think it's going to be very, very competitive," Maronde said. "We have the potential to be a good team, but it could take some time."

Grafton opens the season Tuesday, Dec. 1, when it travels to Green Bay West for a 7:30 p.m. nonconference game.

The Hawks' league opener will be Dec. 11 at Homestead.