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Maqic News

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Cheerleading Program 'Breath Of Fresh Air' Under Yanko

Mirikitani, Albrecht, Karl, Lessmann, Knierim - to name just a few. Now, add one more name to the long list of St. Louis Comm. College - Meramec coaches that have made a major impact to their program - **Sandy Yanko**. The cheerleading coach has made an enormous difference since her arrival four years ago.

"Sandy's been a breath of fresh air in terms of taking the program to a new level," said Manager of Athletics Bob Bottger. "Numbers are up, the execution of the squad is much better, and the level of pride has increased."

Not only have numbers been up since her arrival in the fall of 2004, but quality squads have been Yanko's trademark and this year's edition is no different. Among their many honors, five cheerleaders have recently been selected for a tryout to serve as instructors at the Universal Cheerleading Association summer camp.

Krista Brunkhorst (Mehlville), **Marissa Burkemper** (Mehlville), **Lindsay Ward** (Seckman), **Natalie Struckhoff** (Hillsboro), and **Nicole Basile** (Heidelberg, Germany) will get the chance on Jan. 5 to show their skills. Struckhoff says Coach Yanko has been crucial to that success.

"In high school they just kind of let us run ourselves - here, coach has a little bit tighter grip on things, she knows what she wants to get done, she's a good coach," said Struckhoff. "It's a lot more time. In high school you don't have to go to practice that much. Once games start, you really don't practice. But now, we do a lot more halftime routines than my squad ever did. I like it a lot."

The involvement and pride in their school has been a key to the cheerleaders' motivation. All have previously cheered at their high schools, and loved the sport so much they weren't ready to give it up at age 18.

"I wanted to stay close to home and actually Marissa (Burkemper) and I didn't even know there was a cheerleading squad until the first two weeks here and then we tried out," said Krista Brunkhorst (Mehlville.) "It made me very happy. I love cheering - it's a big part of my life and to be able to cheer for a college is exciting."

Also exciting has been the success brought by Yanko's tutelage. Her teams have won several trophies at the Universal Cheerleading summer camp at Missouri State University in past years, including the coveted Leadership Award. The Magic rabs also won first place at the downtown St. Louis St. Patrick's Day Parade in 2006.

"It's hectic getting ready for it but at the same time it's fun to just be out there and see all the people on the side of the street watching you," said Burkemper. "Last year we won a trophy and that was really exciting. It was a very cold morning but we all had turtlenecks on and we all just tried to make the best of it. We did a really good routine and I think that got us our trophy."

The "we" aspect of cheerleading is important to Yanko, who is marking a quarter century this year as a coach, following stints at St. John's High and Mary Institute-Country Day. Just like the other teams Meramec, she must take a diverse group of students from various schools and quickly form a new unit

"The challenge is molding a team that's coming from all over the state, from all different schools of discipline and coaching, molding them all together into our discipline, our program, and our level of coaching and advancing them and preparing them for the four year school where they go on, hopefully getting scholarship funds," said Yanko.

That goal has been reached more than once. **Samantha Moleski** has moved on to St. Louis University where she has received a scholarship as a cheerleader. And **Jenna Slyman** moved to Lindenwood, received a cheering scholarship, and has been in national competitions in Dallas. And, even at Meramec, each of the 16 young ladies on the squad receive a partial scholarship.

"A lot of the kids here at the college have to pay for their own schooling so it helps them to be able to have the time to do the sport," said Yanko. "Whether it be just paying for books, I'm able to give them something and that's been very nice."

But, like all good things, Yanko's tenure will be coming to an end this spring when she hangs up the poms and retires as a coach. She is proud of what she has accomplished in a relatively short period of time at Meramec.

"Our kids are coming from all over the state as far as Licking, Missouri, and even from Heidelberg, Germany - we've got them from all over coming to Meramec," said Yanko. "They see all the stuff on the web and the program that we have and they talk to the kids here at the school. I'm excited about what we have going on with the 16 kids on the team."

Likewise, the cheerleaders are grateful to be able to continue on in the sport they've grown up with and love so much.

"I was 'most school spirit' in high school and so I love it that much more that I was able to continue it instead of being done with cheerleading after my senior year," said Burkemper. "I was thinking that because I went to a junior college I wasn't going to be able to cheer for people but I am, and I'm very glad."

Other squad members are: **Arielle Doria** (Lutheran South), **Allison Kuelker** (Lutheran South), captain **Mindy Lamberty** (Mehlville), captain **Casey Lowry** (Pacific), **Amber McAllister** (Rockwood Summit), **Leslie Rehagen** (DuBourg), **Miranda Ridenhour** (Licking, MO), **Christina Salama** (Mehlville), **Heather White** (Hazelwood Central), **Brittany Wright** (Affton), and **Mindee Zervas** (Seckman.) The volunteer assistant coach is **Nathan Kitchens**.

Grapplers Prep For 'Mini-Nationals' At N. Iowa Jan. 12-13

It's not the NJCAA National Tournament, but it's the closest thing to it. That's what the Magic wrestling team will experience when they head to Iowa for the National Duals at the University of Northern Iowa Jan. 12-13.

The series of dual meets features the best eight teams in the country, including nationally second ranked Meramec and is a preview of the national tourney showcasing many of the same individual match ups.

"Right out of the chute, our second dual we're probably going to dual Labette. They're ranked right behind us for second," said volunteer assistant coach **David Mirikitani**. "We're going to dual a team probably ranked sixth or seventh in the country the first round - that's our easy round!"

Anything but easy at Northern Iowa will be fourth ranked Colby, Kansas, also a perennial national mat power. The weekend will take away a lot of the mystery and anxiety when these grapplers butt heads at nationals in Rochester, Minn. Feb. 22-23.

"These four dual meets that we got, it's going to be people that we wrestle at the tournament so they get to see us, we get to see them," said **Donald Woods**, a 157 lb. undefeated state champ his senior season at McCluer North. "They'll be scouting to see how to stop us when we get to the national meet so at every dual meet, every person will have to get their moves down and see what you have to do to beat that opponent."

The Magic have eight wrestlers out of ten weight classes ranked nationally, with four of them either first or second in their respective weight class. Mizzou transfer **Dirk Hurrin** (VA) is ranked first at 174 pounds, while **Deron Winn** (Liberty, MO) is second at 184 pounds. **Aaron Senzee** (Kearney, MO) is second at 141 pounds, and **Jamell Jones** (Dover, DE) is second at 197 pounds.

Also in the national polls are Meramec's returning All-Americans - **Ryan Sutton** (Oakville), ranked third at 285 pounds, and **Kyle Foley** (Oakville), ranked seventh at 149 pounds. Rounding out the poll is freshman **Miles Bolin** (Ft. Zumwalt West) who is ranked seventh at 125 pounds, and **Donald Woods**, ranked sixth at 157 pounds.

Later in the month local fans will be treated to their solo home meet of the year, the Meramec Duals Jan. 25-26.

Men's Basketball Squad Heads To Florida; Eyes Tough January

Sporting a strong first half of the season 10-4 record, the Magic men's basketball team will head to the Sunshine State Jan. 4-7 for a series of games against extremely tough competition. The Magic will face W. Palm Beach, Miami-Dade, and Broward in a four day span. In their only previous meeting, W. Palm Beach defeated Meramec in 2006.

The going doesn't get any easier upon their return. Their first game back will be hosting arch-rival Penn Valley (tenth ranked) of Kansas City on Fr., Jan. 11. That game will be crucial to Region XVI Tournament seeding.

Other Region XVI opponents during the month include home contests against North Central on Jan. 19, and Forest Park on Jan. 30.

The Magic have been successful with a combination of their defense, ranked third in the nation in fewest points allowed per game (59), and some strong play from center **Bill Brandenburg** (Kirkwood), who leads the team in points per game average (13.6) and rebounds (7.3.)

Among the nation's stats leaders is forward **Stan Crawford** (Hazelwood Central) who is knocking down three point shots at a 46% clip. Guard **Jake Prosser** (Francis Howell North) is hitting 41% of his three's.

The "dish" leader has been guard **Alonzo Wrickerson** (Webster Groves) who has been averaging nearly four assists a game. "I don't really look to score much, I just try to get my team into it," said Wrickerson. "Assists have been my thing since high school so if I get my assists I'm fine with that."

Women's Hoops Team Regroups For Season Stretch Run

The St. Louis Comm. College - Meramec women's basketball team ran into a buzz saw at the Illinois Central Tournament Dec. 28-30, dropping a trio of games and their season record to 6-10. The Magic had to face ninth ranked Illinois Central and twelfth ranked Owens College. The team suffered from a depleted roster of just eight players following the eligibility loss of four players.

However, the players that will battle down the stretch are quality hoopsters. Sophomore **Michelle Senf** (Mehlville) had 28 points and 10 rebounds in a 78-65 loss to Cincinnati State Dec. 30. Senf is averaging just over 11 points a game, as is freshman guard **Capri Savage** (Orofino, ID). Savage has also been a strong three point threat, nailing over 46% of her deep shots on the year.

Sophomore guard **Jonica Booth** (Ft. Zumwalt S.) has also been a major factor in games - she scored 28 points in a 75-65 upset of Mineral Area Dec. 17. Center **Cynthia Abernathy** (Timberland) is averaging nearly five rebounds a game and seven and a half points.

The squad has added on forward **Jessica Steinmann** (Mehlville) to add depth.

They'll try to regroup Saturday, Jan. 5 in a home contest against Region XVI foe Cottey College in a 3:00 tip off.

Holiday Festival Tourney Enjoys 30th Year With Thrilling Title Battle

The St. Louis Comm. College - Meramec high school boys Holiday Festival Tournament, now in its thirtieth year, unfolded from Dec. 22-29. The tournament has become the prestige showcase of the finest St. Louis area teams and talent. This year was no exception.

Of the 16 teams in the tourney, St. Charles West edged Webster Groves 55-54 in a thrilling championship battle that went down to the final seconds. St. Charles West guard **Kramer Soderberg** hit two free throws with 40 seconds left to break up a tie score and propel his team to victory. Soderberg had 30 of his team's 55 points.

It was St. Charles West first Meramec Tourney title, and the first defeat of the season for a tough Webster Groves squad.

Soderberg was a shoo-in for the All-Tournament team, along with teammates **Brian Maurer** and **Alex Bazzell**. Also All-Tourney was **Will Bruin** (DeSmet), **Craig Bals** (Troy), **Max Artis** (Kirkwood), **Courtney Belger** (U. City), **Tyler Griffey** (Lafayette), **Drew Hanlen** (Webster Groves), **Zach Redel** (Webster Groves), and **Mike Whittier** (Webster Groves.)