

Jayhawks have young team for new season

LAWRENCE — No one claims Bill Self is so nervous he’s chewing nails.

But the Kansas coach did chip a tooth on a ball point pen last month, while contemplating a season with five freshmen and six sophomores.

The chip was only tiny, though. “They got me fixed up real quick,” Self said with a grin.

And while “young” would be an understatement for Self’s third Kansas team, the roster is also laden with promise.

There’ll be the inevitable growing pains, times when these baby Jayhawks make the 16,000 crowded into refurbished Allen Fieldhouse stop cheering and begin to groan.

But if Self’s timetable runs true, they could be ready to crash the Big 12’s upper reaches before the trees along the banks of the winding Kansas River start leafing out next spring.

“It’s a team the coaching staff has to remain patient with because, we’re not going to be as good in November as we are in February,”

said Self. “On the flip side, I think the early season games put pressure on the guys and give them a sense of urgency.”

Gone are point guard Aaron Miles and his nearly 1,000 career assists, shooting guard Keith Langford, super sub Michael Lee — and Wayne Simien, All-American, Big 12 player of the year and first-round NBA draft choice.

That group was 23-7 last year and tied Oklahoma for the Big 12 title before bowing to Bucknell in an epic first-round NCAA upset.

Their departures will hurt. But one subtraction that might turn out to be a plus for the Jayhawks is the transfer of J.R. Giddens. Knifed in an offseason fight outside a Lawrence bar, the talented, troubled and inconsistent shooting guard left for New Mexico, freeing Self to give his full concentration to his freshman class.

Even those few upperclassmen who are still left have been wowed by the athletic gifts and playmaking abilities of Micah Downs, 6-8, Julian Wright, 6-8, Brandon Rush,

6-6, and Mario Chalmers, 6-1.

Downs, Wright and Chalmers were McDonald’s All-Americans. Rush — younger brother of the Charlotte Bobcats’ Kareem Rush — probably would have been, but he attended a prep school and was not eligible.

Rodrick Stewart, a 6-3 shooting guard who transferred from Southern Cal and sat out last season, had no idea the stable would be so crowded with gifted newcomers.

“Man, the sky’s the limit for all four of them,” said Stewart, who becomes eligible at the end of the first semester. “They’re going to be great players, all four of them. They’re all great athletes.”

One day in practice, Wright made a 360-degree slam dunk that left everyone slack-jawed.

Downs, cowering around one afternoon, swished three straight baskets while seated in a chair just outside the 3-point stripe.

“I don’t think I’ll bring a chair out there,” he said jokingly. “I might be too easy to guard.”

So much talent — but so many egos. Can coaches keep everybody happy?

“There’s not a guy being re-

cruited into the Big 12 that probably wasn’t the No. 1 guy on their high school team,” Self said. “If playing time is the sole thing that keeps them happy, then we could have some problems.”

No matter how Self distributes minutes among his freshmen, sophomores C.J. Giles and Sasha Kaun are almost certain to be in the starting lineup.

“If you were to ask our guys to rate our players one through 14, the majority of them would put C.J. and Sasha one and two,” Self said. “They’re our most improved guys from last year.”

The 6-foot-10 Giles, who reported at 218 pounds last year following a bout with food poisoning, is up to 245.

“Their bodies look great. They’re stronger, they’re more athletic, they like contact and they’ve both improved their ability to score,” Self said.

Also new will be the look and feel of Allen Fieldhouse. The limestone walls were scrubbed down, the inside was given a fresh coat of paint and a new scoreboard was put up.

Colby Tipoff Classic starts tonight

The Colby Community College Trojan mens basketball team will take part in the college’s Men’s Tipoff Classic tonight and Saturday at the Colby Community Building.

Friday’s games will feature Eastern Wyoming against the All Stars at 6 p.m. tonight followed by the Colby Trojans against the Bethel

College junior varsity at 8 p.m.

Saturday’s games will be at 2 and 4 p.m. Bethel College junior varsity will play Eastern Wyoming at 2 p.m. and Colby will play the All Stars at 4 p.m.

The public is invited to come watch the Trojans kick off the 2005-2006 basketball season.

SportsLine

Winter sports practice to start

Practices for Colby High School wrestling and basketball will begin on Monday at the high school.

Middle school basketball on Monday

Colby Middle School seventh grade A/B teams will play at Burlington at 4:30 p.m. while the eighth grade teams will play at home at the elementary gym at 4:30 p.m.

Basketball on Tuesday

The Colby Middle School seventh grade basketball teams will play at home on Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. against Goodland at the elementary gym. The eighth grade teams will play on the road at Goodland at 4:30 p.m.

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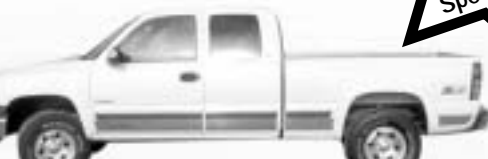
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