

Boys basketball team-by-team capsules

December 17, 2017

Archbishop Wood

Coach: John Mosco (fifth year)

Last year's record: 29-3

Key players: Sr. Tyree Pickron (G), Sr. Seth Pinkney (C), Sr. Karrington Wallace (F), Sr. Andrew Funk (G), Jr. Julius Phillips (F)

The season: Pickron, Pinkney, Wallace and Funk played key roles on Wood's 2016-17 league, district and state championship team. Phillips was also in the rotation. That's a lot of talent to bring back for one of the best high school teams in the country, so the expectations are the same: Win all three titles again.

Bensalem

Coach: Mike McCabe (third year)

Last year's record: 9-13

Key players: Sr. Ward Roberts (G), Sr. Taco Douglas (G), Sr. Keith Parrish (F), Sr. Kris Shields (F)

The season: Bensalem returns two of its top three scorers in Roberts and Douglas, as well as its two best forwards in Parrish and Shields. Look for the Owls to return to the district playoffs after narrowly missing the cut last year.

Bristol

Coach: Jerry Devine (first year)

Last year's record: 9-13

Key players: Sr. Samir Brisbon (G), Jr. Carter Kelley (G)

The season: The challenge for Bristol is replacing forward Ronnie Garrison, who carried the Warriors in the second half of last season. But with Brisbon and Kelley back, the Warriors at least have an experienced backcourt. If they can replace Garrison's production, they can make the district playoffs for the second straight year.

Conwell-Egan

Coach: Bryan Caver (first year)

Last year's record: 10-15

Key players: Sr. Patrick Robinson (G), Sr. Eric Esposito (G/F)

The season: Caver, Conwell-Egan's third coach in three years, was hired to build a program. As an AAU coach in Mercer County, he has extensive connection in one of Conwell-Egan's hottest recruiting zones, for students in general, not just students who play basketball. But in Caver's first season, the cupboard won't be bare. Robinson and Esposito are capable scorers with a lot of varsity experience in the Philadelphia Catholic League, the best league in Pennsylvania.

Council Rock North

Coach: Jesse Krasna (second year)

Last year's record: 9-13

Key players: Sr. Matt McAlister (G), Sr. Brady Haggerty (C)

The season: The 2016-17 Indians were not young, which was unfortunate, because they improved as the season continued, winning six of their last nine games after a 3-10 start. But five of Krasna's top six rotation players graduated, including the pick-and-roll tandem of Noah Ehlin and James Kosyla, which got the Indians moving on most possessions. "We don't have the most game experience," Krasna said. "But if we compete on every play, play intelligently and unselfishly, we will be satisfied with the results at the end."

Council Rock South

Coach: Derek Wright (second year)

Last year's record: 13-10

Key players: Sr. Christian Jabbar (G/F), Sr. Trey Irvin (G)

The season: Rock South accomplished a lot in Derek Wright's first season, winning 13 games, the second highest total in program history, and earning a home playoff game, the first in program history. But all five starters from that 2016-17 team are gone, including two all-league guards and two 6-foot-5 big men. Wright's teams always gang rebound, play suffocating defense and work the ball around for the perfect shot, but this team will need to find scorers to get back to the playoffs.

George School

Coach: Glen Curry (second year)

Last year's record: 4-14

Key players: Sr. Darrell Edwards (F), Sr. Asher Edwards (G), Sr. Max Malavsky (G), Jr. Masai Olowokere (F), Jr. Charlie Trey-Masters (G)

The season: Curry has an athletic, sharpshooting core that likes to play fast. If they play better defense and rebound better in 2017-18, they will improve on that 4-14 record. "A key for us will be consistent defensive intensity," Curry said.

Harry S. Truman

Coach: Byron Conover (third year)

Last year's record: 8-13

Key players: Sr. Jeff Nixon (G), Jr. Gabe Gipli (F), Jr. Javeer Peterson (F), Jr. Zierr Reid (G)

The season: Truman lost its top two scorers and a host of other contributors from last year's team, which went 6-3 in non-league play but just 2-10 against SOL National rivals. Nixon, a third-year starter, and Gipli, a second-year starter, will need to lead a team that, like last year's Tigers, has a lot of speed and athleticism but not much size. Truman last made the district playoffs in 2012, and, "There is enough firepower to make a run at a district playoff berth" in 2018, said coach Byron Conover.

Holy Ghost Prep

Coach: Tony Chapman (40th year)

Last year's record: 16-10

Key players: Sr. Jack Elliott (G/F)

The season: The Firebirds lost leading scorer Mike McFadden, floor general John McCrane and their best all-around player, Aidan Bauer, to graduation. Despite the losses, expect Ghost to again be a playoff team by season's end. Chapman can get the most out of any player and roster.

Morrisville

Coach: Orick Smith (ninth year)

Last year's record: 5-18

Key players: Sr. Isaiah McDavidson (G), Jr. Favian Lopez (G), Sr. Luis Colon (C), Jr. Felix Feliciano (F), Sr. Andrew Ortiz (G)

The season: Thirty-one students tried out for the Bulldogs and 21 remain in the program, great numbers for a Morrisville athletic program. McDavidson, Lopez and Ortiz could probably make the rotation for other Bicentennial Athletic League teams, too. For those reasons, Smith is “very excited about this season” and believes the Bulldogs will “play .500 or better basketball.”

Neshaminy

Coach: Mark Tingle (second year)

Last year’s record: 9-14

Key players: Sr. Chris Arcidiacono (G), Sr. Danny Bodine (C), Sr. Anthony Papeo (G), Sr. Charles Dominick (F)

The season: Arcidiacono is the best player in Lower Bucks, and if he stays healthy, Neshaminy will make the district playoffs again, which it did last year for the first time since 2011. Neshaminy may even get past the first round if Arcidiacono’s supporting cast steps up. Bodine, a 6-foot-8 center, could become the all-league sidekick that Zach Tredway was last year.

Pennsbury

Coach: Bill Coleman (eighth year)

Last year’s record: 16-10

Key players: Sr. Ray lil Winton-Law (G), Sr. Josh Arruda (G), Sr. Jake Martell (G), Jr. Gary Francis (F), Sr. Chad Weldon (F)

The season: Pennsbury is depending on upperclassmen with minimal varsity experience. Only Winton-Law and Francis played extended varsity minutes last year, and only Winton-Law stayed in the rotation through league play and the district playoffs.

William Tennent

Coach: Robert Mulville (11th year)

Last year’s record: 5-17

Key players: Sr. Markeith Baxter (G), Sr. Pat McCauley (G), Jr. David West (G)

The season: William Tennent returns its top two scorers from last year, McCauley and West, which is more firepower than most SOL Continental teams have back. So it’s reasonable to think the Panthers can at least improve on last year’s 1-11 league record.

Boys Basketball Top Fives

5 Players to Watch

Chris Arcidiacono, Neshaminy guard: Among Lower Bucks County players, only Archbishop Wood point guard Collin Gillespie, the Philadelphia Catholic League MVP and Villanova recruit, was better than Arcidiacono in 2016-17. In his breakout junior season, Arcidiacono filled four statistical categories (21.4 points per game, 4.8 rebounds, 3.2 assists, 2.2 steals), led Neshaminy to its first district playoff appearance in six years and received Division I scholarship offers from Eastern Kentucky and Rider. If he improves in 2017-18, he will have a Gillespie-like season to remember.

Andrew Funk, Archbishop Wood guard: Wood lost both starting guards, Gillespie and Keith Otto, from last year’s state title team, leaving Funk, a senior and third-year varsity player, as the most experienced one left on the roster. He does not necessarily have to be this year’s Gillespie for Wood to make another

championship run, but he does need to maintain Wood's breakneck pace, find open shooters and score enough to keep defenders away from those shooters.

Christian Jabbar, Council Rock South guard/forward: In a win over Neshaminy in January, Jabbar held Arcidiacono to a season-low 11 points. In an upset win over Pennsbury a couple weeks later, he led CR South with 15 points. If Jabbar can become a consistent two-way player, he can be the centerpiece South needs to return to the district playoffs.

Tyree Pickron, Archbishop Wood guard/forward: The muscular wing, who was already an elite high school scorer, became an elite three-point shooter, too, in 2016-17. He drilled 68 threes in 32 games, including five in Wood's state championship win over Meadville. With Gillespie gone, Pickron is the best returning player on a team with state title aspirations again in 2017-18.

Patrick Robinson, Conwell-Egan guard: He averaged 17.2 points per game in an inconsistent Eagles offense last year. He even dropped 42 points in a game, a school record for a Philadelphia Catholic League contest.

5 Teams to Watch *(In predicted order of strength)*

Archbishop Wood: In 2016-17, Wood won the first league, district and state titles in program history. The 2017-18 Vikings can't top that, unless they go undefeated, but they can match it. Five of Wood's eight rotation players are back, including All-PCL selections Tyree Pickron and Seth Pinkney.

Neshaminy: Chris Arcidiacono was the big story of the 2016-17 Neshaminy basketball season. But the other key development was new coach Mark Tingle, who implemented a rigorous conditioning program that positioned Neshaminy to close better, both in games and the season in general. With Arcidiacono, Tingle and other contributors back for 2017-18, and with Pennsbury and CR South rebuilding, Neshaminy is positioned to move up in the SOL National standings and finish above .500 for the first time since 2010-11.

Conwell-Egan: The Eagles never figured out an identity in 2016-17, though they did win a state tournament game. With their three leading scorers back, the Eagles can improve on last year's 10-15 record, when they lost eight of their last nine games. New coach Bryan Caver just needs to develop clear roles and a consistent rotation.

Pennsbury: The Falcons have been a mainstay atop the SOL National standings, finishing first or second in 11 of the last 14 years. This year may challenge that consistency. Pennsbury lost the core of its 2015-16 and 2016-17 teams after last season, including Division I recruit Mark Flagg (St. Francis) and All-SOL National point guard Addison Howard.

Bristol: Jerry Devine is Bristol's new coach, and he is ready to just coach basketball after his dramatic and well-publicized exit from Neshaminy two years ago. Devine led Neshaminy to three of the best seasons in program history from 2008-2011, which included a 58-26 record and two state tournament trips. His new challenge is restoring Bristol, his alma mater, back to prominence in Class 2A. The Warriors won district titles in 2014 and '15 but fell to 20-29 the last two years.

5 Games to Watch

Neshaminy at Abington, Tuesday, Jan. 3, 7 p.m.: This game features the SOL National's three best players in Arcidiacono and Abington standouts Eric Dixon and Robbie Heath. It also may feature the league's two best teams. Abington has won five straight SOL National titles, and Neshaminy looks like its biggest challenger in 2017-18.

Pennsbury at Neshaminy, Wednesday, Jan. 4, 7 p.m.: For Neshaminy to challenge Abington for the SOL National title, it must knock off the Falcons, who have finished second to the Ghosts for four straight years. Pennsbury is rebuilding, and Neshaminy returns the core of a district playoff team.

Archbishop Wood at Neumann-Goretti, Thursday, Jan. 26, 7 p.m.: Wood beat Neumann-Goretti twice in 2017, including for the PCL championship. For the Vikings to stay on top of the state's best league, they must again beat its premier program.

Conwell-Egan at Archbishop Wood, Saturday, Jan. 14, 2:30 p.m.: The only two PCL teams in Lower Bucks County meet for the only time this season. Conwell-Egan and Archbishop Wood combined for 153 points in their game last year. Both teams return a lot of firepower from those squads, so this game should be fast-paced and high-scoring.

Council Rock South at Council Rock North, Monday, Jan. 23, 5 p.m.: Both Council Rock teams lost most of their contributors from last year. But both CR coaches — South's Derek Wright and North's Jesse Krasna — can develop any roster into a cohesive, playoff-caliber unit by late January, meaning this rivalry game should have playoff implications.