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Central Washington University Women's Basketball Press Release

Central Washington University Athletics

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Central women's basketball team opens season Nov. 11 against Simon Fraser

ELLENBURG — With all five starters back and a talented recruiting class, Central Washington University women's basketball team has high hopes for the 1999-2000 season.

CWU, which finished with a 12-15 record and qualified for the PacWest playoffs last season, will begin its season next Thursday (Nov. 11) at Burnaby, B.C. with an exhibition game against Simon Fraser.

"In the last couple of years we've gone out and got quality recruits," third-year coach Jeff Whitney said.

Whitney hopes three straight solid recruiting classes will begin to pay dividends this winter. "This year you're going to see an improvement on both ends of the floor," Whitney said.

The achilles-heel that bothered the Wildcats last season, lack of height and injuries, could continue to hurt the team at the start of the season.

Back-up center Jennifer Niemi (So., Yakima-Eisenhower) is still recovering from off-season foot surgery, Aimee Sorenson (Jr., Kittitas) is using her redshirt year and Shannon Hoyt (Sr., Enumclaw) quit the team, that leaves Rose Shaw (So., Bellevue-Interlake) as the only healthy post-player going into the Wildcats opener.

Last season, Shaw averaged 12.0 points and 6.0 rebounds.

"Niemie will probably be back after the first 3-4 games," Whitney said. "We're going to miss Shannon's athleticism on the court."

Playing in only 12 games last season, Hoyt was second on the team with 11 blocked shots.

To make-up for the lack of height in the post, Whitney plans on shooting the three-point shot and playing up-tempo style of offense.

"If we have to use five quick guards on the court to give Rose a short breather, that's what we'll do," Whitney said. "Right now I would have to say that three point shot is our best offensive threat. "We have a number of girls who can step-out and shoot the three-ball."

The Wildcats finished seventh in the country in three pointers made at 7.0 per game last season.

Jaime Johnston (Sr., Castle Rock-Lower Columbia CC) finished 31st in the country in three pointers made a game at 2.4.

"The good thing about Jaime is that she can step outside and hit the three, or she play down low and bang bodies for us," Whitney said.

Back to lead the offense is two-year starter Kristen Willis (Jr., Kennewick - Kamiakin). Willis averaged 11.4 points, 3.9 assists, 5.4 rebounds and 2.48 steals last season, including three games with at least ten points and ten rebounds.

"Kristen is one of the top guards in our league," Whitney said.
Expected to start alongside Willis in the backcourt is Tiffany Darling (So., Fife). Darling averaged 7.6 points last season. "Tiffany is probably one of the most improved players from spring ball to now," Whitney said. "She put in the time during the off-season, I think you're going to see a different player this year."

Joining Willis and Darling at the guard position to perhaps give the Wildcats its deepest backcourt in a number of years will be Becki Matzen (Sr., Oak Harbor), Cherae Walker (Jr., Stanwood) and Linsey Heebink (So., Nine Mile Falls – Lakeside) plus newcomers Carrie Waddell (Jr., Nine Mile Falls – Eastern Washington University) and Meggan Kautsky (Fr., Richland).

Matzen, a three-year letterwinner, was second on the team in three pointers made last season with 42. "With this being Becky's fourth year in the program, she brings experience to the team," Whitney said.

Waddell, a high school teammate of Heebink at Lakeside, played two seasons at NCAA Division I Eastern Washington University. She can play either point guard or on the wing. "Carrie has good hands and is an extremely fine passer," Whitney said. "She sees the floor very well and fits nicely into our team structure."

Waddell played in 47 games for EWU, starting 27, including 21 in her freshman season when she averaged 2.2 assists per game. Kautsky averaged 10 points a game her senior year at Richland and was a three-time all-conference player. "Meggan is very athletic and her quickness will help our up-tempo game," Whitney said. "She also applies great ball pressure and has the ability to put the ball on the floor."

After playing in only nine games last season due to torn cartilage her knee, Jenny Dixon (So., Blaine) returns to the Wildcat line-up. "Having Jenny back at the three-spot is huge for us," Whitney said. "She adds the spark to our line-up that we didn't have last year."

Following the exhibition game against Simor Fraser, CWU will take part in the Seattle Pacific Falcon Tip-Off Classic Nov. 19-20.