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BASKETBALL

City Series basketball: Buchtel boys have eyes on state title; Ellet girls aim for history



Nate Ulrich

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As the head coaches of reigning City Series basketball champions, Rayshon Dent and Nick Harris embraced the targets on their backs Tuesday during the league's annual media day.

Dent has guided the Buchtel boys to City Series regular-season and playoff titles in each of his two seasons in charge of the Griffins.

“Hopefully I can keep it going 'cause it's not gonna be easy,” he said at Guy's Party Center.

An assistant last season under Tina Wallace, Harris helped the Ellet girls earn a share of the City Series regular-season championship with Kenmore-Garfield and then capture the league's postseason crown.

“We want the pressure,” Harris said. “We want the bar raised high.”

Buchtel boys basketball goal is a state title

Buchtel has never won a state championship — the Griffins were the Division II runner-up in 1997 and a semifinalist in 2019 — but Dent isn't afraid to publicly express confidence about his program's ability to be in the mix for one during the upcoming season.

“That's our goal. That's our mindset,” said Dent, a 1986 Buchtel graduate. “Hey, aim for the stars and maybe land on the moon. That's what we're trying to do. I want the kids to have a mindset, 'Hey, we're competing at all costs. No game is ever over with.’”

Ellet girls basketball looking for back-to-back titles

For 2003 Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy graduate Harris, this will be his first season as a full-time head coach. He called Wallace “a legend” and explained learning from her last year was invaluable. Now he's focused on making history.

“Ellet girls basketball has ... never been able to go back to back,” Harris said, “so our goal is to win our second straight City championship and to make some noise in the Division I state tournament.”

Buchtel seniors Amire Robinson, Khoi Thurmon sign letters of intent to play Division I college basketball

The Buchtel boys finished with a record of 19-6 last season. With two of their best players suspended in the fallout from a fight with East, the Griffins were eliminated in an 84-70 loss to Gates Mills Gilmour Academy in a district final. Gilmour eventually fell 63-35 to St. Vincent-St. Mary in the Division II state title game.

Now Dent is relying on senior guards Amire Robinson, Khoi Thurmon and Marcel Boyce Jr. to lead Buchtel.

Robinson recently signed a letter of intent to play basketball for the University of Nevada, and Thurmon signed to play for Purdue University Fort Wayne. They accompanied Dent to City Series media day.

“Amire, he's one of the biggest communicators on our floor,” Dent said. “He doesn't mind holding his teammates accountable. He knows all the nuances of basketball. He's a strong IQ kid, and he shoots the ball at a good clip. He has excellent range, and I'm looking forward to him just to explode this year. Last year, he was hampered with some injuries that kind of held him back. But this year, I think he's going sky the limit for him.

“[Thurmon is] a galvanizer. He takes [his teammates] to workouts. He'll invite the last man on the bench. He's been a constant leader for me since he got here. One of the biggest things about Khoi is he communicates well. He sees the floor very well. He's a strong guard, finishes well at the bucket and I just expect him to have a phenomenal senior season.”

Boyce was a standout wide receiver for Buchtel's football team, which wrapped up its season Saturday with a 41-33 loss to West Branch in a Division IV regional semifinal.

Dent is eager to welcome Boyce and several other football players, including sophomores Stevie Diamond and Demetrice Coates and junior Dakota Taylor, back to the basketball court.

Juniors Diaire Pride and Qi'Marreon Marks will play key roles, too, Dent said.

Buchtel is scheduled to open its season Dec. 6 at Garfield.

“We're guard dominant,” Dent said. “I run pretty much a four out, one in system. I let all five handle the ball, push the ball, get the rebound and go. We like to play at a high tempo. Positionless basketball – we're trying to trend that way.”

Kent State University women's basketball program extends offer to Ellet sophomore Caitlyn Holmes

Ellet returns eight varsity players to its girls team, Harris said, including the two he brought to City Series media day – sophomore guard Caitlyn Holmes and senior guard Rachel Wenzel.

On Nov. 10, Holmes received an offer from Kent State basketball after attending its 80-71 loss to Florida State, Harris said. KSU had previously visited Ellet to watch Holmes during an open gym.

“Last year, when I came here, I told you guys get to know Caitlyn 'cause she's going to be a household name pretty quick,” Harris said to the other City Series coaches. “I think if you played her, you know what I was talking about.”

Ellet's Rachel Wenzel commits to play soccer for University of Akron

On Monday, Wenzel committed to play soccer at the University of Akron, she and Harris said. Wenzel holds an unofficial state record for career assists by a girls soccer player with 95.

She is also “like the engine” of Ellet hoops, Harris said.

“We want to play fast, and nobody plays faster with the ball than Rachel Wenzel,” Harris said. “She's our point guard. She pushes everything. She's one speed, and it's the speed we wanna play at 'cause we have a size deficiency.”

“We can't walk it up and set up. We want to get up and down. We want to turn it into a track meet, and Rachel's ability to go at a speed unmatched by many with the ball in her hands is just instrumental in what we do. She also guards usually the best ball handler on the other team, so she's slowing down their offense while speeding ours up.”

Ellet went 14-9 last season and finished with an opening-round sectional loss to Mayfield. Ellet will tip off its season by visiting Wadsworth on Friday.

“We upped the schedule difficulty a lot out of conference because we're Division I, and to prepare for the state tournament we've gotta see some of those bears early,” Harris said.

Senior guard Julianna Shaw, senior forward Trey Moore, senior wings Mya Knight and Mia Parks and sophomore guard Jayden Knaff return with experience.

Harris added Ellet will benefit from two “significant transfers” – sophomore Jaeda Tavares (Buchtel) and junior Shaniya Cherry (Archbishop Hoban).

“I'm very confident in our ability to repeat as city champions and make some noise,” Harris said. “We've got talent. The girls work hard. They listen. So I think we should be better than we were last year.”

Nate Ulrich can be reached at nulrich@thebeaconjournal.com.

On Twitter: @ByNateUlrich.