

Cautious optimism for women's & men's basketball

BY BANNING WATSON
STAFF WRITER

The Guilford College women's basketball team has made it to the final game of the Old Dominion Athletic Conference tournament each of the past three years, winning it twice.

But will the Quakers continue to be championship material?

"I think we'll be competitive," said senior guard Alex Payne. "We did lose three seniors last year, but we have a lot of good young players.

"It's going to be interesting because we have no junior class, which hasn't happened since I've been here. We're really young, we're really fast and I think we'll be contenders."

The team is currently ranked fourth in the ODAC preseason poll.

"We're preseason top five, but it's going to be a challenge for us each and every day to keep working our way back up to the top," said Payne.

Last season ended with a loss to Randolph-Macon College in the final game of the ODAC tournament.

"The season went pretty well, but it didn't end up like we wanted it to," said senior guard Brittany Drew.

"People didn't think we could go back three times in a row, and people still don't think we can go back now since our leading scorers are gone. I think we can. We're always the underdog team, but we keep working."

The team has nine new players: three transfer students and six first-year players. Though this might worry some teams, women's basketball head coach Stephanie Flamini still likes their chances.

"I think it's just a learning curve, and it's not every first-year that comes in and struggles their first year," said Flamini.

"I have some first-years that may very well start this season. All the first-years are going to contribute. It's just a matter of how quickly.

"I'm hoping that by January, everyone's playing and everyone's contributing and everyone's helping us win."

With the loss of last year's seniors, the team lost key players in the post position, critical defenders in the battle under the basket, so the players will have to adjust and develop replacements.

However, every team member has their eyes on the prize.

"We all have a common goal and that's to win the ODAC championship and win a ring," said senior guard Jennette Taylor, a recent transfer.

Drew believes the team has the heart to do it and sends an important reminder to sports fans across Guilford.

"You have to either want it or you don't," said Drew. "Since I was a first-year, we've always had players that want to win, and they've worked hard to win.

"On top of that, I want everybody to come out to our games. I know that it's women's basketball, but I think we should get the same respect that the boys do."



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The Guilford College men's basketball team ended last season on a losing streak, but the team has high hopes for the 2014-2015 season.

"We were up 9-0 and ranked 16th nationally at one point, but later, towards the end of the year, we hit a wall," said senior Matt McCarthy, all-conference guard.

"We lost three games in a row, and the first round of the ODAC tournament was a huge disappointment for us. This year, we're going to try and make sure that doesn't happen again. This is my last year, and I want to make sure I go out on a high note."

The team is currently ranked as the third seed in the preseason ODAC poll despite losing senior all-conference forward Jake Hopkins and gaining several new members through transfers and incoming first-years.

Returning players aren't concerned about their less-experienced teammates.

"I don't think we're afraid of having young people on the team," said sophomore guard Michael Reiney. "We had three first-year starters last year, and we won nine games in a row."

Reiney reflected on his time as a new member of the team.

"I think the hardest transition for me was coming to college and having three-hour practices every day," said Reiney. "It's a daily battle to get through, and you build up your self-confidence and your mental confidence to where these battles aren't so hard."

Trevor Hyatt, sophomore forward, also spoke about the younger players and where the team needs to improve.

"We're excelling better on the offensive side than we are with the defensive side right now, so we need to get that up to speed," said Hyatt.

"It's very different from anything you learn in high school, and it's a big transition from being in high school to being a first-year at Guilford. I think we have some first-year that could give us some minutes and do well for us."

These young players have solid support from their more experienced teammates.

"It's definitely a new experience," said McCarthy. "When you're a senior in high school you're kind of the man of the team, then you come to college and you have to start over and prove that you can play all over again.

"They're doing a great job of that. We respect them and are really looking forward to playing with them."

Men's basketball head coach Tom Palombo has high hopes and a clear game plan.

"We've got a solid senior, sophomore, first-year class," said Palombo.

"I think we have the ability to be really good if we continue to improve every day, and we've had some really good practices. We've just got to work on keeping things consistent throughout the season."

View from the trenches: Homecoming and senior day

BY REESE SETZER
STAFF WRITER

Homecoming is an exciting event that occurs every fall.

A Saturday where alumni return to Guilford College to reminisce on their experience, tailgate and watch a Quaker football game.

Senior day also coincides with Homecoming. Not only were we playing for our returning alumni, we were also playing for the guys who had put in four years of hard work to get the program where it is today.

On this brisk November day, we were playing the Catholic University of America.

Things did not start out according to our game plan.

We were down 14-0 early, and we were staring adversity right in the face.

We knew we had to get things fixed quickly if we wanted to be able to achieve victory for our alumni and our seniors.

After our ruthless defense made crucial stops inside our own red zone (including a blocked field goal) the offense found its groove.

We rallied and found ourselves entering halftime even with our adversaries 14-14.

After halftime Catholic immediately took a 21-14 lead, and we again needed to step up in order to come out of this game victorious.

As we have done all season, we took this challenge in stride.

We tied the score at 21-21 on a 25-yard screen pass

to junior running back Josh Schow, who would not be denied the end zone. We closed out the 3rd quarter on another Schow touchdown to take a 28-21 lead.

The 4th quarter was all ours after a beautiful pass from junior Matt Pawlowski to junior receiver Adam Smith for a 78-yard touchdown that put us up 35-21.

Then, to put the final nail into the coffin, the offense chewed up five minutes of clock and scored on a 9-yard Pawlowski touchdown to wide receiver junior Austen Thompson to secure a 42-21 victory.

We were ecstatic to get this victory on Homecoming

The ball was snapped, the offensive line picked up all of the Tigers' pressure, and Pawlowski put the ball on a frozen rope into the hands of Thompson for a touchdown.

and on senior day, but we now had foe Hampden-Sydney College on deck.

We had an excellent week of preparation for the Tigers and our confidence was riding high going into the biggest game of the season.

Entering the 4th quarter, Hampden-Sydney was up 21-10. We knew in order to get back into contention we had to make a big play.

On cue, Pawlowski hit wide receiver Smith in stride for a 67-yard touchdown. Following senior running back Josh

Williams' two-point conversion reception, we narrowed the margin to 21-18.

The Tigers answered with a touchdown. Then, following a Tyler Hunt field goal, we found ourselves down 28-21.

In order to get back in the game, our ferocious defense had to make a stop and get the ball back into our hands.

And just as they had done in previous games, they stepped up and got the ball back into the offense's grasp with a little under two minutes to play.

We moved quickly down the field, slashing the opposing defense with everything in our playbook.

Suddenly, we found ourselves on their 18-yard line.

The ball was snapped, the offensive line picked up all of the Tigers' pressure and Pawlowski put the ball on a frozen rope into the hands of Thompson for a touchdown.

It is an image we will never forget.

After the PAT, the game was tied at 28 and

headed to overtime.

In the end, we lost in overtime 35-28.

But you know what? We held our heads high knowing that we gave every part of ourselves in a valiant effort to represent our school.

It was a game for the ages. Each team member will remember it vividly and tell the story for years to come.

And so we move to our final contest, with our sights on Emory & Henry College to bring back a final victory to our wonderful and supportive classmates.