



Kings Mountain High basketball coach Larry Sipe is pictured with three of his returning starters. Left to right are Justin Jones, Marquiz Williamson and Kyle Sellers.

Sipe, Mountaineers eye return to state playoffs

In his first eight years as boys basketball coach at Kings Mountain High School, Larry Sipe's charges qualified for the state 3-A playoffs every season.

Last year, the Mountaineers missed by one game.

The veteran coach says he's felt bad about that for almost a year and he's anticipating seeing his Mountaineers back in post-season play this year.

Sipe has been working a veteran ball club since November 1. The Mountaineers open their regular season on December 1 at home against Hunter Huss.

Sipe, who has a 144-84 record in nine years at Kings Mountain, has all five of his starters back from last year. While most people regard Shelby and Burns as the teams to beat in the Southwestern 3-A Conference this winter, the Mountaineers are hoping to have a big say in who wins the race.

"Experience is going to be a big plus for us," said Sipe. "Last year we started one freshman, two sophomores and two juniors. Everybody's a year older so we hope our experience will pay off, especially in the close games."

Sipe pointed out that the Mountaineers lost five games by three points or less last year. With experience on their side this year, the Mountaineers should win many of the close ones.

Heading the list of returning players is senior point guard Marquiz Williamson. The two-time All-SWC standout averaged 17.3 point per game last year and also had 103 steals. He has scored 884 points in his high school career and should top the 1,000-point mark early in the season.

Justin Jones, a 5-11 senior, and Bryan Leftwich, a sophomore who set a school record with 53 three-point goals last year, return at the wings. Although Jones is small, he has a 36-inch vertical jump and is being counted on to shoulder much of the rebounding load.

"Justin is a good outside shooter and he takes the ball to the basket," Sipe said. "He's one of these kids that have to get in there and rebound. He makes up for his lack of size with jumping ability. We'll count on him for leadership and rebounds."

"The fact that Leftwich scored 53 threes last year is indicative that we were primarily a perimeter team," Sipe added. "We started two sophomores on the inside and we kind of relied on that outside shot last year. If our inside people are stronger this year, Bryan's total may go down a bit. We'll have to wait and see how it goes. The one thing I've noticed about his game already is that he is still a very good outside shooter, but he can also put the ball on the floor and go to the basket. He's picked his game up there."

Sipe is working with three players at the post positions, and all will see a lot of playing time. Juniors Sharee Hopper and Calvin Mathis and senior Kyle Sellers are all 6-2.

"Calvin transferred in here last year from Texas and played about half the season with us," Sipe recalled. "He has only been with us a week because he played football. With those three guys we're hoping we're going to have a good inside game first, and then push it back out to the perimeter."

Jerry Black also recently joined the team from football and will be a good back-up to Williamson at point guard.

Marcus Bell, still another grinder, is up from the JV team and will contribute inside. Albert Perkins, a sophomore, looks good at the wing and senior Lewis Nantz, who is back on the basketball court after competing on the

swimming team last year, will be backing up Jones.

Andres Alvarez, an exchange student from Colombia, South America, hopes to improve as he becomes more accustomed to playing North American basketball. "He'll be the first to tell you that the brand of high school basketball here is entirely different from what he's been accustomed to," said Sipe. "But he's a hard worker. I think it's going to be a good experience for him and, in turn, I hope it's going to be a good experience for our players to be around him."

Chad Huntsinger, a senior who hasn't played basketball before, hopes to get in some playing time at guard, and transfer William Vaughn, a 6-1 sophomore whose brother Era played on Sipe's 1989-90 championship team, should become an asset inside as he becomes stronger.

"Rebounding will be the key for us," says Sipe. "Last year we were able to put points on the board but there were only five games in which we out-rebounded the opposition. Experience will also be a big factor. With everybody coming back, especially our perimeter people who are three of the best in the conference, if we can break even on the boards we'll be in good shape."

Sipe always considers depth a key, because he tries to use as many players as possible in every game. And, he looks for substitutes to have a team before self attitude.

"We have some quality people who can come in and play well when we have to take a rest or get in foul trouble," he said. "You have to make sure your substitutes understand the role they're going to have to play. You can talk to them for two hours a day about good attitudes and roles, but it comes down to whether they're going to accept that role or not. They probably get tired of hearing me talk about this. But if you look back at the two teams we've had that won sectional championships and the team that went all the way to the state finals in 1990, you can see that it takes five people to start a game but it takes more than five to be successful. I constantly remind them about people in the past who didn't have to start to feel like they were contributing to the team. If I had to go to the bench, they were ready. They hopped up, went to the scorer's table and went in and played hard. They were really good team basketball players. It's a key for every team - getting everybody

Kings Mountain girls hope to move up in SWC standings

Kings Mountain High's girls basketball team hopes to capture one of the four state playoff spots from the Southwestern 3-A Conference this year.

The Lady Mountaineers have shown steady improvement in two years under Coach Tony Leigh. With the SWC more balanced this year, Leigh feels his girls have a legitimate shot at the playoffs.

"I don't think the conference is going to be as overpowering as it was last year," he said. "I still look for East Rutherford to be strong, and Burns will be stronger. After that, it's going to be pretty much of a logjam. Our goal is to try to make one of those four playoff spots."

Leigh has been practicing his team since November 1, and the Lady Mountaineers hosted East

Gaston in a scrimmage Monday afternoon. Kings Mountain will host a multiple scrimmage Friday afternoon. The regular season opens

here on December 1 against Hunter Huss.

See Basketball, 8-A

KM girls to host scrimmage Friday

Kings Mountain High's varsity girls basketball team will sponsor a multiple scrimmage Friday at 4:30 p.m. at the KMHS gym.

Teams from Kings Mountain, Cherryville, West Lincoln, Ashbrook and Hunter Huss will compete. Admission is \$2 and a concession stand will be in operation.

Each team will scrimmage three schools. Each game will consist of two 12-minute quarters and the clock will run continuously.

Cherryville and Hunter Huss will play at 4:30, followed by Kings Mountain and Ashbrook at 5 p.m. West Lincoln takes on Huss at 5:30 and Kings Mountain battles Cherryville at 6 p.m. At 6:30, West Lincoln meets Ashbrook, and at 7 p.m., Kings Mountain battles Huss. At 7:30, Ashbrook faces Cherryville, and at 8 p.m., Kings Mountain plays West Lincoln.



Kings Mountain High girls basketball coach Tony Leigh discusses strategy with his players during a scrimmage with East Gaston Monday. Leigh hopes his girls will qualify for the state playoffs this season.

THE SCHEDULE

Dec. 1 - Hunter Huss; Dec. 3 - at Clover; Dec. 8 - at Huss; Dec. 11 - at Lincolnton; Dec. 15 - Clover; Dec. 18 - at East Lincoln; Dec. 28-30 - Shelby Star Tournament at Gardner-Webb (KM vs. Olympic in first round); Jan. 5 - Lincolnton; Jan. 6 - East Lincoln; Jan. 8 - East Rutherford; Jan. 15 - North Gaston; Jan. 19 - at R-S Central; Jan. 22 - at Burns; Jan. 29 - Shelby; Feb. 2 - at South Point; Feb. 5 - at East Rutherford; Feb. 9 - at North Gaston; Feb. 12 - R-S Central; Feb. 16 - Burns; Feb. 23 - at Shelby; Feb. 26 - South Point.

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