



By Pastor Vince Carrig

Sports Writer

Experience and depth give the 2012-13 Plainsmen basketball team hope that it can advance past last year's district final loss and play in the state championship tournament this year.

The Plainsmen return four starters: leading scorer and point guard Quinton Hite, Elliot Carlson, Jake Sexson, and Alex Johnston. The group of seniors hopes to shred through a tough schedule and sit atop the top of the bracket when sub-district playoffs begin in McCook in February.

Starting his fifth year as Perkins County's Head Coach, Shawn Cole (39-42) thinks last year's experience positions this year's team for success: "You could see them maturing last year, playing a team that lost only five games [14-5 Hemingford in the sub-district final] and beating them," Coach Cole said.

Last year, the core shook off a 7-15 season and almost made an improbable run to Lincoln. Coach Cole gets the luxury of adding two big post players to his starting rotation this year: seniors Blake Poppe and Caleb Breazeale.

Poppe provided muscle last year coming off the bench, contributing rebounds and putbacks. Breazeale, Coach Cole says, "improved to the point where he can play the post position near the basket as well as at shooting guard."

Poppe and Breazeale anchoring the blocks could create a strong inside-outside game for the Plainsmen on both offense and defense. Hite, Carlson and Sexson can umbrella the arc and strike from long range on kick-outs, use big-body picks on drives, and work the ball down low to start a power game. The team possesses enough speed to run up and down the floor for points as well.

Defensively, Coach Cole calls the man-to-man array their "bread and butter," but says that he has speedy players who like to get after dribblers and morph into press-zone and press-man coverages.

The team will have to find playing time for two with significant experience and capability: junior

swing forward Tim Johnson and power forward Colton White, both stronger versions of the ones who earned varsity letters last year.

Coach Cole hopes Perkins County's depth gives opponents fits.

"This group really understand it's a team game, and it's probably going to be a different guy every night who leads us. If you look at last year, we didn't have one guy lead us in scoring two games in a row," he said.

Over the summer, the entire team attended three camps and worked to improve deficiencies that capped their playoff run last year. They shoot with more confidence and defend with more tenacity than last year.

Off the court, the Plainsmen added Jeff Skeels and Brent Turner to join Jon Forney in assisting Coach Cole.

"Jeff's very competitive; he won't settle for things done half-way, which is good," Coach Cole said.

Perkins County moved to a tougher neighborhood in terms of sub-district this year, sparring with Sean Keenan and the North Platte St. Patrick's Irish, Dylan Johnson and the Hershey Panthers and Joe Rettele and Dundy County-Stratton during the year and fighting to the finish just to reach the district level.

The Plainsmen play either sub-district rivals or schools larger than NSAA Class C2 for the first month of the season. They will likely face their sternest test in Sidney on December 14, but local C1 rivals Ogallala and Chase County will likely provide stiff competition as well.

First Action

The Plainsmen head to the mountains of Wray, Colo. to challenge the Eagles on Friday, and await the Hershey Panthers' visit Saturday to start a 22-game schedule.