

Grizz boys look to make a late move

Coach's directive is to keep improving and peak at the end

By Bruce Smith
Matchup

Copper Hills High School opened in Aug. 1995. In that short span – less than 20 years – the boys basketball team has built a proud tradition.

The team won its first region title just two years after that. In 1999-2000 came the Grizzlies' first state championship.

Two years ago, coach Kent Smith directed a talented squad to a third-place finish in region, but Copper Hills reached the 5A semifinals. The Grizzlies seemed to surprise everyone, except perhaps themselves.

"They've reached two Final Fours," said Smith. "There is a basketball tradition here. In fact, it's probably one of the most successful sports so far here at the school."

The Grizzlies look for it to continue.

Certainly, 2008-09 was a special year. However, the key was that team peaked at the end. Last season, after losing most of its best players from the year before, Copper Hills started slowly and finished 11-12, but again reached state and thrilled its fans with a home-court win in a play-in game.

The Grizzlies followed Smith's directive. Learn early, make adjustments, improve



Bryson Allen is one of several Copper Hills players with size on its front line.

and peak at the end.

"It will be interesting to see how people fit in," Smith said. "The preseason (non-region games) is where you find out a lot about your team."

Again, Copper Hills lost

a lot of its top players to graduation, but the cupboard certainly isn't bare. Eight seniors dot this year's roster. There are players with shooting

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LEFT: Cameron Sanchez MIDDLE: Dustin Graham RIGHT: Dylan Carter

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ability and even some size. Smith's biggest concern is toughening up the team enough so it can handle the pressure Region 3 games will likely bring.

"Everything is about making the state tournament and getting ready," he said. "We have a lot of basketball skill, but need to show it when it counts."

Unlike last year, the 2011-12 team has shown it can play tougher defense, led by seniors Dylan Carter, Dustin Graham, Tyler Lazenby and Bryson Allen.

"This year's team is very versatile," Smith said. "I have multiple players who can play several positions."

And, as expected, defense has been the team's strong suit. Halfway through the season, the Grizz had held several opponents to 50 points or less, although many were not 5A teams.

On offense, Carter was the team's top returning scorer (6.4 points per game in 2010-11) and he and Lazenby have emerged as go-to players this season. Carter is Copper Hills' primary outside-shooting threat.

As Smith noted, the Grizzlies are also versatile. Allen and Graham have had big games and were scoring near double figures. The team's bench strength has also allowed players to rest and help avoid injuries.

Best of all, the team's free-throw percentage should be much better. Shooting from the free-throw line was a problem last season, but

this year's club aims to improve in that area, which could come in handy in close games.

Now comes to the integral part of the season. Smith said the region schedule will be more difficult. Copper Hills remained in Region 3, but many of its opponents changed. The new region will include rival West Jordan (a state title contender this season), as well as Alta, Brighton, Jordan and Cottonwood.

Four teams from this region will advance to the state tournament, meaning two of the schools mentioned above won't make it. This season, the postseason will be held at the Maverik Center in West Valley City.


Smith admitted that there is no guarantee Copper Hills will make it. However, the Grizzlies have already built some confidence and, if they follow their usual pattern, they'll be in the race and look to make a push near the end.

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