

Records in peril as “dangerous” Craig, BC3 women’s basketball squad poised for comeback season

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Members of the 2018-19 Butler County Community College women’s basketball team are, top row, from left, Carly Burdett, Mackenzie Craig, Brooke Dingel and Amara Dorcy. Bottom row, from left, Jenna Heitzenrater, Casey Kretzer, Kelly Kriley and coach Dick Hartung. Missing from photos, Linda Lee and Emma Cubarney.

(Butler, PA) The Butler County Community College women’s basketball team seeks its third Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference crown in four years behind the return of its top two players, including a Karns City High graduate chasing the 50-year-old program’s all-time scoring and rebounding records.

Mackenzie Craig scored 765 points and grabbed 554 rebounds for a Pioneers team that in 2017-18 finished 5-19 after capturing consecutive WPCC titles.

The 5-foot-10 sophomore forward is 306 points and 127 rebounds shy of breaking records held by Julia Baxter, a Butler High graduate who scored 1,070 points and grabbed 680 boards from 2015-17 en route to becoming the program's first National Junior College Athletic Association Division III All-American.

Craig's average of 31.9 points in 2017-18 was 5.4 more than any other player among the NJCAA's three divisions, and her 23.1 rebounds, 7 more.

"Craig," coach Dick Hartung said, "is a competitor."

Craig, sophomore forward Carly Burdett said, is "aggressive."

"Amazing," added sophomore guard Amara Dorcy.

But not "into" statistics that show she is on the cusp of BC3 legendary, Craig said of herself.

"I am not into anything like that," Craig said. "I don't pay attention to that. It's not important to me. I just want to win."

"I am relentless"

BC3 seeks its first winning season since 2016-17 -- when it finished 16-9 and captured the second of two consecutive and the program's only WPCC titles -- behind the return of Craig, and Burdett, who averaged team second-bests in points with 15.6 and rebounds with 9.2.

The Pioneers added freshman guard Casey Kretzer, who averaged 10 points and four assists in 2017-18 for Knoch High; and freshman forward Jenna Heitzenrater, who last year had 178 rebounds, 47 steals and 27 assists for Slippery Rock High and who at 5-foot-11 is the Pioneers' tallest player.

Heitzenrater will diversify a BC3 offense that in 2017-18 saw Craig and Burdett account for 72 percent of the Pioneers' scoring, Hartung said.

"I am hoping we can all work well together and move the ball around and see the opportunities inside and outside now that we have the threats," Heitzenrater said.

Burdett will score from the outside, Hartung said, and Heitzenrater, from the inside.

"It will be tougher this year for teams to stop Craig because she has a better supporting cast," Hartung said. "Craig is going to score a ton. Craig is at the end of everything. Everything is centered around Craig. It funnels right into Craig. And even when people miss, Craig puts it back in."

She had 184 offensive rebounds and 370 defensive in 2017-18.

“I definitely think that I am relentless,” Craig said. “I don’t stop until I get what I want. If I want the ball, I am going to get the ball. That is just my goal, to work hard. If I want it, I am going to get it.”

Pioneers can be “really good”

Craig’s 23.1 rebounds per game were higher than that of Pamela Bethel, a sophomore forward who averaged 14.6 and led Division I with Eastern Wyoming College, Torrington, Wyo.; and that of Antishay Rahim, a sophomore forward who averaged 16.1 and led Division II with Columbus State Community College, Columbus, Ohio.

Her 31.9 points per game were higher than that of Jade Thurman, a sophomore guard who averaged 23.3 and led Division I with Kilgore College, Kilgore, Texas; and that of Lori Wardynski, a sophomore guard who averaged 26.5 and led Division II with Gogebic Community College, Ironwood, Mich.

All while facing double coverage that began midway through her freshman season.

“Not even just double-teaming,” Craig said. “There were times when it was triple-teaming.”

She also blocked 47 shots and was second in the NJCAA’s Division III by making 215 free throws in 269 attempts.

“What really makes her dangerous is that she can make foul shots,” Hartung said. “She is dangerous. Don’t foul her. And she is a contact player. So she is going to the foul line.”

The Pioneers, Kretzer said, have the potential to be “really good.”

“We have some height,” she said. “We are fast. We have shooters.”

And Craig.

“If she stays healthy,” said Hartung, who has no reason to believe otherwise, “she will break records.”

The Pioneers open their 25-game regular season with a nonconference matchup at Penn State-Greater Allegheny at 6 p.m. Friday. BC3 begins WPCC play by hosting the Community College of Beaver County at noon Jan. 5. BC3 visits Westmoreland County Community College, the defending WPCC champion, at 5 p.m. Jan. 16.

The Pioneers' roster includes Kelly Kriley, a 5-3 sophomore guard and Butler High graduate; Brooke Dingel, a 5-5 sophomore guard from Butler; Linda Lee a 5-6 freshman guard from Mars; and Emma Cubarney, a 5-8 freshman guard from Lincoln Park.