

CC Men: Numbers Favor Trailblazers in 2014-15 Campaign



By Brandon Hansen

Centralia College's Calvin Edward puts a shot up during NWAACC West Division mens basketball action against Lower Community College Wednesday night at the Michael Smith Gymnasium in Centralia.

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The bench at Centralia College is mighty crowded this season but it looks like no one is going to sitting for too long. With 13 players listed on the roster, the ranks for the Trailblazers have swelled from recent years as the Hub City squad eyes a return to the NWAC Tournament after missing the playoffs last season.

"We're gonna be solid in our depth play," Centralia coach Jason Moir said. "It's just a matter of finding the right combination throughout the game and making some things happen."

The Trailblazers finished seventh in the NWAC West Division last year with a 5-11 league record, but there are several reasons to think they'll improve.

First, Centralia returns 6-foot-3 sharpshooter Zach Carras after the sophomore from Olympia missed most of last year to injury.

“He got a medical redshirt so he’s basically a third-year guy,” Moir said. “He’s going to bring a lot to the team and he’s going to be able to spread things out on offense.”

Carras led the NWAC in 3-point percentage and was averaging 18 points per game last year before his injury, Moir said. Opposing defenses will also have their hands full with the second reason Centralia College is on the rise: sophomore guard Calvin Edwards, a Kent-Meridian product.

“He’s probably one of the more just flat-out athletic scoring guards,” Moir said. “He stepped up last year to be our leading scorer and now he’ll be back in the role of a facilitator and he’ll score when we need him too.”

Edwards seemingly did it all for the Trailblazers last year, averaging 16.6 points a game and was fifth in the NWAC with 2.25 steals per game. He dished off 3.5 assists a game and nabbed 6 rebounds a night.

“We’re expecting some good things from him this season,” Moir said. “Hopefully with his experience he’ll give us leadership and composure out on the floor.”

One loss for the Trailblazers will be Marced Farley, a star last year who suffered an ACL injury and will return next season.

Defensively, Centralia allowed fewer points (77.4 per game) than 22 other teams in the NWAC, thanks in part to 6-foot-3 Renton product Colin Malone. Malone was a solid perimeter defender for the Trailblazers, Moir said, and kept possessions alive with his offensive rebounding and tip-outs.

Moir expects his team to run a lot of zone-based defense to cover more ground, open up the transition game and keep things uptempo. The Trailblazers averaged just 69.6 points per game last year, but Moir said he feels like this year’s squad is going to be more explosive — the third reason to look for big things from this squad.

“We’re gonna be a team that can score with the basketball,” Moir said. “We’ve got good shooters, good post presence and we should have a well-balanced attack.”

The Trailblazers welcome in eight new freshmen, including Morton-White Pass’ Kalen Dunlap — last year’s Central 2B League and Chronicle All-Area MVP — and Centralia’s Patrick Neely. Moir thinks the freshman class is one of the deepest he’s had and he expects them to make an immediate impact.

Freshmen forwards Dane Fjeld (6-6) and Justin Fjeld (6-7), both from Graham-Kapowsin, will give the Trailblazers size up front, as will small forward Andrew Briggs (6-7) out of Boise.

Jacob Talbot (6-5, also from Boise) will bolster Centralia’s height advantage, while Neely (6-3) has plenty experience in the paint as well.

“While Patrick is not as big as the others, his footwork is right where it needs to be,” Moir said. “He plays a lot stronger than 6-3 and I think we’ll see him out there on the court.”

Freshman guard Tanner Therrien comes from a Pullman High School team that won two State 2A championships, and Dunlap led MWP to last year’s State 2B title.

“Tanner’s more of defensive specialist and rebounder while Kalen’s more of an offensive player,” Moir said. “Tanner is physically strong enough and tough enough to take someone anywhere from 5-8 to 6-4.”

The Trailblazers are also welcoming back sophomore Dylan Fullmer of Eagle River, Alaska, who spent the past two years on a mission trip in London. He'll provide plenty of leadership for the Trailblazers.

In Centralia's most recent scrimmage, nine players scored 6 points or more and six were in double figures, meaning almost anyone could light up the scoreboard on any given night.

"If we continue to go in the direction we're going, we're gonna be in good shape," Moir said.

The Blazers will try to make waves in a tough, experienced NWAC West Division.

Pierce College made the title game at the NWAC Championships last year after finishing second in the division with a 13-3 record, and Clark College posted a perfect 16-0 record in West Division play, but it's Highline that impresses Moir the most.

Highline was third in the West last year, with an 11-5 league record and 23-8 overall record.

"Highline was very successful last year and they picked up some good kids," Moir said. "If I were going to pick who stands out, they're the one that is going to have a target on their back."

Highline also retained most of its players, while Pierce and Clark will be reloading after graduating key pieces from their rosters.

Lower Columbia, which went 9-7 in league last year, returns just four players from last year's team and adds 10 freshmen to the mix.

The Blazers' season begins on Friday, when Centralia plays in the annual Lower Columbia Red Devil Classic with a 1 p.m. opener against Yakima.