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With small roster, Pirates will depend on endurance, hustle to be competitive

Numbers will not be on the side of the Port Washington girls' basketball team this season.

Hustle and endurance will have to be.

With only eight players expected to start the season on the varsity roster, third-year coach Brian Johnson knows his Pirates face a sizeable depth challenge.

"It's definitely tough but not something we can't deal with," Johnson said. "Right now, we're just taking what's available."

Port, which went 6-18 overall and 3-11 in the North Shore Conference last season, will need a productive youth movement to be competitive.

The Pirates' top players are three seniors who were regular contributors last season — Mikayla Hilton, Kayla McIlree and Stephanie Volesky.

Hilton, a 6-foot swing player, will be counted on to provide much of the scoring punch. Last season, she averaged 6.8 points and 5.9 rebounds per game on her way to honorable mention in coaches' All-NSC voting.

"Mikayla is our leader. She's the kid with the most experience," Johnson said.

"She's strong and has really matured as a player and a person."

McIlree (5-9) and Volesky (5-6) return to a backcourt that will also feature sophomore Brianna Ahner (5-6) at the point position. Ahner played AAU basketball this summer and has looked good in practice, Johnson said.

“Kayla will be our defensive stopper, a lock-down kind of player,” he added.

“Stephanie will be one of our better shooters from the perimeter.”

Rounding out the roster are junior guard Hannah Lilly (5-6), sophomore forward Hanna Strohm (5-10), sophomore forward Regan Curtin (5-8) and freshman guard Allie Uselding (5-6).

“We don’t have any real true post players or point guards, so everyone will have a chance to play different positions,” Johnson said.

“I’m pretty confident in the players we have. We’ll see what they can do.”

The Pirates lost most of last year’s starters and much of his bench to graduation, including their top two scorers, guard Caity Tydrick and center Nicole Ziehm.

As a result, Johnson knew the Pirates were likely to have a young, inexperienced team this season. He’s not conceding anything just yet, though.

“We’re not going to complain about our numbers. We’re going to work hard and get better,” Johnson said.

“We’re going to be fine with it.”

With perennially strong teams such as Nicolet, Grafton, Cedarburg and Whitefish Bay on their conference schedule, the Pirates will have to score a few upsets to make their mark this season.

“We’ve certainly got some challenges, but overall I’m happy with our situation,” Johnson said. “The girls who are here want to play, and that gives us a chance to compete.”

Port opens the season Friday, Nov. 23, when it travels to University School of Milwaukee for a 5:30 p.m. game.

The Pirates will then continue nonconference play Nov. 27 with a 7:30 p.m. contest at Whitefish Bay Dominican.

Image Information: READY TO TACKLE a new season for the Port Washington girls' basketball team are (from left) Hannah Lilly, Regan Curtin, Kayla McIlree, Mikayla Hilton, Stephanie Volesky, Hanna Strohm and Brianna Ahner. Photo by Sam Arendt