

Herald Sports



TOWERING ABOVE THE COMPETITION

At 6-4, Hermiston's Jordan Thomas presents a challenge

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

There's one thing basketball coaches say they can't coach — height.

But when they have it, it's a luxury, especially at the high school level.

Hermiston coach Juan Rodriguez counts himself a lucky man with 6-foot-4 senior Jordan Thomas on his side of the court.

"It's a big deal in high school basketball to have a 6-4 girl who can finish around the basket," he said. "She has the talent to play college basketball."

Which is a dream for Thomas, but first there is her senior season to take care of.

"Honestly, I love it," Thomas said of basketball. "It's a stress reliever and it makes me happy."

The Bulldogs will open their season Friday, hosting Lewiston in a nonleague game. They will host La Grande on Tuesday before beginning Mid-Columbia Conference play Dec. 8 at Kennewick.

Thomas and fellow senior Mati Byrd have been playing basketball together since grade school. With Byrd standing 6-2, they are Hermiston's version of the Twin Towers, though they do not play at the same time.

"I hope coach makes the decision and looks at us and sees two girls over 6-2," Thomas said. "It's intimidating. It could be a huge threat."

Rodriguez said their offense isn't designed for two post players. He said Byrd will come off the bench to relieve Thomas.

While Thomas is one of the two tallest players in the school — Hermiston boys player Blake Davis also is 6-4 — she also is the tallest in her family.

Her dad John is 6 feet tall, while her mom Barbara is 6-1. Her older siblings Mitchell (6-1) and Vanessa (5-10) also are shorter. She believes her height comes from her mom's side of the family. Her mom's brother, Larry Bush, is 6-9.

Thomas is the Bulldogs' returning leading scorer from last season with 16 points and 11.8 rebounds a game. She had 30 points in a playoff game last season against St. Helens, and while pouring in the points is nice, she feels her strength is her defense.

"Rebounding is what I feel I am better at," she said. "I'd rather play defense — I feel I am more of a threat and I'm more comfortable doing what I do. I can score, but if I have an off night, my defense is always there."

Pendleton coach Kevin Porter isn't shedding any tears with Hermiston and Thomas leaving the Columbia River Conference.

"Last year, she was our focal point," Porter said. "She killed us in the second game and was almost unstoppable. Our



Hermiston's Jordan Thomas drives past Hanford's Sarah Ellis in the Bulldogs' 55-38 win against the Falcons on Dec. 5, 2017.

HH FILE PHOTO

plan was, how do we drag her away from the basket defensively, and how to keep her from scoring without opening up the 3. Even on a bad night, height kills."

Thomas spent the summer playing with Oregon Elite. She was on the Navy team, which is the top team in her age group.

The team traveled to Canada, California, Kentucky and Arizona.

"We won our tournament in Canada," Thomas said. "In Kentucky, we were at a facility that had 150 courts. There was

one in Arizona with 60. There were girls playing everywhere. It was a lot of fun."

Rodriguez said the summer program helped Thomas with her game.

"She has developed a lot the past year and a half," he said. "She is very athletic, and she slimmed down this summer playing on her traveling team."

The move to the MCC is exciting and a little sad for Thomas and Byrd. They want the challenge of the playing the MCC teams, but they will miss the friendships they have made over

the years, especially with the Pendleton girls.

"We have played against them since the seventh grade," Thomas said. "They have been our rivals since then. It's part of growing up, I guess."

But, they also have played against the Tri-City schools in summer league.

"I know some of them, but a lot of their best players are always gone with their elite teams," Thomas said. "Washington is a totally different league. It will be interesting."

Home opener
Lewiston at Hermiston
5:45 p.m., Friday
The Dawg House

Boys ready to take on the MCC

Hermiston opens league play Dec. 8 at Kennewick

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston left the Columbia River Conference last year with the league title in hand, and one win from the state tournament.

This season, the Bulldogs move into the competitive Mid-Columbia Conference, and coach Casey Arstein is happy to pack up their gear and head across the border.

"It's exciting," he said. "Every night will be competitive. We are excited to do home and away games against good athletes. It's good all the way around."

The Bulldogs will open their season Friday, hosting Lewiston in

a nonleague game. The game will follow the girls matchup, which is another benefit of moving to the MCC.

In the MCC, the girls and boys teams play back-to-back at the same venue, and each team will play the other eight opponents twice. Hermiston will open league play Dec. 8 at Kennewick.

Though the league plays as one during the season, the 3A and 4A schools split for the postseason.

Hermiston in the 3A ranks with three Kennewick schools - Kamiakin, Kennewick and Southridge.

"Having 16 league games, and every game is a battle, will be different," Arstein said. "Every team in the league has a kid who could play college basketball. You couldn't say that about our old league. It's nice to play good teams, and every team will have athletes. I know Earl Streufert (Richland coach) really well. I'm glad we didn't have to

play them last year."

The Bulldogs enter the MCC with a group of talented players, led by Ryne Andreason and Cesar Ortiz, who were first-team CRC players last year, and Jordan Ramirez, who was a second-team selection.

The one thing Hermiston lacks is a dominant presence inside. Junior Blake Davis is 6-foot-4, but from there, the Bulldogs rely on their athletic ability and knowledge of the game.

"We have a bunch of smart kids with high basketball IQs," Arstein said. "Ryne is our best athlete, but there isn't one guy who is our main guy. Most of these guys have played together since the second grade."

And most have played against the Tri-City teams in summer league, and in nonleague games over the years.

"They know those Tri-City kids," Arstein said. "We've played a lot of those schools, minus a couple."



Hermiston's Ryne Andreason shoots the ball over the top of Sunset's Colby King on Jan. 12, 2018 in Hermiston.

HH FILE PHOTO

LOCAL SLATE

Wednesday, November 28

Boys Basketball
Heppner at Riverside, 7:30 p.m.
White Swan (WA) at Umatilla, 7:30 p.m.

Girls Basketball
White Swan (WA) at Umatilla, 6 p.m.
Heppner at Riverside, 6 p.m.

Boys Wrestling

Hermiston at Southridge, 7 p.m.

Thursday, November 29

Boys Basketball

Stanfield at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m.

Girls Basketball

Stanfield at Irrigon, 6 p.m.

Friday, November 30

Boys Basketball

Stanfield vs. Culver, 4:30 p.m., in Moro

Helix vs. Irrigon, 4:30 p.m., in Lone

Echo vs. Trinity Lutheran, 4:30 p.m., in

Hood River

Umatilla at Vernonia, 7:30 p.m.

Lewiston at Hermiston, 7:30 p.m.

Girls Basketball

Stanfield at Sherman County Tournament,

3 p.m.

Helix vs. Irrigon, 3 p.m., in Lone

Riverside at Faith Bible, 3 p.m.

Lewiston at Hermiston, 5:45 p.m.

Umatilla at Vernonia, 6 p.m.

Heppner at Willamina, 6 p.m.

Boys Wrestling

Hermiston at Yakima, 11 a.m.

Girls Wrestling

Hermiston at Kennewick, 11 a.m.

Saturday, December 1

Boys Basketball

Umatilla at Vernonia Tournament

Stanfield at Sherman County Tournament

Riverside vs. Taft, 1:30 p.m.

Heppner at St. Paul, 2 p.m.

Echo vs. Perrydale, 2 p.m., in Hood River

Irrigon vs. Pine Eagle, 2:30 p.m.

Girls Basketball

Stanfield at Sherman County Tournament

Riverside vs. Taft, noon, Westside

Christian

Heppner at St. Paul, 12:30 p.m.

Helix at Lone, 4 p.m.