Gasser and Co. poised to give Port boys bragging rights in North Shore and beyond

It's not hard to see the Port Washington boys' basketball team has all the pieces of the puzzle this season.

The only question is how quickly the Pirates can assemble them — and make the leap from title favorite on paper to juggernaut on the hardwood.

"We have a real good group of guys with a lot of talent, size and depth," said Port coach John Bunyan, whose team is poised to take the next step after compiling a 16-5 record last season that included a 10-4, third-place finish in North Shore Conference play.

"We have high expectations, but we have a lot of work to do to achieve those."

To no one's surprise, the biggest part of Port's game plan is senior Josh Gasser, who's entering his fourth varsity season with a scholarship in hand to play basketball for the University of Wisconsin-Madison next year.

The 6-foot-4-inch guard — who averaged 22 points, 11 rebounds and three assists per game as a junior — is coming off a summer-basketball ankle injury

that forced him to forego playing football this fall but is almost completely healed and ready to go, Bunyan said.

“Josh is doing great and recovering just fine,” he said. “He’s nearly 100% and is really excited about having a great final year.”

Gasser returns as the top gun in a talent-laden conference led last season by two powerhouse teams — champion Whitefish Bay and runner-up Germantown. But both of those programs have lost several standout players to graduation, helping open the door for the Pirates.

Bunyan said he expects Bay and Germantown to both be strong again, along with Homestead and Milwaukee Lutheran, but sees his team firmly in the thick of the title chase — and for good reason.

Port lost three players to graduation, including forwards Marty Clarke and Elliot Kotecki and guard Mark Burmesch, all of who contributed regularly last season. But in addition to Gasser, the Pirates have plenty of veteran talent with players such as seniors Cory Steinmetz,
Zach Schultz, Adam Prom and Jay Davel and junior Shane Kennedy.

The front line will be led by Steinmetz, a 6-4 forward who averaged nine points per game last season and has three-point shooting range. Kennedy, a 6-4 forward, earned a starting role as a sophomore with his hustling play and had an eight-point average.

Schultz, a 6-6 center, missed most of last season due to an injury but has bounced back nicely and will strengthen Port’s interior.

“Zach’s 20 pounds lighter and has looked really good in practice,” Bunyan said.

Prom (6-3) and Davel (6-0) will bolster the Pirates’ depth along with varsity newcomers such as junior guards Joe McIlree and Marcus Lackovic and sophomores Kyle Rismeyer and Sawyer Mosley, all of whom excelled on a junior-varsity team that went14-6 last season.

Bunyan is particularly high on Mosley, a 6-2 guard who directed the JV offense as a freshman and is now vying for a starting varsity role.

“Sawyer has the ability to play at this level as a point guard or shooting guard,” Bunyan said. “With Josh in the lineup at the point, he would probably play the two (shooting) spot.”

Last season, Gasser often found himself carrying much of the scoring load in addition to running the Pirates’ offense. That should change with a deeper, more versatile roster, Bunyan believes.

“I think it’s going to be a lot easier for Josh because we have more people to share the scoring load and can move them around more,” he said. “We can play him outside, but we can also get the ball to him in the post more.”

Port’s size and athleticism should also allow them to maintain steady defensive pressure, including a mix of man-to-man and zone schemes, Bunyan said.

The Pirates will open the season Saturday, Nov. 28, when it faces Waukesha North in a 4 p.m. nonconference game at Carroll College. They will start conference play at home Dec. 11 against Germantown.

What concerns Bunyan heading into one of the most highly anticipated Port basketball seasons in recent memory?

“We should be solid in a lot of areas,” he said. “What concerns me a bit is getting our young players to understand their roles and learn to play with each other.

“But I think we’re going to be fine.”

THE PORT WASHINGTON boys’ basketball team will take aim at a North Shore Conference title this season on the strength of talented returning players such as (from left) Adam Prom, Zach Schultz, Cory Steinmetz, Josh Gasser and Shane Kennedy.
Photo by Sam Arendt