Del Norte Triplicate

SPORTS

Del Norte basketball teams building momentum ahead of league play

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The Del Norte boys and girls basketball teams appear well positioned to challenge for a Big 5 championship this season after productive and successful Decembers for both that saw each win a tournament.

The boys go into (went into) the Christmas break riding a five-game winning streak after overcoming a slow start to the season that saw them lose four of their opening five games, while the Del Norte girls are 9-2 after reaching a pair of tournament finals.

New girls head coach Dylan Nelson, who takes over this year from Justin Clifton, believes the team will be a force when league play begins in the new year.

“(What I like is) mainly just the attitude,” he said. “They’re really a positive group, they really want to learn and they’re hard working.”

The Warriors pieced together an impressive six-game winning streak in December that included a 50-46 win over St. Bernard's in the final of the Mt. Shasta tournament on Dec. 9.

A week later, the Warriors would reach the championship game at the Central Valley tournament, where they fell 51-43 to a Weed team that is the top-ranked Division-6 team in California, according to MaxPreps.com.

And they've impressed early in the new season despite playing without senior standout Lili Nunez, who opted not to play this season because she felt this year's team is not a good fit for her.

Nelson believes the Warriors' success on the volleyball court in the fall has helped prepare the basketball team for success.

"We have a lot of players coming from that volleyball run and they've stepped in and given us a lot of experience," Nelson said. "I think they'll continue to get better this year and we think we have a chance to do well."

Senior forward Jacalyn Gorbet and junior guard Brooklyn Carter have helped set the early tone and both have impressed through the opening few weeks, as have junior power forward Lauren Stutes and senior guard Anyessa Bettega.

Bettega led the way offensively in the final of the Mt. Shasta tournament and scored a team-high 13 points, while Gorbet added 12 points.

Junior guard Tsinte Steinruck also has impressed early in the season on the defensive side of the ball.

"The whole team is coming together and playing together," the coach added.

The Warriors closed out their pre-Christmas schedule with a 53-38 win over Brookings-Harbor in non-tournament action.

The Del Norte boys, meanwhile, have steadily improved as the season has progressed and they closed out their pre-Christmas schedule with a record of 6-4.

The team overcame a slow start to the campaign with a big improvement on defense.

After allowing an average of 57.8 points a game in their opening five games, the Warriors allowed just 33.4 points a game during their five-game winning streak.

"That's our objective, is to keep the other team under 40 points," head coach Cris Rice said. "That's what we pride ourselves on."

Del Norte won the Anderson tournament with a 41-34 win over Orland in the final in mid-December.

Lyon Rigden scored a team-high 11 points in that victory, while teammate Colin Tromble added nine points and Aidan Rice finished with eight points.

Defensively, the Del Norte players did a good job handling the Orland pressure.

“We kind of took them out of what they do,” Rice said. “I thought what stood out was the team performance handling their pressure. They play really strong defensive pressure and one of the keys to victory was being able to handle that pressure.”

After a standout fall on the football field, where he was named Big 4 co-Defensive MVP, senior Kai Russell has been impressing early in the basketball season and had a good tournament in the paint at Anderson.

The Del Norte boys open league play at home against McKinleyville on Jan. 2, while the girls tip off the Big 5 at McKinleyville the following night.

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