

BC3 women's basketball team means business with "mean" business

Freshman's persistence in paint to pay off in points, teammates say

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(Butler, PA) Mackenzie Craig's scrappiness could galvanize a freshmen-heavy Butler County Community College women's basketball program fighting to replace its first All-American and preparing to defend its two consecutive and only Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference championships, fellow forward Carly Burdett said.

Craig "is very strong and tough," said Burdett, one of eight freshmen who inherit a BC3 squad without Julia Baxter, the program's only 1,000-point scorer and its first National Junior College Athletic Association All-American.

Coach Dick Hartung said Craig, a 5-foot-10 Karns City High graduate, is "mean" in the paint.

The meanest woman on the court?

"I think so," Craig said with a laugh. "I would say it definitely comes from aggression. I am very competitive. I think coming from Karns City, that makes more competitive players."

"I will do anything I can to win"

Craig and Karns City teammate Alyssa Gibson last year became the school's only two girls basketball players to have won four straight District 9 championships.

"I want to win, and I will do anything I can to win," said Craig, who for a Karns City squad that in 2016-17 finished 19-6 averaged a team-leading 7.8 rebounds and a second-best 14.6 points per game. "I started out pretty weak underneath the basket and not being really strong. In my senior year I realized I needed to man up and become that kind of mean in order to win."



Mackenzie Craig, left, of Karns City, and Carly Burdett, of Knoch, are 5-foot-10 forwards on the Butler County Community College women's basketball team.

Added Burdett, a 5-10 Knoch High graduate: “If you go up for a rebound with her, she is definitely going to win it. She doesn’t let anybody else get the ball.”

Craig and Burdett will join point guard Lydia Roth, the squad’s only sophomore, in the starting lineup, Hartung said.

Roth, who started in 16 of the 23 games in which she played in 2016-17, said Craig “is going to be a force underneath the basket. She is going to be a lot like Baxter last year. She just doesn’t stop. Even if it doesn’t go in the first time, you know it is eventually going to go in.”



Lydia Roth, of Butler, left, a 5-foot-2 sophomore guard on the Butler County Community College women’s basketball team, “understands how good you have to be to play against the women we play against,” said coach Dick Hartung, right.

Craig “just like Baxter, but just not as big”

Baxter, a 5-11 forward from Butler Area High, ended her BC3 career with 1,070 points. In 2016-17, she guided the Pioneers to a 16-9 finish; ranked third in the NJCAA’s Division III with 16.9 rebounds per game; fourth with 75 blocks; sixth with 25.3 points per game; and 12th with a 55 percent shooting average from the field.

“Julia Baxters don’t come along every year,” Hartung said, “but Craig is not bad. She is tough around the basket. She is just like Baxter, but just not as big. She has a good touch and likes to mix it up.”

While Craig’s leadership may hinge on tenacity, Roth’s may depend on serenity.

Roth played a season-high 37 minutes in the NJCAA Division III Region XX semifinals, in which BC3’s seven-game winning streak, and year, ended with a 62-57 loss to Prince George’s at Rockville, Md.

“In that game there was a lot of pressure,” said Roth, of Butler. “I learned a lot. I learned to just stay calm. I think last year the (other) team would get in my head a little bit. I think I have learned to become more of a leader.”

Roth “very confident at the point”

Roth averaged 6.1 points and 2.3 rebounds per game, and finished with 55 assists and 22 steals while playing with the likes of Christina Davis, Saydie Moore, Kalynn Callihan and Baxter. She

scored seven points, grabbed seven rebounds and had two assists as BC3's only freshman starter and its ballhandler against Prince George's.

"She understands how good you have to be to play against the women we play against," Hartung said. "Her strength is her dependability. You know she is going to be there and get after it. She will take care of the ball and help her teammates out on defense."

Burdett said she noticed that Roth is "very confident at the point. She can get to the hoop very easily. She can create a lot of plays for everybody."

That would include Burdett, whom Hartung called the "the best player" on a 2016-17 Knoch High team.

"She can get to the basket," Hartung said. "She has a good first step. The scoring inside will come from Craig and Burdett."

Confidence, said Craig – and teamwork, Burdett added – will be key for a BC3 team that may ultimately battle Westmoreland County Community College again for the WPCCC title – as it has in beating the Wolfpack the past two years.

Persistence in the paint won't hurt, either, Burdett said.

"I hope Mackenzie's meanness on the court rubs off on us," Burdett said. "That will motivate us to keep going and try our best. And everyone can get a little mean."

Joining Roth, Craig and Burdett on BC3's roster are guards Madeline Schnur, from St. Joseph High, Natrona Heights; Caitlyn Mueller, First Baptist Christian School, Butler; Kelly Kriely and Brooke Dingel, of Butler High; Darienne Yates, Slippery Rock High; and Amara Dorcy, of Butler.