

On a run: BC3 women's basketball squad may turn team speed into scores

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Members of the 2019-20 Butler County Community College women's basketball team are, top row, from left, Alexis Barnhart, Katelyn Gavinski, Nicole Hartman and Jenna Heitzenrater. Bottom row, from left, Casey Kretzer, Michaella Roth, Skye Wessel and coach Dick Hartung. Missing from photo, Carrie Dingel and Elizabeth Stokes.

(Butler, PA) Thirty minutes into their final preseason practice, players on the Butler County Community College women's basketball team sprint 94 feet from a baseline at the west end of BC3's Field House toward the other, behind which hangs a blue pennant updated to add 2019 to the years in which the program has won Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference championships.

A quick turn, and 94 feet back again.

Among those racing end-to-end are Casey Kretzer, the Pioneers' leader with 80 successful 3-pointers in a 2018-19 season capped with the WPCCC title-game victory over the top-seeded University of Pittsburgh at Titusville.

“We’re going to move pretty fast,” Kretzer said. “We gained a lot of speed this year.”

Added Jenna Heitzenrater, the Pioneers’ 2018-19 leader with 45 blocked shots: “We have a lot of fast players.”

“I think we have a little bit more speed,” coach Dick Hartung said.

The Pioneers, Hartung added, have the potential to be better than a 2018-19 squad that won its third WPCC crown in four years behind top scorers and rebounders Mackenzie Craig and Carly Burdett.

“I don’t think we have a 30-point scorer,” said Hartung, whose team finished 9-13 in 2018-19, “but I think we have four or five players who can score in double digits.”

Craig, a forward from Karns City who became the program’s second National Junior College Athletic Association Division III All-American, led the Pioneers with averages of 24.4 points and 19.6 rebounds. She finished as the program’s all-time leading scorer with 1,277 points and rebounder with 966.

Burdett, forward from Knoch, added 17 points per game; Kretzer, 16; and Heitzenrater, 4.3.

“This year Heitzenrater will be a scorer,” Hartung said. “If we can get eight to 10 points out of her, we will be really happy, and she can do that.”

Heitzenrater, a 5-foot-10 forward and Slippery Rock High graduate, said she is ready to become more of a force on offense.

“Last year I just kind of sat back and let the older players who had more experience work,” Heitzenrater said. “But this year I am going to try to step it up.”

As will Kretzer, who made 32.4 percent of her 3-point attempts. Her 80 successful 3-pointers ranked fifth among players on all 97 NJCAA Division III women’s basketball squads.

“She can shoot the ball,” Hartung said of Kretzer. “This whole team is built around her. She has to shoot the ball, not turn it over, give people the ball. She will lead this team.”

Opponents familiar with Kretzer will focus on the 5-1 point guard from Knoch at the beginning of games, said Michaella Roth, a 5-5 freshman from Slippery Rock who will start at shooting guard.

“That is going to open up things for me a lot,” Roth said. “I think I will be able to do a lot in those first two minutes of the game. Then they will realize they can’t guard two people who both have ball-handling skills and who can shoot.”

Roth is “the fastest player on the team,” said Skye Wessel, a 5-8 freshman from Seneca Valley who will start at small forward. “When she gets going, she is gone all the way down to the other side of the court. So that is going to lead to her making layups, and she is pretty good at that.

“This year (Hartung) said we are faster. We have more people who can run up and down the court.”

Alexis Barnhart, a 5-9 freshman from Butler, will start at power forward.

The Pioneers’ roster also includes Carrie Dingel, a 5-8 freshman forward from Butler; Elizabeth Stokes, a 5-3 freshman guard from Pine-Richland; Katelyn Gavinski, a 5-6 freshman guard from First Baptist; and Nicole Hartman, a 6-0 freshman forward from First Baptist.

“We’re definitely fast on offense,” Hartman said. “We’re coming together on defense. We have a lot of quick plays, a lot of quick dishes in from out of bounds. We’re going to be quick. So it is going to be harder for the opposing team to keep up with us.”

The Pioneers’ home opener is at 5 p.m. Nov. 13 against Mercyhurst North East, Northeast, Pa., following road games against Penn State-Greater Allegheny, McKeesport; Penn State-DuBois; and Potomac State, Keyser, W.Va.