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## Six players back for Cumberland

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TOLEDO -- Last year Cumberland finished 17-11 overall and 4-4 in the Little Illini Conference, falling in the IHSA Class 1A regional semifinals to Neoga 37-35.

"The kids still talk about that game," said second-year Cumberland boys' basketball coach Justin Roedl. "It was pretty big heartbreak losing that game knowing they had Jeremy Jansen (injured) on the bench and two points away. I think they are hungry to get in the regional championship and have a shot at winning that."

Cumberland returns six players from that team including second-team all-LIC player Silas Gabel, who averaged 12.5 points per game, which is the most out of any of the returning players. Gabel is one of five seniors returning. Others are Cole Miller (1.4 points per game), Jory Matteson (3.2 points per game), Cole Carlen (2.2 points per contest) and Reed Draper (6.4 points per contest). The other returning player is Jaton McMechan, who averaged 4.4 points per contest.

Two other seniors are on the varsity squad of 13 in Tyler Kuhn and Dustin Parker.

"I hope our defense is our strength," said Roedl, an Altamont grad. "With the lack of size at the varsity level and the experience back we are going to have to defend well. We are going to have to rebound well. Defensively, we played fairly decent at the end of last year and I think if we can continue with that we should have a chance in a majority of the games, if not all of our games this year. We have focused on our defense and rebounding so far. Honestly we have not done a lot of offensive work. This early in the year if we don't defend and if we don't rebound it doesn't matter how much we can score."

Height is something the Pirates had plenty of last year in Journal Gazette/Times-Courier all-area player Jeremy Jansen (6-5), second team all-LIC player Dalton Sowers (6-4) and 6-8 Zach Bolin.

"The height we do have is either a first-year player or young kids," said Roedl. "We have height, but they don't have a lot of experience. Jansen averaged 15.1 points and Sowers averaged 13.8 points per game last year. We learned a few things with Jeremy Jansen going down in the last month. We had some kids step up at the end like Jory (Matteson) and Jaton (McMechan). They had eight points a piece (in the final month), but that is more than what they were scoring before. I think we will find their points, but Dalton and Jeremy were our top and third place rebounding leaders and it wasn't necessarily because they boxed out well. They got a lot of rebounds by just going in there and out jumping people. Dalton had 11 and Jeremy 6 rebounds per game. Rebounding is something we are going to have to work for."

Roedl, who is assisted by Cumberland graduate Justin Wallace, feels the team should be fairly quick.

"Silas Gabel is a great athlete and is fast and Jory Matteson is probably our best overall athlete," said Roedl. "He is quick. He can jump. He is had a good summer. He worked a lot on his basketball handling and shooting. If he can just stay under control and stay out of foul trouble I look for a lot out of him because he is very athletic. I think Cole Miller has not only grown and has gained some strength I think he has got a little more athletic. It seems like he is jumping a little higher and getting up and down the floor a little quicker. The younger guys coming off the bench are more athletic than what we had last year. We are going to be pretty deep at the guard position."

Look for the Pirates to be an up-tempo team.

"If we are outsized we are going to try to get into a full-court game and keep it up and down the floor," said Roedl. "We can't let them get into a half-court game and just kick it inside all of the time. If they are small we will see how our quickness matches up and if we need to go to a half-court game we will go to a half-court game. I see us trying to play a lot more up-tempo, full-court game, especially with the depth we have guard."

Roedl feels Marshall is the team to beat again in the LIC, but feels it is more balanced with any team in the top eight capable of knocking off anyone.

"These kids have a want-to mentality," said Roedl. "The kids are looking to be very successful this year. They have high expectations. It is going to be tough, but I think they are willing to work for it. This is only my second year here, but this group of juniors last year was very hard working and now as seniors I see that they are all working hard and working together."

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