

Young lady cager squad shows promise

By TODD A. MOUNTFORD
Collegian Sports Writer

The women's basketball team is ready to begin what Head Coach Rene Portland calls a rebuilding year after graduation claimed some key players from last year's 23-7 squad.

The Lady Lions finished 15th in last season's Associated Press Coaches Poll and recorded big victories over national powers Rutgers, Washington and North Carolina State before falling to Mississippi in the second round of the NCAA tournament.

This season, Penn State will face four teams that finished in last year's Top 20, including Louisiana Tech (third), Rutgers (fifth), Virginia (11th) and James Madison (12th). But in order to have success against these teams and gain their fourth straight 20-win season, the Lady Lions will have to fill the shoes of graduated 6-2 forward Vicki Link, three-point specialist Lisa Faloon, front court backup Vanessa Paynter and shooting forward Laura Hughes.

Link led her teammates in both scoring (18.4 points per game) and rebounding (10.1) and was Penn State's most accurate shooter. Faloon, who contributed 16.5 points per game, nailed a team-high 34 three-point shots for a 548 percentage.

Portland said that she has had to change a few things to accommodate all the young players on this year's squad.

"We're really going to simplify things," said Portland, who is entering her eighth year at the Penn State helm. "It's going to be fundamental. It's going to be a team that has to be very, very intelligent."

The returning seniors are All-American point guard Suzie McConnell and 6-3 center Bethany Collins. Both players should contribute enough experience to help offset a very young Penn State team that has three rookies, one redshirt freshman and four sophomores in its 11-player roster.

McConnell pumped in 13.9 points and grabbed 4.7 rebounds per game last year while dishing out a nation-leading 11.8 assists. This season, however, the 5-3 McConnell will be expected to complement her outstanding passing skills and knack for picking opponent's pockets with an effective offensive punch.

"She has been told we are going to need more scoring from her this year," Portland said. "This year we have adjusted our fast break to give her the option to continue to the bucket. If she reads a mismatch of numbers, Suzie will not stay in the point position. She will get herself into a scoring position. As she goes, we go."

McConnell, who played for the U.S. team at the Pre-Olympic Invitational in Seoul, South Korea last summer, said that a scoring role should not change her run-and-gun style.

"Whatever I can do to put more points on the board, that's what I'm going to do," the Pittsburgh native said. "I like to run, and hopefully we'll be able to run this year, but I'll definitely be looking to score more."

Collins was not a scoring machine at center last year, averaging 9.5 points and 4.6 rebounds per contest. Her role was that of a dominant inside player — creating steals, blocking shots and using her size to keep opponents out of the paint. But shoulder and back problems limited her playing time in previous years and could be factors in her performance this year.

"I have to rebuild. Right now I haven't reached my potential," said Collins, a Stony Creek, Ct. native. "I've missed an awful lot when the preseason began because I had another operation on the shoulder and the week after that I came down with pneumonia."

"But I'm really looking forward to the season. It's my senior year and I want to go out with the best season I've ever had here."

The lone junior this year is 6-0 forward Lisa Lambert. She saw some time as a front court reserve last year and is a frontrunner for a starting spot.

Sophomore Tiffany Chill and redshirt freshman Debbie Harrison are also in the running for a starting spot at forward.

The 6-0 Chill became a starter in the second half of 1987 and averaged 3.3 points and 2.2 rebounds per game while the 6-3 Harrison sat out with knee problems. Harrison averaged 20.6 points and 13.1 rebounds in high school and could add depth to Penn State's power game.

Sophomores Shelly Caplinger, who had 12 starting assignments a year ago and Liz Henson, a State College Intermediate High School graduate, will battle for the other starting guard spot opposite McConnell.

Caplinger combines outside shooting and good passing ability in the back court, while Henson, as a walk-on last year, appeared in 10 games.

Adrie DeVries, a 6-4 sophomore,



Head Coach Rene Portland, above, will be counting on Bethany Collins, one of just two seniors on the Penn State squad, for leadership this season.



'... we have to move at a pace that's correct for this age group.'

—Rene Portland

will share time with Collins at center. She appeared in 25 games as a rookie and contributed 2.8 points and 1.9 rebounds per game.

"Adrie is the return of the quick center," Portland said of the Louisville, Ky. native. "She's the kid you're going to have to keep your

eyes on. Adrie is similar to Vicki (Link) in a lot of ways — very agile, very offensive oriented. I don't see her as a forward, I see her being more effective inside."

DeVries, however, said she never considered herself to be a center. "I've always thought I was a for-

ward," she said. "I grew half an inch last year so maybe that will make the difference at center. I just want to get a lot of playing time and I hope to play well. We'll probably try a lot of combinations."

Those combinations may include using the rookies more often to get

them playing experience, while giving the starters a rest. But judging from the talent of the newcomers, some may compete for a starting spot.

The rookies include 6-0 forward Stefeni Thomas, who was a USA TODAY two-year honorable mention All-American; 5-9 guard Terri Williams, who was all-state and all-Eastern Regional in her senior year; and 5-7 guard Tanya Garner, who averaged 29.9 points and 10.1 rebounds during her senior season.

"We certainly have very high goals and very high expectations," Portland said, "but we have to move at a pace that's correct for this age group."

The Lady Lions open their season in Hawaii at the United Airlines Rainbow-Wahine Tournament hosted by the University of Hawaii. Penn State will play Oklahoma Nov. 27 in the first game of the three-day tournament.



Suzie McConnell

1987 schedule					
Date	Time	Opponent	Date	Time	Opponent
Nov. 27	4:30	Oklahoma at Hawaii	Jan. 28	5:05	at Duquesne
Nov. 28	tba	at Hawaii	Jan. 30	1:30	at West Virginia
Nov. 29	tba	at Hawaii	Feb. 4	7:00	at St. Joseph's
Dec. 5	8:00	at Pittsburgh	Feb. 8	7:45	West Virginia
Dec. 8	7:45	Syracuse	Feb. 12	7:45	Louisiana Tech
Dec. 11	6:00	Virginia	Feb. 13	3:30	Massachusetts
Dec. 19	7:45	Texas Tech	Feb. 15	7:45	Rhode Island
Jan. 3	2:00	Western Kentucky	Feb. 18	7:00	at Temple
Jan. 7	6:00	St. Joseph's	Feb. 20	2:00	at George Washington
Jan. 9	2:00	at Rhode Island	Feb. 24	7:30	at Maryland
Jan. 14	7:45	Temple	Feb. 26	7:30	at James Madison
Jan. 16	6:00	George Washington	Feb. 28	2:00	St. Bonaventure
Jan. 18	7:30	at Rutgers	Mar. 3	7:45	Duquesne
Jan. 23	5:30	at St. Bonaventure	Mar. 5	7:45	Rutgers
			Mar. 7-12	tba	Atlantic 10 Tournament



Tiffany Chill

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