

PIL Forecast

by Joe White

An injury here and there and a couple of other surprises are going to make the Portland Interscholastic League's basketball season like the shoot-out at the O.K. corral. Guns are going to be firing and it's going to be a wide open affair.

Early season predictions had Benson Tech slated to win a third straight PIL crown but those ideas have been holstered for awhile.

Benson was dealt a damaging blow when 6-5 Ulf Spears, one of the state's premier players, suffered a badly sprained ankle just over a week ago. Spears missed the entire week of school this past week and Benson head coach Dick Gray isn't sure how serious the injury is to his star player.

"It will definitely hurt us," Bray said. He reported that Spears should be back playing by the middle of January unless complications arise.

Describing Spears' importance to the team, Gray said, "We don't have a guy to substitute who can rebound or score as much."

While most of the coaches in the PIL are predicting that Benson will battle for the league title, Gray sticks to his guns in saying the team will finish third or fourth. "We would be third or fourth with Ulf out and we'll struggle to be third or fourth when we get him back," Gray said.

He says there are other teams with more experience at more positions in the league. Grant, Wilson and Roosevelt were mentioned. "Those are three teams we have to beat. Without Ulf, we would have a problem beating them."

One big problem facing the Techmen is that they aren't as deep as past seasons. Steve Adams, Anthony Stroughter and Kenny Luckett are three of the starters but Gray said, "We're still looking for a fifth guy."

When Spears gets back, Benson will be a team to reckon with but for now they sit on the same fence post with the rest of the league.

Grant Generals

This was supposed to be some sort of rebuilding year for the General team that went 19-5 last season and won 12 out of 14 league games but don't tell that to the team members.

Much traveled first year head coach John Stilwell has the Generals literally off and running. "I'm an up-tempo type of coach," he said. "I like to get the game moving." Grant is moving up and down the court at a pace that brought a 68-56 win over Parkrose.

Franklin head coach Hugh Pennington changed his mind about Grant after the Generals soared off to a 40-point win over the Quakers. "They look pretty tough," Pennington said.

One of the big surprises so far this

year is the development of forward Richard Hollis. By playing at rim level, Hollis pocketed 28 points in a game versus Glencoe and fired in 19 in the Parkrose shoot out.

Guards Eric Ross and Cory Washington are two of the reasons Stilwell said, "I've got the best team I've ever coached talent-wise." Ross pumped in 23 against Parkrose and along with Hollis forms a deadly one-two punch. Stilwell said, "Richard is doing really well inside. For a junior who hasn't played much, he has a lot of talent."

Grant's biggest problem now is the fact that they are no longer a secret. Teams are going to prepare for them and that will create more of a challenge—a challenge the Generals will try to run right over.

Marshall Minutemen

One of the darkhorse teams in the league practices daily in the Marshall gym. The Minutemen return three players from last season's state quarterfinal team with plans on sneaking up on the pack.

Don Emry, Marshall head coach, plans on making up for lack of size by using pressure defense, hustle and his team's two biggest assets—quickness and shooting ability.

"We're hoping to gain a playoff spot [the PIL qualifies four teams]. We think we have a chance for one of them," Emry said.

Heading up the charge is junior Robert Key. Key is averaging 25 points per game this season and hit for 31 against Benson. The Minutemen lost by six to the Techmen but Emry saw that as a positive sign. "I look for us to challenge. We played a good game against Benson."

Senior forwards Leonard Wade and Wilbert Antoine are the other returning players Emry looks to for production.

Marshall will hope to earn one of those four playoff positions and Emry really believes they can. "After Grant and Benson, anyone could come in there."

Cleveland Indians

Some of the firing guns mentioned earlier belong to the Indians. Cleveland is swamped with good shooters as evidenced by a field goal percentage of over 50 percent for all three games.

Craig Miller, a 6-1 forward, leads the way with a shooting percentage of 62 percent and 25 points a game average.

Cleveland rates as another team that could surprise this year. Head coach Gary Tash is highly confident that his first year as head man will be a good one. "I don't see any reason why we can't be one of the better teams in the city," Tash said.

To accomplish that goal the Indians are going to wear out some tennis shoes. "We play a fast style of basketball. Fast break and full court press the whole game," Tash said.

"Cleveland's been the doormat but I think we're really going to surprise a lot of people," Tech said.

The big surprise will be a platooning system that creates havoc on opposing teams. The Indians have some depth and Tash is using it to run two squads of five players in and out of the game. When one gets tired, the other takes over.

Defense will play a big part of the Cleveland game plan and the name Roger Marcell comes to Tash's lips when you mention defense. "He's our best defensive player and probably one of the quickest and best defensive players in the city."

Roosevelt Roughriders

Many people feel that Roosevelt will have anything but a rough ride on the way to the playoffs. That feeling is formed when looking at five returning starters buoyed by 6-9 center John Piwarchuck.

Piwarchuck is the big man for Roosevelt but not the only one who can shine for the team. Leon Brewer, Andre Phelps and Andre George can find the scoring book also.

Friday night the Roughriders won a battle with Cleveland. The Roughriders won 95-86 behind a balanced scoring attack. Brewer tallied 22 points, Piwarchuck tossed in 19 and George contributed 16 points.

The win puts the Roughriders at 2-0 in the PIL race so far. Wilson fell 100-66 to the powerful offense of Roosevelt.

Fans of the North Portland high school should see plenty of scoring this year and a bushel of baskets.

Lincoln Cardinals

Inexperience and lack of height are two of the problems facing 0-2 Lincoln. "We're not real big. This is probably the smallest group we've had at Lincoln in some time," head coach Tom Thomas said.

The team's big gun is Michael Lankton. He fired in 18 points in a 49-45 loss to Marshall Friday night. Thomas rates Lankton as one of the top shooters in the PIL. "Michael probably has the best range of anyone in the league. Once he gets hot, just get him the ball and the ball's going down," Thomas said.

Even though the team is small, Thomas is pleased with the way the players are working together. "I'm more optimistic because the kids are workin' hard."

Madison Senators

Talking about his basketball team isn't the most pleasant subject right now for Madison head coach Bob Osborn. The Senators were put far behind because of the Madison football team making the state playoffs and numerous other problems have surfaced since then.

Notably injuries and other interests have left the Madison squad on the edge of collapse. Guard Chris Kock, one of the three returners, left the team for personal reasons as did guard Tiny Butler. Injuries have sidelined guards Billy Porter and Tim McCormick and left the team without very many guards.

Transfer Edgar Glover has been declared ineligible and point guard John Clark has been out ill.

All of these problems have resulted in a 0-3 start at the season's beginning and left the Senators gasping for air. "We've got some problems," Osborn said. "You go into a season hoping you can solve these problems the best you can."

Osborn hopes the football players will come around soon. Junior Dave Brannon missed a week after football to get some dental work done and still is, "Not where we would like him to be," according to Osborn.

Franklin Quakers

Hugh Pennington spent 12 years at Benson as an assistant coach before moving to Franklin this season. Along with him he brought a great deal of basketball knowledge and a new system.

Pennington is hoping that the Quakers will adapt to a faster style of play and compete with the rest of the league. "Some of the kids are having trouble handling the ball on the move," he said. "We want to play a faster game than they're used to."

Brian Crook is playing his third season on the varsity and averaged in double figures last season. Crook and the team will need more as shown in a 40-point loss to Grant in the league opener.

"There's the potential to be fairly competitive. A lot depends on how these kids work together," Pennington said.

Wilson Trojans

Wilson is using a little of the old and some of the new to jump out to a fast start in the PIL race. Last year's team leader Brian Wilson pumped in 24 points against Marshall as the Trojans won 86-81. He's the old.

The new is a player named Rich Banton and he emerged with 27 points against the Quakers.

Wilson has eight returning lettermen this season and four starters back from a 10-10 team last year. The team rates as one of the favorites to earn one of four playoff positions from the PIL.

Jefferson Democrats

Before the season began Jefferson coach Bobby Harris said his team would be right in the middle of the fight for the playoffs. People are taking him seriously after the Democrats stunned Grant 67-62 Friday night.

Jefferson used a balanced scoring output to upend one of the favorites for the league title. John Johnson led the way with 15 points and Curtis Penny chipped in with 14.

Johnson is a 6-3, 250-pound center forward who is counted on for offensive production. Keith Jackson guides the offense as the point guard but can also score. He had nine points in the win over Grant.

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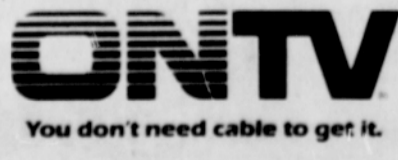
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