

# Sherman Co., Heppner favored in Columbia Basin girls conference

"Something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue." So goes the old saying at weddings, and so say the coaches of the Columbia Basin, District 7-A, as they prepare for another girls basketball season.

The "old" refers to the favorites, as Sherman County and Heppner are expected to defend their division titles in the West and East, respectively. The "new" speaks to the emergence of new contenders at both ends of the conference, promising to provide the CBC with its best balance in years. The "borrowed" is the adoption of some college rules, while "blue" is the way the coaches feel when thinking about new, strict guidelines for bench behavior by coaches, which may lead to a new definition of "Mr. T." by the end of the season.

Both Heppner and Sherman County spent most of last season in the top five in the State, and CBC coaches see more of the same this year. Despite the loss of two key seniors, the Fillies of Heppner return a wealth of experience from a club that took down third place in last year's State tourney. Sherman's Huskies return the nucleus of a team that held the No. 1 ranking in the State before succumbing in the District playoffs.

While Sherman is expected to dominate the West, the East is not being conceded to Heppner. Weston-McEwen, Umatilla and Pilot Rock are all seen as teams capable of stepping into the breach if the Fillies falter. In fact, the District 7 coaches see the league as having its best balance ever at the girls level. Such balance is seen as a good sign for making the District 7 champion—whomever it may be—an even stronger contender for State honors. When asked to name the best players in the league, 10-15 players, from every team in the league, were mentioned.

As the coaches are divided on their opinions of the best players, so too are they less-than-unanimous about some major rule changes in the girls' game. Both boys and girls have adopted the possession arrow, replacing the jump ball. That rule has been in effect at the college level for several years. Several of the CBC coaches favor the rule, while the rest aren't so sure. Typical of those who don't like the alternating possession rule is Weston-McEwen coach Reggie McShane. "These rule changes make the game more like college and pro games, which is bad. It takes away some of the incentive for a player to attempt a tie-up. Making the game more like a college game takes less talented teams out of the game." On the other hand, many coaches feel that the possession arrow speeds up the action, which is seen as a plus.

Another significant change this year is the introduction of a smaller basketball for the females. Again, the coaches are mixed in their reactions, but the general consensus is that ball-handling will improve, while shooting percentages will come out about the same as in the past years. In fact, the biggest complaints about the smaller ball

can be heard from boys coaches, who cringe when they see their players fooling with the girls' ball.

One subject of unanimous disapproval was a new code of bench conduct for coaches. Under the new rule, a coach may not stand up in front of the bench, even to instruct a player. The only exception is for "spontaneous reaction to an outstanding play." All agree that the rule is a response to an outbreak of official-baiting at last year's AAA tournament, and lament the fact that the rule is being universally applied.

Most coaches echo the sentiments of Riverside's Dirk Dirksen, who says "When we're standing up and coaching, they shouldn't T us. I hope the officials use common sense." Wahtonka's Gene Bivens suggested that a coaching box, similar to that used in college games, might better address the problem. Prediction: Look for a sharp increase in the number of spontaneous reactions.

In general, the goals of most teams are the same: "get us to the District tournament and we'll take it from there." District 7A teams have historically done very well at the tournament, and there is an added bonus this year. The District, the Regional and the State Tournament are all being played at the same site—Pendleton's Armory. But first things first—here's how the league looks to shape up:

**Heppner**  
For coach Mike Royer, the biggest opponent all year may be the trophy case at the Heppner High School gym, as Filly fans wonder "what can they do for an encore?"

Heppner fans have been treated to a third place finish at last year's A-basketball tournament and a fifth place spot in this year's A-volleyball tourney, but coach Royer doesn't think the high expectations will bother his team.

"These girls are competitors—they're working just as hard as ever because they want to get back to the State tourney," says the third-year head coach. "We have to stress that we're not satisfied," said Royer. "I have to give them new challenges, like adding some new plays."

The run-and-gun Fillies (18-4 last year) return six of their top eight players from last year, including five who started games at one time or another. Led by first team All-tournament selection Lana Reid, the Fillies will once again play an up-tempo game. Reid's twin sister Dana is also a returning starter. Point guard Missy Turner will be called on to run the Fillies effective fast break, and to key their pressure defense. Frontliners Missy Eubanks and Penny Connor are expected to provide board strength for Heppner.

Royer has loaded the pre-season schedule, logging AAA Hermiston twice, AA Mac-Hi twice, and meeting league powerhouse Sherman County in a non-league match-up. "I think it will help," said Royer, "we could be 4-4 in our first 8 games and still be okay."

This is a senior-dominated squad, and Royer says that they are determined to give it one final shot. He

cautions that the immediate goal is to make the District tournament. "From there, it's whoever's hot," says Royer. "Our defense is the key to our success. If we play it well for four quarters, we can do well."

Knowing the Fillies, anything's possible. Weston-McEwen TigerScot basketball fans were treated to an unfamiliar sight last year—a winning girls basketball team. If they liked last year, they may love this year.

Led by second-team all-league performer Karen Bjorklund (5'9" senior) the girls of second-year skipper Reggie McShane are poised to make a big move this year. The TigerScots were clearly the league's most-improved team at year's end last year, and only the presence of State powers Umatilla and Heppner kept them out of the District tournament.

"We felt like we were one of the four best teams last year," says McShane. "Our goal this year is to take it one game at a time, and hope to get to the playoffs."

One distraction for the girls from Athena-Weston may be the schedule.

They don't play Heppner until the last two weeks of the season, and then meet twice in the last three games, which coach McShane feels may work to his team's disadvantage, as it did last year when the TigerScots drew Umatilla and Sherman County, back-to-back.

McShane would like to see his team run the ball, and feels that he has the personnel to do so. "Our team is 9-10 players deep, which helps," says McShane. "The key to a running game is develop the team concept, and to develop our timing." From all appearances, the timing may be just right for W-M to run right to the head of the pack.

**Umatilla**  
It may be a tough act to follow for this year's Umatilla Vikings, but don't start the funeral procession just yet, as the girls of coach John Tomas approach the new season.

Enthusiasm for Viking basketball was at a fever pitch last season, as the girls—led by current BMCC standout Jeri Wells—roared to the No. 1 spot in the State in the early runner-up Imbler. The Vikings finished last season with a gaudy 18-4 record.

Coach John Thomas thus begins his inaugural season with slightly lowered expectations. Thomas sets "a 300 season" as a realistic goal, and offers that his team "could sneak into the second playoff spot" if the breaks go this way.

Other coaches are not so pessimistic, however, noting that Thomas returns an ample supply of talent. The Vikings will once again be a big team, with 5'11" seniors Shirley Eckleberry and Deanna Adams working together with 5'5" playmaker Tina Byington.

Thomas sees "attitude and balance" as the keys to his team's success. He hopes that a good pre-season schedule will help bring his team along. He hopes to be able to go 10-11 deep on his bench, and cites that factor as a team strength.

Yes, they lost some good talent in Umatilla, but expect the Vikes to be right in the thick of things as the season goes along.

**Stanfield**  
(We were unable to catch up with Tiger Coach Kelly Williams, but were able to learn about his club from other coaches.)

The Tigers face an uphill battle this year, in a bid to snag one of the two playoff spots in the Eastern Division. The Tigers do return some excellent talent, most notably Linda Porfily and Heather Hummel. Both performed well for the Tigers last year, and should be counted on heavily again.

Most coaches see the Tigers as a sleeper in East, sort of the "X Factor" in a division of heavyweights. Only time will tell if Mr. X can mean a rise in the standings.

**Pilot Rock**  
(Rockets coach Tim Weinke was also unavailable for comment by press time.)

The Rockets are in many ways like the UCLA Bruins—whether they have talent in a given year or not, they do have one thing for certain: tradition.

For years the Lady Rockets were one of the dominant teams in State A basketball, and it's only been in the last two years that they've been displaced at the top of the standings.

In talking to CBC coaches, they'll all get a little quiet when discussing "The Rock." All agree that the late addition of Remi Reeser will be a big boost to the Rockets chances. An all-league performer last year, Reeser moved back to the PR school district several weeks ago, boosting Rocket stock in the process. At the same time, the Rockets can count on Karen Doherty, another returning veteran.

The Rockets aren't picked to win the CBC East, but the smart money says this: don't count out the Rock. Sherman County

The Huskies are perennially tough, and last year's 18-4 record was no exception. Sixth-year coach Terry Kaseberg boasts a deep squad, led by all-conference senior Patti Sharp, mentioned most frequently by CBC coaches as the league's best player. The girls from Moro were the State's top-ranked team until first Heppner, then Umatilla knocked them out of the playoffs. The schedule, however, could have been this team's worst enemy. "I don't want to sound like we're making excuses," said Kaseberg, "but because of snow dates we had to play six games in fifteen days at the end of the season. We were just drained." The Huskies coach also noted that his team had some serious limitations last year.

Kaseberg noted that his team lacked for good shooters last year, and by the second time around the league the other teams had figured out their weakness. This year, he feels that the Huskies are a better balanced ball club, able to utilize their size (Sharp is 5'10½"). Senior Leslie Martin is 5'10" and also able to score from the outside.

"We're ten times quicker than we were last year," said Kaseberg. "That should make us better equipped to handle pressing teams like Heppner and Umatilla."

Kaseberg sees the league as well-balanced, and cites District 7A as the best in the State. "That can only help our league at tournament time," says Kaseberg. That would be good news for Huskies fans, because they'll probably be there.

**Riverside**  
Riverside's girls team made their first-ever appearance in the District tournament last year, and would love to see an instant replay this time around.

Led by 5'6" guard Michelle Mark, the Pirates hope to show continued improvement from last year's mark of 9-10. The red-headed Mark is the team leader both mentally and physically, and coach Dirk Dirksen hopes she can lead the Pirates up.

"Michelle is a team leader, and it carries over to the rest of her teammates," says Dirksen, who also hopes to complement his team with the play of guard Frannie Sharkey. "We have some good youngsters," says Dirksen, "they should be a big help on the boards."

The Pirates hope to develop into a running team as the season progresses, but coach Dirksen realizes that it takes time to formulate such an attack.

The Pirates will be tested early, as they play both Heppner and Sherman County in the pre-season. While Dirksen concedes that Sherman County is the favorite, he sees his team with a solid shot at the playoffs.

"We hope to build on last year—the expectations of the players are higher," adds Dirksen. With only one starter missing from last year, there's every reason for optimism in Pirate country.

**Wasco County**  
Wasco County would like nothing more than to return to the glory days of yesteryear, but for now they'd settle for a trip to the District Tournament. Like most of the CBC coaches, Wasco coach Tony Schackman expects Sherman County to be the class of the Western Division, but he holds out hope that his ballclub can qualify as the West's other representative to the playoffs.

Although only in his second year as head girls coach, Schackman is no stranger to Redside basketball, having served as head boys coach for 12 years, and having put in another six as assistant girls coach. Last year's 8-12 campaign was a disappointment, but even so the Redside missed the playoffs "by one point," says Schackman.

Wasco County returns only one starter, and can be expected to attempt a controlled style of play.

"We're not going to try to run," says Schackman. He does see his team with reasonable depth, with 8-9 evenly matched players at his disposal.

The Redside's coach is staunchly opposed to the new rule changes. Opposed to the possession arrow, Schackman sees the bench rule as addressing problems "in the Valley." Overall he objects to the liberalized fouling calls, and feels that the rulesmakers are trying to make the high school game too much like the college game.

Inclement weather and the holiday season have put the Redside behind schedule for the start of the season. "We're not ready," says Schackman, "we may not win a lot early, but we hope to improve. We'll probably be an up and down team." Hopefully for Wasco County, one of the ups will be at Pendleton in March.

**Wahtonka**  
"No way to go but up," probably best summarizes the Wahtonka Eagles, as they strive to up last year's win total from the five they hatched a year ago. First-year coach Gene Bivens is optimistic about his team's chances, and cites the overall attitude of his team.

"We're a very relaxed team," states Bivens. "I'm very excited about the new year."

Bivens will rely on point guard Kim Kaiser (5'3" junior and frontliner Dana Feist (5'9" senior) to key an otherwise very young team. "We'll probably start three sopho-

mores," states Bivens. Bivens is particularly fond of the new ball, citing better ball handling and higher shooting percentages as results of the rule change. He expects to see less turnovers than in past years as a result of the new equipment.

For his own team, Bivens sees the key to success in good free throw shooting and tight defense. He can't count on a very deep bench, so will need to stay out of foul trouble.

Like most coaches, Bivens expects the West's second playoff spot to be up for grabs. He would like to see the Eagles claw their way into that second spot. "Our goals are to be the best sportsmen possible and to try to reach the 300 level," says Bivens. If the second half comes true, the Eagles may get an extended season this year and a happy drive up I-5 to Pendleton.



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