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A special men's basketball preview section of the *College Heights Herald*

Fountain of Youth



Hilltoppers take the court this year with eight youngsters

BY TRAVIS MAYO
Herald reporter

The hair was wild — a baby afro — and the sweater was the usual Mom-made-me-wear-it kind. But Nate Williams says he was cute as a little kid.

Now, it would take a larger size sweater to fit the Raleigh, N.C., native.

He's 6-8, 240.

David Boyden had that innocent look in his youthful snapshot. His eyes were wide open. He was sporting his Sunday suit, with a curly afro sprouting on top.

"Probably drooping a bit," Boyden said.

Now, he's 6-8, 230.

Jimmy Boykin was graduating for the first time when his most memorable toddler picture was taken. From Head Start, that is, as a 3-year-old. Wearing that cardboard cap and paper gown everyone has probably donned at some point, the young Boykin had no front teeth. The picture is still sitting on his dresser, a reminder of how far he's come since those early days in Mississippi.

He says he takes a peek at it every night. Now, Boykin stands 6-6, 200.

Brian Allenspach used to wear the same outfit as his twin brother, except a different color. He'd always wear blue, while his brother sported red.

Now, he's 6-11, 245, and, oddly enough, wearing a lot of red.

The first three are freshmen, while Allenspach is a sophomore — he played at Davidson two years ago. But he and seven others are babies again.

Baby ballers, learning to walk in a toddler of a Topper program.

Baby steps for a true fountain of youth.

The journey

Maybe Ponce de Leon made a mistake, because there's so much youth trickling down Big Red Way and flooding into Diddle Arena that it could be a river. If you count freshman Mike Wells, who's sitting out this year to focus on class work, there are nine new faces emerging from the locker room. Eight pupils under Dennis Felton, the discoverer.

"I'm very happy and excited about where our program's at right now, because we've been able to go out and bring the kind of players in that I think we need to get to where we wanna be," the second-year coach said.

Guns that can flat-out play.

Williams, a McDonald's All-American coming off a 14-point, nine rebound senior season in Raleigh, Boyden, a forward, averaged a double-double two seasons ago at Hermitage High School in Virginia. Boykin, an All-American who had 178 points and 101 rebounds per game on his senior stat sheet.

Guard Raynardo Curry averaged 21 points, six assists and four steals last year at East High in Memphis. Todor Pandov and Filip Videnov, two Bulgarian natives who have athleticism exploding out of the gym doors. Three seasons ago Allenspach averaged 15 points and 10 boards as a prep star in Florida. And then there's Chris Marcus, a 7-1 and 285-pound sophomore who sat out last year to work on his academics.

See Youth, Page 8B

Inside

Meet the Hilltoppers

To find out who will be donning the Red and White for Western this year, check out the profiles of the team, complete with mug shots for easy identification at the games. There's also a schedule to keep up with the games.

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Herald Top 26

Herald reporter Travis Mayo ignores the Associated Press and USA Today/Coaches Polls and makes his own. Check out his picks for the season and snippets on his top 26 college basketball teams in the nation. That's right. Mayo's list has 26 teams. That makes it better.

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Hilltoppers predicted to finish fourth in Sun Belt

Denver added to conference schedule

By RYAN CLARK
Herald reporter

When asked what he thought of preseason polls, men's basketball coach Dennis Felton responded with a textbook answer.

"That picking stuff is just kind of comical to me," he said. "The Sun Belt Conference is as competitive as any league in the nation."

Comical or not, the Herald has compiled a preseason Sun Belt poll, based on the predictions of

six other publications: Street & Smith's College Basketball, Dick Vitale's College Basketball, Preview Magazine, Basketball News and Athlon Sports College Basketball. These are the average spots the nine Sun Belt teams are expected to finish:

1. LOUISIANA TECH (10-4 in the conference last year).

The La. Tech men's program, who won the regular season title last year, must be jealous of the women, who've won nine straight. These guys want some respect and they got it — all six publications have La. Tech number one. We're not going to argue.

2. NEW ORLEANS (5-9). Surprisingly, five publications picked New Orleans to place sec-

ond in the Sun Belt. Finishing just 5-9 in the conference a year ago (14-16 overall), the team returns four starters and hopes to make a run at the title.

3. ARKANSAS STATE (9-5).

They represented the Sun Belt in the NCAA Tournament last year, defeating Western in the title game. They've got two-time Sun Belt player of the year, Chico Fletcher. They've got a coach named Dickey Nutt. Everyone look out.

4. WESTERN KENTUCKY (7-7).

Backed by a stellar recruiting class, these Hilltoppers look to improve on last year's surprising conference record. Western looks to be the tallest team in the league by far, featuring 7'1" Chris Marcus and 6'11" Brian

Allenspach, but can these two towers put the ball in the hoop?

5. LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE (7-7).

The Ragin' Cajuns think that changing their name from SW Louisiana to Louisiana-Lafayette will make them a better team. We disagree.

6. FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL (7-7).

Like Western, Florida International adds eight new faces to its squad. The team will rely heavily on junior guard Carlos Arroyo and senior forward Darius Cook, both preseason all-conference selections.

7. SOUTH ALABAMA (6-8).

Plagued by graduation, South Alabama returns just four letterwinners from last year's team.

Three of those were starters, but the road will be very tough for the inexperienced squad.

8. ARKANSAS-LITTLE ROCK (5-9).

Preseason all-conference selection Alan Barksdale returns to lead Little Rock, but the senior guard can't score all the points. In a state with such competitive teams, Little Rock looks to be in trouble.

9. DENVER (first year in league).

Denver? In the Sun Belt? At least conference opponents can look forward to the plane ride. The hapless Pioneers will get their first taste of conference life this year, but don't expect much noise from them. Hey, the city still has the Broncos.

Western hopeful after last season's success

Young team wants March birthday party

By TRAVIS MAYO
Herald reporter

When the final whistle echoed through Bowling Green last February more than just a near-march had been witnessed. Western didn't just lose to Arkansas State in the Sun Belt Conference championship game, it picked up Red Towels again.

And they're still waving. It's a Hilltopper team that boasts a young approach to the game from athletes to coaches to the program. Ideally, this team wants to end 1999-2000 one way: by blowing out two candles on a birthday celebration — with the cake a conference tournament trophy.

Right smack dab in the most heralded dance sports has-to-offer.

The word around the Hill claims Western has the right type of party goers to samba into the promised land of college hoops. Eight new guys complemented by five coming back. Sounds like a relentless equation. But the math still has some figuring left.

The excitement and stuff is there, but then again we've got a lot of younger guys," sophomore center Chris Marcus said. "I'm pumped up and I'm ready for the season to get started. I'm ready to do some damage, just beat teams and win. But it's nothing that's going to come without hard work, and that's what we've been doing."

Practice has been full of lengthy running sprints that the Hilltoppers hope will allow them to utilize a deep bench. This team wants to pick up the game from a year ago and send players racing down the hardwood on both ends. It wants a defense that gets at opponents like a bunch of hungry wolves, and an offense that drops the basketball into the opposite net so quick it leaves opponents checking their faces because there's nothing else they can do.

And it has plenty of guards to complete the transition game.

Juniors Vashon McPherson and Khashon Brown lead the tandem, with four others pitching in. But don't tell Western coach Dennis Felton that one position has enough muscles to flex to call itself the strongest.

"I think we're strong in every position," he said. "I

think we have more than one or two guys that can play every position on the team. The quicker we can get all of these guys to understand what it takes to play at this level, the quicker we'll have that kind of depth we hope to have."

That's our vision for this team — that we can double or triple teams at every possession, that they're playing seven or eight guys and we're playing as many as 13. Just keep coming at 'em in waves of fresh players."

Towers down low

When Felton first climbed this Hill of a basketball program two years ago, he was sent to save a team without something big. Now, he has it. Marcus is 7-1 and sophomore Brian Allenspach is not too far behind at 6-11. Them just being on the floor rustles an immediate impact.

And the towering Toppers don't trail off after the centers. Big guards, big forwards, big plus.

There are only three players shorter than 6-4. It's an obvious switch, since last year's average height didn't even reach 6-4.

I think we know how to use our size too. Allenspach said, "But it's indescribable, how great it is because now we can go up against a team that has a 7-1 guy and we have somebody that can guard him. Size should definitely be our strength because even our guards are big."

It comes at a good time. Most Sun Belt teams have added the same ingredient to their rosters.

Toss in a whole arena full of newcomers. But that's typical for a league that's like the ideal balanced budget. Lady Justice should be the conference mascot, balancing two scales.

That makes cutting the cake seem a bit more unpredictable.

"When you're coming from the bottom like we are, it seems a little more retainable," Felton said. "Just like the other eight teams in the league, we want to dominate the league. There's no giant up there right now, where it seems like it's just impossible to knock them off their perch."

Just in front of Felton, in between his desk and sofa, is perched a reminder of what one birthday did to a team many had given up on. It's a Red Towel, protected by a season's five seniors. One Red Towel that still hasn't been dropped.

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Main Avenue - 783-7221
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An invitation to Dennis Felton

OK, Mr. Felton. You showed us a glimpse of what you can do last year. Now show us more.

After we watched the Hilltoppers on national television last year in the finals of the Sun Belt Conference tournament, we are a little intrigued as to what you can do to build on this.

I've been on the Hill four years and have never seen a winning season by a men's basketball team. The once proud tradition has been mired and, Mr. Felton, you were dubbed the "Fixer."

So far, we like what we see. This year's Hilltoppers have the look of a team that could produce that elusive winning season that we older Topper fans are salivating over just the hint of.

Lee Lampley leads the youngsters by example. Derek Robinson and Tremain Rowles had great seasons last year as freshmen and they are looking good in exhibition this season.

Last year's big downfall, a lack of height, has been solved by the gentle giant, Chris Marcus, and sophomore Brian Allenspach. Marcus was a swatting machine in the first exhibi-



ON THE BENCH
Scott Sisco

bition game, blocking three shots.

I interviewed Marcus last year and when I shook his hand, mine disappeared into the meathook that could swallow a basketball... before he throws it into the fourth row.

One of the big questions for you to answer, Mr. Felton, is how to draw fans to your games. How do you draw Kentucky Wildcat fans who pay tuition to come to Western Kentucky into the fold of Hilltopper faithful? I don't have an answer for you, but winning lots of games is a good start.

The Herald has picked your team to finish fourth in the

conference. I know you think these predictions are about as useful as a bathing suit in Alaska in December, but it gives you something to shoot for.

Prove us wrong. Finish first, win the tournament and go to the Big Dance. We don't care if you lose in the first round, the important thing is that Western is back in the NCAA where it belongs.

One last thing, Mr. Felton. We see you know how to dress pretty snazily. Your players follow suit and look very prim and proper in their suits after games.

But there is one thing that would complete those ensembles very well. It's a large ring with the words "Sun Belt Championship" engraved on it. The flash from the camera in the team picture would probably be too bright. The picture would be one bright white flash.

I'd like to have a framed copy to put on the Herald office wall, right next to the shot of Lampley hoisting the 2000 Sun Belt Conference tournament trophy high over his head.



Daniel Wallace/Herald

Junior guard Rashon Brown led Western in assists 19 times last season.

1999-2000 Hilltopper Roster

55 Brian Allenspach
A 6-11 sophomore center from Hickory, N.C.

43 David Boyden
A 6-8 freshman forward from Richmond, Va.

34 Jimmy Boykin
A 6-6 freshman forward from Jackson, Miss.

10 Rashon Brown
A 6-1 junior guard from Cleveland, Ohio

11 Raynardo Curry
A 6-0 freshman guard from Memphis, Tenn.

33 Lee Lampley
A 6-6 senior forward from Chicago, Ill.

2 Chris Marcus
A 7-1 sophomore center from Charlotte, N.C.

12 Nashon McPherson
A 6-4 junior guard from Jamaica, N.Y.

45 Todor Pandov
A 6-9 freshman forward from Plovdiv, Bulgaria

23 Derek Robinson
A 6-1 sophomore guard from Paris.

42 Tremain Rowles
A 6-4 sophomore guard from Landover Hills, Md.

1 Filip Videnov
A 6-4 freshman guard from Kozloduy, Bulgaria

30 Nate Williams
A 6-8 freshman forward from Raleigh, N.C.

The SunFit Club

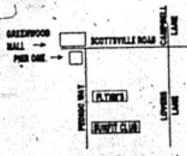
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Big men could be answer to Toppers low-post problems

Freshmen transfer offer size and skill

By Travis Williams
Herald reporter

Last year, the men's basketball team was abused by opposing teams' big men. This year the Hilltoppers look to return the favor.

Full on heart but low on height was the repeating factor in last year's 13-16 campaign. But a crop of five hungry and talented big men could prove to be the answer to the Toppers' low post problems.

"We won't be undermanned anymore, maybe now we won't have to pay for every little mistake," Coach Dennis Felton said. "We'll have more of a physical presence, we should even be at an advantage some nights."

Much of that advantage should come with sophomore Chris Marcus. To call him "a physical presence" might be an understatement. At 7-1, 285 pounds, fellow teammate and freshman forward David Boyden said, "That's a big boy, he's a space eater."

After sitting out his first year on the Hill to concentrate on classes, Marcus is ready to enter the world of college basketball. Knowing that, simply relying on his natural gift of height won't help the Toppers in the win column, Marcus put in work over the summer, developing his still growing game in areas the team desperately needs.

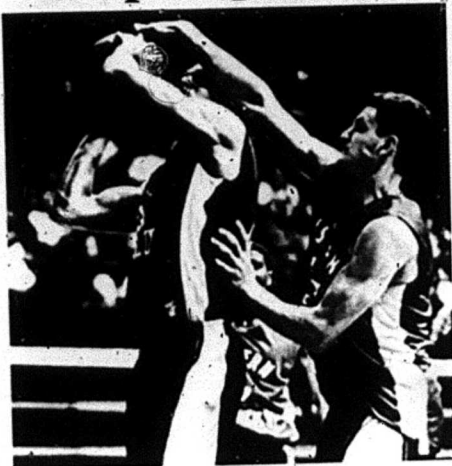
"I spent the summer working on my post moves with my back to the basket, getting stronger and getting in shape," Marcus said. "When the game time comes, I'll be ready to go all out."

Despite Marcus' large frame, he still has plenty of growing on another level. Having only one year of organized basketball experience, his potential ability could be off the hook.

"Everything, even the simplest thing is new to him because he's never been coached," Felton said. "He's one of our fastest developers, he improved right in front of you, you can see a change in an hour of work."

The only other person on campus who comes close to being eye-to-eye with Marcus is his teammate, sophomore center Brian Allenspach.

At 6-11 Allenspach, who sat out last year due to NCAA transfer rules, will help Marcus defend Felton's beloved paint area which was molested last year by opposing



Jonathan Kirshner/Herald

Freshman forward Todor Pandov, right, attempts to block freshman forward David Boyden from shooting during an intrasquad scrimmage.

teams. The strongest of the five, Felton believes Allenspach is probably the best post defender right now.

Allenspach and Marcus help make up an offense that will involve the post players more this year and give the guards more cushion on the perimeter on both sides of the court.

"I think we want to look in the post more this year, we're gonna be a lot more physical," Allenspach said. "But we've got some great guards too and any one of them can shoot it." (See McPherson, Brown, Robinson, Rowles)

Also adding depth and height to the team is a trio of freshmen with skills that put them in a class of their own.

Both coaches and players are anxious to see freshman Todor Pandov's first appearance as a Hilltopper. A 6-9 swing man, Pandov is originally from Plovdiv, Bulgaria. He played his prep school ball at Washington College Academy in eastern Tennessee. Pandov, like Marcus, is another player, with raw talent, but who still has much to learn from Felton and his basketball gurus.

"He's one of our most fun guys to work with," Felton said. "He learns something new everyday."

Pandov's learning started over the summer when he began preparing himself for college ball.

"I worked some on post game and dribbling," Pandov said.

Pandov has the size and ability to be the complete player to push the Toppers over the hump.

Coaches are also expecting contributions from 6-8 forwards David Boyden and Nate Williams. Both are hard workers and plan to add some excitement to Hilltopper basketball.

"We're gonna play together as a team, we got a whole lot of athleticism and that's what we're gonna bring to the table, that and hard work," Williams said. "We're gonna try to put Bowling Green back on the map."

As far as the up and down tempo expected this year, Williams and Boyden think they're pretty much ready for it.

"We're going to run, I don't know if we're gonna press a lot, but you gotta play that," Boyden said.

Boyden has a soft touch around the rim along with a consistent 15 to 18-foot jumper. Williams is the solid defender, who Felton calls a "warrior" on the court, that gives it all everyday.

The big men are a key ingredient for Felton to cook up an interesting season. The big men will debut in their first official home game of the season Nov. 23 against Evansville. The bandwagon is officially open for everyone who jumped off.

Good Luck Hilltoppers from the

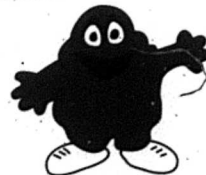
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Questions loom as Toppers begin season

- ◆ Will this young team with a lone senior capture the college game soon enough?
- ◆ Will the Hilltoppers use last year's near-NCAA run as a motivating force?
- ◆ Now that the team has size, can every player count on streaking down the floor in his natural position?
- ◆ Can nine new faces blend with those returning, in a baby of a program?
- ◆ Will Western use this as a building year, or will it teehee on the conference championship?
- ◆ Can everyone get into a groove with so much talent rotating?
- ◆ Will Western's hopes to quicken the pace pay off or cause commotion among itself?
- ◆ Is this the year junior guard Nashon McPherson explodes, or is there just too much talent for anyone to do that?
- ◆ Who will be the go-to players on the offensive end?
- ◆ Who will start? And for how long?
- ◆ Will the guard spot prove to be the strongest?
- ◆ Who will replace former Hilltopper Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's hectic hair?
- ◆ Will sophomore centers Brian Allenspach and Chris Marcus be able to rumble in the paint against a league that has upped its size everywhere?
- ◆ Will fans show up even during lulls, remembering that at the end last season, it was worth the wait?
- ◆ What suit will coach Dennis Felton sport Nov. 29 at Southern Illinois?

—By Travis Mayo

Cincinnati leading men's Top 25

By TRAVIS MAYO
Herald reporter

Hate 'em or love 'em, this bunch of rough Bearcats is once again highly touted. It's become an annual event — Cincinnati ranked in the preseason upper echelon. It lost guard Melvin Levett, but that's about it.

Welcome back, Kenyon Martin and Pete Miceal, two seniors who can dominate any time, any place. Proof: both were the leading scorers on the U.S. team that conquered the World University Games. Throw in freshman guard DerMarr Johnson, called possibly the school's best recruit since Oscar Robertson; freshman center B.J. Grove, another huge recruit; freshman guard Kenny Satterfield, who won back-to-back New York City and state titles as a high schooler; freshman guard Leonard Stokes, who beat out Satterfield for New York's Mr. Basketball.

Goodbye, Queen City 'Hello, Indianapolis.

1 Cincinnati. Donned in those black uniforms, the Bearcats' frontcourt are like diamonds wrapped in coal.

Martin and Miceal could claw coach Bob Huggins back into the Final Four, a place he hasn't been since 1992. Then there's a freshman class that has the ability to make the Ohio River flow backward.

2 Michigan State. Mateen Cleaves chose not to bag millions and stay in school for a reason: he wants the Spartans to go even farther than last year's Final Four feat. He's got a heck of a supporting cast to help him.

3 North Carolina. Who'd have thought the Tarheels would be regarded so highly after the Weber State debacle last March? But that first-ever first round loss in school history should be tossed to the back of the photo album if this team — led by senior guard Ed Cota — lives up to its potential. First, Cota has to return from an indefinite suspension.

4 Connecticut. The reason the defending champs aren't atop the mountain: Richard Hamilton. He leaped past a chance at repeat and into a pool of profit, but left behind a pack of Huskies that can still cause so much trouble. Junior guard Khalid El-Amin is simply the man in Hartford.

5 Auburn. Senior forward Chris Porter is another solid contributor to the growing popularity of JUCO transfers. The Tiger who defies everything, not just gravity, is back as the reigning Southeastern Conference Player of the Year. And the Tigers' talent doesn't drop there.

6 Florida. Forget about the pigskin posse that munches in "The Swamp." Billy Donovan's Gators hoops squad has sharp teeth, too. Only one senior fills the roster, just above what many think could be one memorable frosh class.

7 Temple. The Owls are without just one major player, guard Rasheed Brokenborough, from last year's Elite Eight team. Oh, and Kentuckian (former University Heights standout) Lamont Barnes is back. Coach John Chaney didn't think his frontcourt played like it should've last year, but shouldn't be worried a few months past.

8 Arizona. Throw former Wake Forest center Loren Woods' 7-1 into the mix and the Wildcats are poised to snap back into national championship contention. But sophomore forward Michael Wright, Arizona's leading returning scorer and rebounder, is the top snaggleteeth.

9 Ohio State. The Buckeyes have the best backcourt in all of America — including the mainland and all colonies. Scoonie Penn and Michael Redd are a duo for another Final Four slot, but the Buckeyes' depleted frontline's performance will tell the tale.

10 Duke. A lot of critics are counting the Blue Devils out because Elton Brand, William Avery and Corey Maggette ended Duke's early NBA immunity. But there's this one thing that might never swipe Duke from the hunt: it's still Duke.

11 Kansas. Roy Williams has gone 305-72 in 11 years at the helm, but last year's 23-10 finish was anything but Jayhawk jubilee. Junior center Eric Chenoweth had to battle inside alone a year ago, but that shouldn't be the case this time around.

12 Illinois. Without that Big Ten tournament run, many wouldn't even be thinking about the Illini that finished 14-18 in '98-99. But everyone's rushing to see how this team does after the trailer. It's a young team with the league's Freshman of the Year, guard Corey Bradford, coming back.

13 UCLA. A deep bench and deep history should keep

the Bruins from swimming in the deep end. Despite losing guard and star Barnes Davis to the NBA, Steve Lavin should have a solid group building toward rock-solid.

14 Kentucky. If senior center Jamaal Magloire can push and shove in the land of giants, and if the Wildcats can count on everyone pitching in, Kentucky could hush a lot of naysayers.

15 St. John's. What a backcourt in Eric Barkley and Boots Thornton, the Red Storm's two leading returning scorers who'll be complimented by senior forward Kavor Postell and sophomore forward Anthony Glover. Many are hyped about Glover, who sat out last season because of academic struggles.

16 Tennessee. The whispers about this roundball team clad in orange leading into last season quickly became mere gossip, as Tennessee dropped some games early. And even though the Vols ended it by getting drummed 81-51 in the second round of the NCAA tournament. But balance could turn gossip into fact.

17 Utah. Odds are Rick Majerus will still be living in a hotel room when this season wraps up. And odds are his Utes will be rattling around the madness in March. Senior forward Jamno Mottola has to be the one to keep 'em running.

18 Syracuse. Jim Boeheim coached the Orangemen to their 21st 20-win season in his 23 years there. Connecticut coach Jim Calhoun says Syracuse is the team to watch in the Big East. But it's going to take more than compliments to knock Boeheim off the list of best college coaches to never wipe a national championship.

19 Fresno State. Despite a thin frontcourt, the Bulldogs have standout senior guard Courtney Alexander on their side. Coach Jerry Tarkanian would like to be chewing his towel in the NCAA tournament, instead of its sideshow, the NIT. But the loss of Chris Herren obviously hurts.

20 DePaul. The class that everybody was jabbering about last season now has a little more substance, especially 6-6 sophomore guard/forward Quentin Richardson. He kept his feet in Blue Demon land because he wants to make DePaul a national power.

21 Texas. Junior center Chris Mihm nailed down 19 dou-

ble-doubles in 1998-99. The 7-footer's 13.7 points and 11 boards an outing should make second-year coach Rick Barnes raise the Longhorns. The thing is, senior forward Gabe Muoneke brings back a 16.5 points average.

22 Maryland. Gone is Steve Francis, who spent just one year in Terrapin threads. Now, junior forward Terence Morris has to be consistent to stack up against ACC competition.

23 Wake Forest. The ACC could be wide open, and the Demon Deacons are part of the jumble. It's a team with nearly everybody returning from a 17-14 year that some thought should've been granted an NCAA berth.

24 Miami (Fla.). Forward Tim James will definitely be hard to replace — he did average 18.7 points, 8.2 rebounds and 2.1 blocked shots, and shared the Big East Player of the Year honors with Connecticut's Richard Hamilton. But the Hurricanes could surprise some people.

25 Louisville. The Cardinals have quite a bit of talent, especially if the two Nipponis are cleared to hit the hardwood. Much could depend on when aprior guard

Marques Maybin decides to show up.

26 SUNY-Albany. Okay, so this team has absolutely no chance in hell of doing anything. Most pick them close to last of all 318 Division I programs. But I felt sorry for them — their home court in Albany, N.Y., is called the Recreation and Convocation Center, for Pete's sake.

All-America Team

First Team

Chris Porter, Auburn forward
Terence Morris, Maryland forward
Kenyon Martin, Cincinnati center
Courtney Alexander, Fresno State G
Mateen Cleaves, Mich. State guard

Second Team

Shane Battista, Duke forward
Pete Miceal, Cincinnati forward
Chris Mihm, Texas center
Quentin Richardson, DePaul G/F
Scoonie Penn, Ohio State guard
Third Team
Jamno Mottola, Utah forward
Morris Peterson, Mich. State forward
Amin Jones, Georgia Tech center
Michael Redd, Ohio State guard
Eric Barkley, St. John's guard

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Managers key to team's success

By CHRIS YEO
Herald reporter

When you watch the Hilltoppers basketball team this season, take a look at the bench during a timeout. Look at the guys who don't have to duck when they walk into the bathroom stall, the ones who aren't in uniforms that are scurrying around the bench making sure coaches have markers and boards to outline plays on and the players have water and towels. Then scan the stands for the guy with the video camera who is waiting for play to resume. These are the men behind Western's hoop dreams, the managers.

The men's basketball team employs five full-time managers who provide a wide array of services to the team. At this week-end game the managers could be found hurrying around Diddle Arena two hours before the game doing whatever it took to prepare uniforms in lockers, preparing the visitors' and officials' dressing rooms, checking that the batteries in the camcorder are charged, getting all the necessary equipment on the floor and

doing anything else that the coaches or players needed.

After the game the managers stick around for another two hours cleaning up and preparing for tomorrow's practice.

"It is not unusual for us to be doing laundry at 1 a.m.," sophomore Bryan Masters said. "That's part of it."

So why do they do it? Yeah it looks good on a resume, yeah the young men make contacts for the future, but the resounding reason for going through the long and sometimes humbling duties of a college basketball manager is the relationships.

Western's managers are not the picked on and insulted Bobby Bouchers of Division I basketball. They're part of the team, a team which considers itself a family.

To me, relationships mean a lot, people mean a lot," sophomore Paul Gibson said. "We're fortunate to be in a relationship with guys on the team that are thoughtful enough to know what we go through."

Like sophomore center Brian Allenspach, who offered to do the team's laundry in an effort to light-

en the burden on the managers.

The bond between manager and player doesn't end after the last jersey has been picked up off the locker room floor. A couple of weeks ago, Allenspach and freshman forward Todor Pandov went with Masters and Gibson and some friends to the movies and then bowling, Gibson said.

"Our relationship goes beyond the court," Allenspach said. "We've developed a friendship."

For those of you thinking this sounds like a pretty good gig don't forget, the Hilltopper managers put in a full year.

"It goes beyond the season of basketball, it's a 12 month a year thing," Masters said.

Like the players, the managers' responsibilities to the team do not end with spring exams. They continue to work with the coaches recruiting for the next season, doing work in their offices or working with the summer camps. "It takes a special person to do what we're doing," junior head student manager J.T. Henderson explained. "There's not a lot of recognition. You gotta love the guys you're working for and with."

YOUTH: New faces fill roster spots

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

The fountain runneth over. Quietly, Felton and company swayed high schooler, after high schooler to the Hill. And before he knew it, he had what's been labeled the nation's 26th-best recruiting class. Dick Vitale picked the crew as the Sun Belt Conference's top newcomers.

And when they finally hit the Hill, they became soldiers vying for spots with the veterans — practice the heated battlefield.

"You know everybody can play," Boyden said. "There's no one on this team that doesn't have the ability to come in and start any night. So you definitely have to come to practice ready for war. It's time to get down once we get in between the lines."

That's because Felton didn't know who would fill what spot when that first practice was looming. He couldn't answer all the questions about who would start, or how much playing time the toddlers would snag. He wanted to leave it up to who clawed for rebounds the hardest, who pushed themselves up and down the floor the most, and who proved that the college arena could be his domain. It was wide open.

"It definitely raised the competition level," senior forward Lee Lamprey said. "Last year, we didn't have as many players that were able to do

what they can do. We've got some height this year, we have some guards who can play. It definitely does raise the competition level."

Youthful veterans

It's easy to see that this team is young from top to bottom, because Lamprey's the lone senior.

Those returning are young veterans.

On the side, they're teachers, using the court as their classroom. The pupils? The same ones they call teammates. So why would a senior, two juniors and two sophomores help a bunch of greenies to the game? Because the sooner everyone knows the X's and O's, the sooner the Hilltoppers win.

That's why sophomore guard Derek Robinson answers questions like a quiz show. He believes the youth will make the entire ensemble closer, on and off the court.

And when it gels, the real fun begins.

"I think about it every day," Robinson said. "I see different sports channels and I see different teams, how they won the championship, and in different interviews they ask players what it's taken. And they say it's taken a lot of teamwork and a lot of commitment, and everybody has to play their role. This team is a lot to look for-

ward to. We just have to come out here and work hard, knowing that you're going to be somewhere, someday, and that hard work's going to pay off."

But don't drink the water ... yet.

It's not clear enough yet. It hasn't been filtered enough. It's not basketball-purified. Right now, the fountain is spitting out river water, its Hilltoppers wanting well water.

The nursery, Diddle Arena, is the raising ground, the most serious playground. Recess is all business. Running. Drills. Running. Learning. Running.

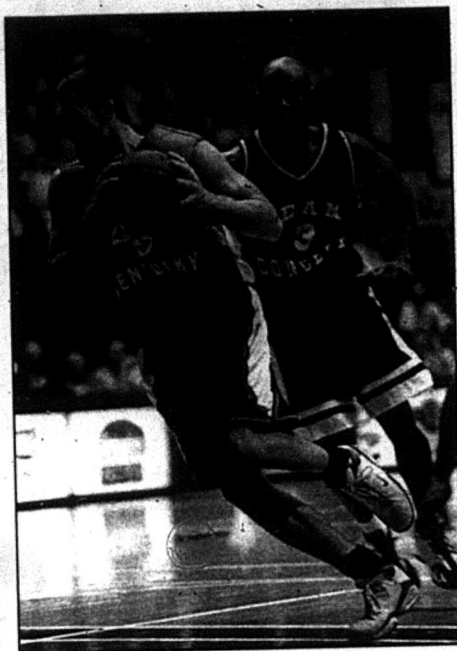
While the youngsters are anxious to tackle their biggest game, they're also willing to wait for those microphones and those questions. It can only make the moment sweeter.

"Greatness never happens overnight," Felton said. "It really doesn't. There are some teams that do get out of the gate fast and have success, but still not reach greatness. It takes time, it always takes time."

"That doesn't mean we're going to stand around and have the attitude that it's going to happen. We have to make it happen with how we approach things every day."

When the hours finish ticking, when it happens, then the discovering reels off dividends.

And the fountain runneth over.



Daniel Wallace/Herald
Freshman guard Filip Videnov drives to the basket during Sunday's exhibition game against Team Concept in Diddle Arena.

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