

# Buffington to lead more experienced Lady Cats



Louisburg senior Carson Buffington returns to lead the Lady Cats after earning All-Frontier League second team honors last year. Buffington and the Lady Cats open their season Friday at home against Tonganoxie.

In what was an eight-win season a year ago, the Louisburg girls basketball team featured a lot of youth and inexperience in its varsity lineup.

It was an up and down season that featured a pair of wins over rival Paola, before falling to the Panthers in the sub-state tournament and watching them advance to state. The Lady Cats also had to say goodbye to two starters from a year ago, including all-league performer Bailey Belcher.

However, the good thing about playing with a young team is that they get older and more experienced and head coach Shawn Lowry hopes that pays off for his group.

“We have been fortunate to have several unselfish players that have embraced the process of their development by playing wherever it was best for their team at the time and in many cases playing up to the six-quarter limit many nights,” Lowry said. “As such, several of those girls are now positioned to step in at varsity roles to contribute.”

“Last year we talked about having inexperience and a learning curve with new and young players. This year those players are more experienced, have a better understanding of expectations and have hit the ground running.”

One of those players is senior Carson Buffington, who has hit the ground running since her freshman season. The Louisburg forward has led the Frontier League in rebounding the last three years, and is a 3-time all-league player, including a second team selection a year ago.

Buffington was selected team captain, along with junior forward Haley Cain, and both players fixture to be prominent players underneath the basket.

“Carson’s leadership has been important for our team since she was a freshman,” Lowry said. “At that time, it was more subtle in what she gave in practices and games. Now as a senior, she has really developed into a great leader for us. She’s our vocal leader, no one works harder than she works and she is one of the most unselfish players.”



**Junior forward Haley Cain was named team captain with fellow teammate Carson Buffington.**

Three starters return to help lead the Lady Cats this year in Buffington, Cain and sophomore Madilyn Melton, who started several games as a freshman. Juniors Sydni Keagle and Erin Lemke will also crack the starting five after seeing varsity minutes off the bench last season.

Senior Kennia Hankinson, along with sophomores Alyse Moore, Megan Foote, Brooklyn Diederich and freshman Delaney Wright will also be in the varsity rotation this season.

“What has been great coming into this season has been the growth and development of several players from last season,” Lowry said. “We have several juniors and sophomores that are much stronger, more confident and improved fundamentally. We have had very good competition in our practices, girls are

really pressing each other and I expect we will have several girls play big roles at various points throughout the season.”

The Lady Cats will need that experience as their schedule got tougher this year with the addition of three teams to the Frontier League in Piper, Bonner Springs and Tonganoxie. Add in returning state champion Baldwin to the mix and it will be another tough road through the league.

“The Frontier League will again have some of the very best teams in the state, particularly with the addition of those three schools,” Lowry said. “Along with a very strong league, we will have the opportunity to play some very good teams in our non-conference and tournament schedule. With that said, I trust in our players to compete with great effort, toughness and pride every time we take the floor.”

Louisburg will get its first chance to compete Friday when it hosts Tonganoxie in a 6 p.m., tipoff. The Lady Cats have been preparing for this day since offseason workouts began over the summer.

“The girls are working very hard in preparing for the upcoming season,” Lowry said. “Our upperclassmen have been great in fostering an environment that is competitive and positive with their work ethic and attitudes. The girls are always anxious to start playing games after the preseason conditioning work and three weeks of practice.”