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Nicholas County
Youth brings athleticism to Ladyjackets

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By David Lane
 Sports Writer

Coach Jennifer Corbett's teams won seven and eight games in her first two seasons at the helm of the Nicholas County girls' basketball program. This year she anticipates matching that two-year total.

The reason? Athletics. "We will be very athletic compared to the past," Corbett said. An infusion of youth in the program will be the difference.

The Ladyjackets will have six players on the varsity roster who are freshmen or younger, and collect their third jersey gives the team more options both offensively and defensively. In addition, Corbett believes that the group is as talented as the upperclassmen. They just lack experience.

With the increased athletics, Nicholas County plans on speeding up the tempo and playing more pressure and man-to-man defenses.

"We are going to run a fast break offense to start our primary break and try to get off a quick shot. We need to generate a lot of turnovers and try to get a quick lay up," Corbett said. "Our

defense will create our offense. My first year (at Nicholas County) we played man-to-man. We were not athletic enough to play a fast year. This year we are going to go back to it."

The Ladyjackets also will utilize a full-court and a three-quarter court press. "We need to dictate the pace," Corbett said. The Ladyjackets graduated just two players from an 8-15 club. However, a big part of that team's struggles was its inability to hit free throws.

Nicholas County was 336-of-613 for just 54.8 percent. In fact, the Ladyjackets actually out-scored their opponents on the season 1203 to 1182, but missing free shots literally killed them.

"We could have won 10 more games last year if we'd shot at least 70 percent from the free throw line," Corbett said. "We are a horrible free-throw shooting team. Seventy-five percent is where I'd like us to be. We are improving in practice, but have to hit them in games."

Although there is an abundance of youth in the program, the leadership will come from the Ladyjacket seniors. Returning starters center Petrea Mitchell and point guard Shelby Soby provide a potent one-two punch

do whatever she is asked. Sophomore guard Lauren Howard is likely to miss the first part of the season because of an illness. Corbett thinks highly of her due to her athleticism, length and defensive ability. A pair of post players round will add depth. Senior Lauren Harrison returns to the team after sitting out last season, while sophomore Rodney Catron is a player who always gives full effort.

The Ladyjackets have a chance to really make some strides this year with their deep and athletic lineup. However, the team will have to improve on its free-throw shooting to realistically expect a higher win total. "The keys are knocking around the basket, rebounding and hitting free throws," Corbett said. Nicholas County also

has to get used to playing away from home. The team only has nine games scheduled in its gym. "We want to go undefeated (at home)," Corbett added. "We want to win our district and advance to the second-round of the region (tournaments)."

To accomplish those goals, she says the team needs to improve its work ethic and the younger players will need to contribute. "We need to bring a every day in practice and if we do we will be fine," Corbett said. "We are a better team this year than we were last year, and we could have won the district last year. We want to have a winning season. Ten wins is the most the team has had in the last 10 years."

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