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First-year coach has team banking on speed, versatility in face of height shortage

What it lacks in height, the Port Washington boys' basketball team may be able to make up for with quickness and hustle this season.

At least that's the hope of Brian Hebein, who enters his first year as the Pirates' varsity coach.

Briar

"We don't have anyone over 6-foot-4, but we have a lot of versatility with guys who can play multiple positions," said Hebein, who has succeeded John Bunyan at the helm.

"We also have good team speed. Our players should be able to push the ball, get up the floor and get good quality shots."

With six players from last season's team — including standouts Kyle Ris-meyer and Sawyer Mosley — lost to graduation, Port has some voids to fill.

However, the Pirates won't be without offensive firepower, especially with the return of swing player Joey Burbach. The 6-4 senior averaged a team-best 16.7 points per game on the way to All-North Shore Conference second-team honors last season.

Burbach, who Hebein said can play virtually every position, will give Port backcourt and front-line scoring punch. His leadership will be crucial for the Pirates as they try to better last season's marks of 5-9 in the conference and 9-14 overall.

"Joey is a talented player who's worked hard and increased his vertical leap," Hebein said. "He

will be a real key for us."

The Pirates' other varsity veterans are seniors Austin Gehrke (5-10), Mick Clarke (5-9) and Derek Haley (6-1) and juniors Sam Weiland (6-3) and Darius Will (6-3).

Weiland, a 6-3 guard, averaged six points per game as a sophomore and is bigger and stronger this season, Hebein said.

Gehrke and Clarke will bolster the backcourt, while Haley and Will are being counted on to lead the Pirates' front line.

"All of them are athletic and tough," Hebein said.

Port's roster also includes seniors Tyler Mueller and Lucas Jarman (both 6-3), juniors Brennan Cassidy (6-0), Alec Manley (6-1), Brett Kirmse (5-8), Nic Schueller (6-3) and Jon Rabideaux (6-3) and sophomores Tay Jackson (5-11) and Patrick McDonald (5-7).

Mueller joins the team after missing his junior season, and Jarman spent last year on the junior-varsity squad.

Cassidy was the top JV scorer last season, averaging 14 points per game. "He's probably one of our best post scorers," Hebein said.

Jackson transferred to Port after playing at Cedarburg High School last season and will give the

Pirates athleticism at a wing position, Hebein said.

Although Hebein is confident the Pirates will be able to score, he's not as sure about the other end of the court.

"Our biggest concern is how we're going to do defensively," he said. "We're not big, so we will have be fundamentally sound, work hard and box out against taller teams."

Hebein, who was Port's JV coach last season, moved into the varsity post when Bunyan resigned to become the Pirates' head football coach.

Coming off a fifth-place conference finish, Port will face a tough challenge against perennially strong teams such as defending state champion Germantown, Homestead and Whitefish Bay.

However, Hebein believes his team can step up its game and hold its own with the league's best.

"Germantown is clearly the class of the conference with everybody coming back, and Homestead and Bay will both be strong," he said.

"We have the potential to be better than last year, but it will depend on getting our seniors and younger guys to blend together. If we do that, we could compete for a spot in the top four."

The Pirates open the season Friday, Nov. 16, with a 7:30 p.m. nonconference game at Waukesha South.

Port will then play in the Redwing Holiday Tournament at Sheboygan South High School on Nov. 23 and 24.

Image Information: JOEY BURBACH led the Port Washington boys' basketball team in scoring last season and will be the Pirates' top offensive threat again this season. Photo by Sam Arendt