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Despite graduation losses, Eagles again aim to stay on top

By Jim Faasen
CORRESPONDENT

For as hard as it is to climb to the top of the mountain in sports, it's often viewed as harder to stay on top.

That is the position the Liberty Christian boys' basketball team finds itself in for the 2026-27 basketball season, though.

Coming off a 24-win campaign and the Missouri Christian Schools Athletic Association (MCSAA) state championship one year ago, the Eagles must do so without a pair of top talents in forwards Willy Mueller and Tommy Meyer, both of whom graduated.

Senior guard Ryder Carlisle said the team is ready to pick up any slack.

"If anything, we've got to work even harder because we lost our two seniors," Carlisle said. "We've got to buckle down at practice and make sure we know what we're doing. It's not going to be easy. We're really pushing to win (state) again. That and the MAC (conference) Tournament."

Among the players leading the charge for the Eagles this season are expected to be senior guard Phoenix Obermann (20.6 points per game) and Carlisle (5.8 points, 2.3 rebounds per game last season).

Obermann said the five seniors on the roster this year have been around one another for a long time.

That's a fact that can only help the team succeed, he said.



The members of the Liberty Christian boys' basketball team are, front row, from left: Tony Kelly, Ryder Carlisle, Cooper Dickson and Luke Meyer. Back row: Phoenix Obermann, Tucker Wainscott, Celton Kimmel, RJ Hoffmann, Cruz Meyer, Micah Devine and Ben Greening. Jim Faasen photo

"I think that we have a great team and a lot of the seniors have been playing together for several years," Obermann said. "I think we have great chemistry and that can help us win another state title. We play together well, share the ball and just have such good chemistry."

That chemistry will be vital, Head Coach Butch Clark said.

The coach said that while replacing Mueller and Meyer's physical attributes will be nearly impossible, the team-oriented approach may make the team even harder to beat.

"I'd like to win another one; those don't happen very often," Clark said. "I like our team. We lost a ton of talent. We lost a 6-5 and a 6-3, but the cupboard's not bare. We've got kids who are ready for the opportunity. Our scrimmages have looked real good. The first five have played real well together. I also like our bench. Our second five can get in there and hold their own. All of the guys coming off the bench are young, but promising."

Clark pointed to the team's top five of Obermann, senior guard Cooper Dickson, Carlisle, senior forward Tucker Wainscott and sophomore forward Cruz Meyer as a formidable formation.

Meyer said that the team is, literally, off and running.

The sophomore added that the team will work as a unit to win basketball games, and he added that there really isn't anyone on the roster who cares about individual glory.

"We want to make sure we're in shape, not just by running in practice, but in games," Meyer said. "I think last year taught us to trust one another. We didn't really care about who got the shot. We moved the ball well and that helped us score. That (team success) showed us just what we can do. We want to do that again."

This season, Liberty will play more than 10 games against MSHSAA schools to forge the team into a conference and state title contender, Clark said.

"I'd like to win that, too," said Clark of the conference tournament. "I think we've got a shot. Victory Christian has a lot of size. (Defending MAC champion) Westwood lost everyone. I never underestimate them, though. They always seem to just reload. We've got the same type of schedule. I know if I didn't think we could handle it, we'd go a little softer."

Liberty returns to play at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow (Friday) at home against the St. Louis Blue Knights Homeschool.

Liberty Christian girls gets back to basics with youthful core

By Jim Faasen
CORRESPONDENT

Coming off a five-win campaign one season ago, the Liberty Christian girls basketball team will be young this season.

The two key differences this time, though, are that much of that youth, which took its lumps last year, will return and that venerable Coach Butch Clark will pull double duty, sliding over to take the reins of the girls' team while still guiding the boys.

Sophomore forward Morgan Boenker said she is excited about the change, which has already helped the team earn its first win, a victory over Chesterton Academy last week in which sophomore point guard Bristol Barron scored 19 and Boenker added 10 rebounds.

"I really like it," said Boenker of the coaching change. "He's very passionate. I think he likes to do more basketball (strategy). That makes us stronger. He coaches us very well. I think, as a team, we need to make more buckets and, for me, I need to grab more rebounds. We need to work on playing more as a team."

Barron said she could see how a new coach and a five-win season could provide ample pressure.

She added that it just won't be the case because of Clark's extensive background.

"I think it takes any pressure off because he knows how to coach the game so well and how to lead us," Barron said.

"It was (disappointing last year), but now, it's about this year. We're building up from Ground (Zero) in a way. I think a new mindset will help with that."

Barron said that the team's aim for this season should be simple.

Breaking the game down into its most basic components will be key.

"For us, it's about staying consistent on defense and, on offense, pushing as hard as we can," Barron said. "If we get the points, we get the points. If we don't, it's okay; we're going to push it again the next chance we get."

For his part, Clark agreed with Barron that the team will do a lot of work to break things down and then build them back up as the season progresses.

He said that, while the team may take some lumps, as the schedule plays out, the Eagles should eventually be able to hand out their share of lumps to the opposition.

"We're going to start with the basics," Clark said. "The temptation is to try and win games but just overlook the things you really need to be working on. We're going to try and temper that, work on our fundamentals and get our skill level to where it needs to be. They're mostly young. I've got a lot of sophomores that should probably be on a JV team.

"Seeing us be able to handle the basketball, make passes on the money and have proper shooting techniques," continued Clark as he listed important areas of focus for the team. "We need to get a feel for how things should be done."



The members of the Liberty Christian girls basketball team are, front row, from left: Delaney Schulte, Elsie Kimmel, Callie Dickson, Bailey Minderman and Brinley Kayser. Back row, from left: Morgan Boenker, Emma Roden, Bristol Barron, Mallory Boenker, Elsie Goodfellow and Samantha Beard. Jim Faasen photo

The coach said the sophomores will do a lot to guide the Eagles on the court this season.

"I think Bristol and Morgan are our two most athletic kids," Clark said. "I've told the team that after Christmas, I believe we will be fairly competitive."

After the top two, Clark mentioned junior guard Bailey Minderman and sophomore guards Elsie Kimmel and Callie Dickson as those who will play important roles for the team.

"I think we go six, seven-deep right now," Clark said. "They're going to get some playing time. We'll see how things go."

The Eagles will next take to the court when they host the St. Louis Blue Knights homeschool at 6 p.m. tomorrow.

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