

Seaside seeking third-straight league title

By Gary Henley
EO Media Group

The 2014-15 season was a hard one to figure for the Seaside girls basketball program.

The Lady Gulls were the Cowapa League favorites coming in, and indeed won their second straight league title with a 9-1 record.

Yet in a two-day stretch at the 4A state tournament in Hillsboro, the Gulls lost to league rival Valley Catholic, 61-30, and lost to Banks in the consolation bracket, as the Braves rallied from a big first-half deficit.

It just wasn't Seaside's time, said coach Wally Hamer.

"I think we played our

best game last year in the first game with Valley Catholic," a 64-56 Seaside victory Jan. 27, Hamer said. "That was a phenomenal game. We had a pretty good run, but in the second half of the league season and then obviously the state tournament, we didn't play well. We all wanted to play better, and it didn't happen."

In two years as the Seaside coach, Hamer is 19-1 in league play, with two league championships.

"One of the goals I had to begin with was just to develop the program," he said. "Of course we always want our varsity team to do well, but I like looking at the whole program."

The Cowapa

Despite the tournament losses to Banks and Valley Catholic, any team with Maddi Utti on it has got to be a league favorite. Which is just where the Gulls find themselves as they enter 2015-16, playing for their third-straight league title.

Utti was the Cowapa's Player of the Year last season, in addition to being voted as the league's Defender of the Year.

Hamer — the Cowapa Coach of the Year — knows his team will face the same challenge as last season.

The Valiants return some talent, but lost Kaylynn Bush to graduation. Banks returns all-leaguers Me-

gan Bunn and Ariel Slifka, while Astoria — in Mike Jacobson's second year at the helm — should join the mix this year.

"With Banks and Valley Catholic, it won't be easy," Hamer said. "One of our goals is to win a Cowapa League championship. That's something we strive for."

"We don't take anything for granted. Our league will be good. We'll take one game at a time, work hard and try to improve every game and every practice."

The Lady Gulls

With five returning seniors, the Gulls are way ahead of the game in experience and leadership.

"It's nice when we don't have to spend hours to work on something, when you have kids who have been with you and know what to expect," Hamer said.

The seniors are led by four-year starter Whitney Westerholm, an all-league guard last season. She is joined by Annuka Brown, Paige Ideue, Jesse Trott and Brittany West.

"The last couple years Paige has been a spark plug, and we'll expect her to start right off with that," Hamer said, while Westerholm is a sharp shooter from the 3-point line, and will help run the offense.

But the go-to girl for points the past two seasons has been Utti, the league's best player. She was voted as the Cowapa MVP as both a freshman and a sophomore.

Utti sprained her ankle at a basketball tournament during volleyball season, but is at full strength and has added to her game, Hamer said.



Whitney Westerholm, a four-year starter, was an all-league guard last season.

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Maddi Utti was the Cowapa's Player of the Year last season.

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SEASIDE GIRLS

COACH: Wally Hamer, 3rd year

2014-15: 20-7 (9-1 Cowapa)

PLAYOFFS: Lost to Valley Catholic (30-61) and Banks (37-44) at state tournament.

ALL-LEAGUE LOSSES: Haylee Dundas

ALL-LEAGUE RETURNERS: Maddi Utti, Sr. (MVP); Sydney Villegas, Jr.; Whitney Westerholm, Sr.

bitt, Jetta Ideue and Anesha Smart.

"We'll definitely miss Shelby (Miller), Haylee (Dundas) and Allison (Bussert)," Hamer said of last year's seniors. "Haylee will be tough to replace. She was such a good shooter. We just need people to step up and make shots. I think we have kids who can step in and do that. With two or three kids, we can make up those 10 points."



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