

Trip to State Tournament highlights 17-8 season

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Thursday, 20 March 2014 00:00 -



The Wauneta-Palisade girls basketball team has four seniors this year. Pictured below are Abbie Fanning (14) and Cassidy Rathe (20) and above Brooklyn Nordhausen (23) and Tailor Lee (15). (Diane Stamm | The Wauneta Breeze)



By Diane Stamm

The Wauneta Breeze

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Strong leadership from four seniors powered the Wauneta-Palisade Lady Broncos back to the State Basketball Tournament at the end of the 2013-14 season.

The Broncos returned four starters from last year's 18-7 team and finished this season at 17-9.

Coach Betsy Johanson said the four were leaders on and off the court and did what was asked of them.

A three-year starter, Lee was the Broncos' presence in the middle, leading the team with an average 12.7 points per game and 8.5 rebounds. A co-captain, Johanson said Lee continually improved. "Taylor fought for rebounds in every contest, and she developed some hard-to-stop post moves that were a huge asset to our team."

Fanning was a four-year starter for the Broncos and was voted by her teammates co-captain with Lee. Johanson said Fanning embraced the role, always giving 100 percent effort and leading by her example.

"Abbie played great defense. We often asked her to defend the other team's best player and she was never intimidated by that," said Johanson.

Fanning led the team in steals and assists and averaged just under four rebounds per game.

Another three-year starter, Nordhausen complimented Lee on the inside.

"She always did a great job of playing help side defense, plugging up the lane. Brooklyn was a great teammate and did a special job of helping out the younger players," said Johanson.

Rathe stepped up to the challenge of playing new positions for her team as a senior.

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Johanson said “We needed Cassidy to play a wing, even though she usually played a forward position, and she did a great job. She would play a guard, a forward, and a center all in one game, and consistently gave her best effort at it. Cassidy is strong, and did a solid job of getting rebounds, too.”

Juniors Brianna Einspahr and Sydnee Harchelroad gave the Broncos a 1-2 punch from the arc as the pair saw their roles expand from last season.

“Both Sydnee and Brianna had the ability to knock down huge three-point shots when we really needed them. They were such a consistent threat from the outside that a lot of our inside game was opened up,” Johanson said, adding that with Fanning missing several games, Einspahr and Harchelroad each had a chance to step out of their comfort zones and show other skills.

Einspahr was second on the team in rebounding and third in scoring. Harchelroad was second on the team in scoring and assists, while averaging nearly four rebounds a contest.

Fellow junior Nicole Strand came off the bench and racked up valuable minutes for the Broncos, providing rebound and scoring in the post.

“Nicole improved a ton from November to March. She gained a lot of confidence in herself, and provided her team some really valuable minutes on the inside. Nicole is a really smart player, and in turn, makes smart plays. She did a good job off the bench, scoring the buckets she needed to get for her team.”

Hannah Nordhausen and Leiauna Alberts were also juniors who came off the bench for WP.

H. Nordhausen played a variety of positions for the Broncos and Alberts saw action as a guard.

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Strand, Alberts and H. Nordhausen led a JV squad that won 10 games this season. Other team members included Ellie Lee, Cameo Rector, Tryssta Duvel, Melany Morales, Miranda Behrends, CeAnna Brewer and Kian Jones.

Johanson said team members “got lots of playing time, and improved a lot throughout the season. They were great teammates, too, and any success that happened in varsity games was due to competition in practices.”

According to Johanson the team spent the season focusing on effort and attitude, emphasizing process over product.

“We asked the team to think only about doing all the little things, and then letting the big things happen,” she said.

The Broncos started the season with a 1-4 start, with losses coming against bigger schools Brady, Cambridge, Southern Valley and Dundy County-Stratton. Of the teams’ eight losses four came against C2’s Southern Valley and DCS.

“Our season really opens up against tough competition in large schools. The team should be commended on keeping a great attitude throughout that tough spot. We turned around and went 8-2 in January and 6-2 in February, winning seven in a row up through the conference tournament, and then played very confidently through district competition. Our loss in the State Tournament to Falls City Sacred Heart was the only D-2 loss we had all season.”

As the season wore on and the schedule became more favorable, the wins started adding up, thanks impart to the Broncos improving defense. Johanson said her team also became more patient and “got on the same page offensively.”

Following the rough start the Broncos went 10-1 and headed to the state tournament winning six of its last nine.

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WP finished the season ranked ninth by the Omaha World Herald and tenth by the Lincoln Journal Star.