



Senior Isaac O'Neal goes up for a lay-up during an open gym. He was preparing for tryouts. **Aubrey Costelow** photo



Boy basketball players scrimmage against each other in the SAC during open gyms. The boys were preparing for upcoming tryouts. **Aubrey Costelow** photo

Woodmen basketball looks to rebound after last season

By **Brady Cave**
sports editor

A healthy fusion of experienced upperclassmen and new faces look to build off of Coach Keith Witty's first season as coach of the varsity team.

The Woodmen are noticing a stronger connection between teammates and coaches.

"Last year was still everyone feeling Witty out, as it was his first year here. Last season, we spent a lot of time together at team dinners, and we grew closer to our coaching staff as the year went on, but even in the open gyms that we have had so far this year, I feel a much stronger bond between Coach Witty and the team," senior Isaac O'Neal, guard, said.

The Woodmen understand the task at hand for their season opener against Center Grove but feel good about the outcome.

"We know it might be challenging opening our season against a team that reached the Semi-State round in last year's State tournament. It is one of our biggest goals to start our season off strong with a win," senior Travarius Nolan, guard, said.

The Woodmen enter this season losing only four seniors, which is minor compared to other conference and county opponents. One 2024 graduate in particular, Jake Mosemann, was an impactful player.

"With our leading scorer from last year graduating, we are going to need to find some more scoring from younger players this year. I am looking at playing solid varsity minutes this season, and I feel like my shooting ability will help fill the role," sophomore Joey Ortman, forward, said.

Some players said the move down to 3A and the Sectional realignment opens a door for the school's first Sectional

championship since 2020.

"We have been facing much bigger schools in Sectionals for a long time. Moving down to 3A allows us to play schools of similar size and gives us a much better chance at a Sectional final. New Pal will be a challenge as they reached the Regional last year in 4A, but everyone else is in the same situation as us," junior Acen Swain, guard, said.

Other players view the switch as the easy way out.

"I feel like the change is soft. I do not think that we need an easier schedule or move down to an easier division to be a good team. I feel like the wins do not mean as much if you have to go down a level to get them," Nolan said.

Coach Witty has made some additions to the coaching staff. These coaches bring different backgrounds and experiences to the table for the Woodmen

"I hired Coach Ramey as an assistant for this season. He is younger and leads a lot of our skills training and is also a big help in demonstrating drills. He brings a completely new perspective to the staff. Coach Ramey played college basketball and was a 1,000-point scorer at Franklin Community," Coach Witty said.

During the season, preparation is about the same from game to game, even in the season opener against county opponent and reigning Semi-State qualifying Center Grove.

"We approach each team similarly. Each game we make a detailed game plan and scout the opponent. Something different for me this year is it is my second year. Most of the teams on our schedule were opponents last year, and I have an idea of what they like to do," Coach Witty said.

The Woodmen travel to Center Grove for their season opener on Tuesday. Junior varsity will begin at 6 p.m., and varsity will follow at 7:30 p.m.



Lady Woodmen basketball prepares for a season with great expectations

By **Rachel Spivey**
reporter

After months of off-season workouts, the Lady Woodmen are back on the floor and ready for a new season.

They host the Johnson Country tournament tomorrow starting at 7 p.m.

"I think this season is going to be good. We have had a lot of tough off-season workouts, but I think these workouts made our team better as a whole. We have a lot of rough teams on our schedule, so there is going to be some good competition," senior Emma Gardner, center, said.

The team will be rounded out with several underclassmen.

"The only thing that is a bit different from last year is that we have a young team with only six upperclassmen coming in. We have a new Sectional so that will be pretty interesting," junior Eliana Anderson, guard, said.

Anderson talked about how the dynamic of the team is better than it has ever been since she has been on the basketball team.

"This team dynamic is crazy good because we are all friends off the court, so the team chemistry is better than it has ever been before. We all get along super well and help each other when we all need it. We all just work together very well," Anderson said. "I really think our team's biggest strength is our communication and how we all get along so well with one another."

Effort is key when playing any sport, and the girls are putting major effort into improving their individual and team

skills.

"I think everything will go very well as long as everyone puts in effort, which was an issue from last year. I feel like everyone just gave up when things would get hard. For example, losing a game to a really good team would set some of us back and make us feel we were not good enough in a way," junior Zaire Gillis, guard, said.

With the new season, there is much to anticipate on the boards and in the paint.

"I am looking forward to seeing how much our team grows. I also look forward to some of the younger kids turning into leaders at the end. It is so crazy how much the JV team grows and changes around the end of their first or second season. They turn into young role models and people I would want to surround myself with," Gardner said.

Gillis also shared what she is most excited about this season.

"I'm looking forward to making new connections with the freshmen. I am excited to make new memories with all of my teammates and friends. I am scared of all the seniors leaving because they are the ones who I have had a good relationship with, but I am excited to take leadership and help guide the younger girls," Gillis said.

They definitely have some challenging competition but there are some teams they are dying to face on the floor soon.

"I really want to beat Whiteland. I think if we can beat them we can beat most of our competition and, hopefully, make it to State," Gillis said.



Senior Emma Gardner fights against two Greenfield Central players during a tip-off. Gardner finished with 9 points. **Paige Glynn** photo



Senior Isabelle Reynolds prevents a Greenfield-Central player from scoring. The Lady Woodmen suffered a 27-48 defeat. **Paige Glynn** photo