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MAGIC News

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Men's Basketball Roars Into Region XVI Title Game Mar. 6

The men's basketball team have become road warriors, and at the right time. The Magic (21-10) have won their last six road games and head into the Region XVI championship game Thursday, Mar. 6 at 7:00 at Westminster College in Fulton, MO. They'll take on perennial nemesis Penn Valley of Kansas City in a tournament the Magic have dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Kirkwood tragedy and to recovering **Mayor Michael Swoboda**.

Meramec had a tough time putting away Forest Park in the Region XVI semi-final Saturday, Mar. 1. Despite holding an 11 point halftime lead (37-26), the Highlanders refused to give up, drawing to within a bucket at 57-55 with nine minutes to play. The determined Magic then went on a 13-1 run to put away the victory, winning 75-61.

Sophomore center **Bill Brandenburg** (Kirkwood), an All-Conference and All-Region first team selection, had 25 points and 10 rebounds. The double-double feat was his ninth of the season. **Stan Crawford** (Hazelwood Central), also an All-Conference and All-Region pick, had 10 points. **Eddie White** (Parkway West) also had 10 points. **Alonzo Wrickerson** (Webster Groves) dished off seven assists.

The win marked the 650th career win by head coach **Randy Albrecht**, including his three seasons as head coach at St. Louis University, and his 31 seasons at Meramec.

Against Penn Valley, the Magic dropped a triple overtime decision at home, 95-92 on Jan. 11. But, Meramec bounced back to beat the Scouts on their floor 67-60 Feb. 15. The rubber match on Mar. 6 could be another classic battle,

"You just have to put a hand in their shooter's face, you can't let them get open looks because they will knock it down," said sophomore guard **Jake Prosser** (Francis Howell North), an All-Region first team honoree.

The tenth ranked Penn Valley team is 24-7 and will have Meramec's full attention. Both teams have gotten an in-depth look at each other.

"They got some good shooters and they defend well and they're a good team," said Crawford. "Edriss Floyd, he's the best three point shooter we've played this year. We've got to guard him real well."

In the middle, the Magic will look to Brandenburg and sophomore center/forward **Clay Zerr** (St. Charles) for solid rebounding. Forward **Josh Dale** (Affton) has also pulled down some critical rebounds. Off the

bench, guard **Brandon Crites** (Hallsville) has been a catalyst with both scoring and rebounding, as has **Drew Moore** (Northwest.)

"We should have beaten them the first time we met, we made a lot of mistakes," said Brandenburg. "I think we are better now, I think we do have a bit of an edge on them. If we just play good and confidently we'll be fine."

Likewise, coach Albrecht has the title game measured in a simple formula.

"Our hallmark all year has been defense and rebounding," said Albrecht. "Usually for us to win against good competition we have to do two of three things: ball handling can't break down where we have 20 turnovers, free throw and three point shooting can't go real bad. I think if we do two of those three decently then we got a great chance."

Baseball Team Looks For Success With Strong Returning Cast

Several returning players in key positions will form the foundation for the baseball team in the new season according to sixth year head coach **Tony Dattoli**. Among the top returners are pitcher **Jake Morgan** (Mehlville), shortstop **Jon Myers** (Ft. Zumwalt S.) who was recently named by the NJCAA as a pre-season All-American, and third baseman **Jon Wilson** (St. Charles.)

The Magic opened the new campaign in Tennessee Feb. 29-Mar. 1 with a pair of doubleheader defeats to Dyersburg State. They'll return to action Tuesday, Mar. 4 in Belleville taking on Southwestern Illinois in a 1:00 doubleheader. Then, they'll head out to warmer climates again, making a Texas swing the weekend of Mar. 7-9 before finishing up in Shreveport, Louisiana on Mar. 10.

Meramec also returns outfielder **Jon Moran** (Vianney) who saw much action a year ago in left field and showed a spectacular glove. His strong arm will see him in right field this season. "His numbers don't indicate what a catalyst he was down the stretch for us last year," said coach Dattoli.

Morgan, a lefthander, will be the ace of the mound staff after a strong '07 season where he was 6-4 with a 3.76 ERA. "His ability is tremendous. He throws three pitches for strikes," said Dattoli. Morgan has proven himself as an intensely fierce competitor and a battler.

Jason Nicholas (Warrenton) will be the number two starter behind Morgan. Nicholas, a power pitcher, sat out the entire '07 season recovering from Tommy John surgery on his throwing elbow, but is healed and ready to throw.

"It feels really good, really strong, ready to get going," said Nicholas, also a lefthander. "It's definitely back, throwing back up there pretty hard."

In fact, the top three starters are all lefties, and are part of seven total lefthanders on the pitching staff. The third starter is **B.J. Gregg**, a lefty, from Mehlville. **Kevin Mahler** (Mehlville) will be the fourth starter as well as play some outfield and DH. Another key returner is long relief pitcher **Cory Cowsert** (Pacific).

Behind the plate will be freshman receiver **Dylan Mooney** (Francis Howell Central). He'll be backed up by **Monty Cooper** (Sullivan), **Brady Cunningham** (Fulton) and **Pat McCoy** (Blue Springs.)

The infield will be anchored by much experience with Wilson at third. Wilson hit .331 his freshman year with 26 RBI's. Myers will hold down short while hopefully matching or surpassing his .373 average, four home runs, and 26 RBI's of '07. And sophomore **Larry Von Dracek** (Hazelwood West) will play second and also return a solid bat that produced a .333 average in '07.

In the bullpen, **Scott Reese** (DuBourg) will be called in to close the door in late innings. Reese is a dominating righthander with wicked breaking stuff.

“He’s a side winding righthander who possesses a slider that’s impressive to watch,” said Dattoli. “He’s one of those guys that every team wants to have at least one sidewinder on the staff. He’ll be a nice addition to the staff.”

Hall Of Famer McQueen Leads Hard Working Softball Squad

Making the transition to a new head coach is sure a lot easier when the new head coach is a hall-of-famer. That’s the case for the softball Magic, who are led by **Linda McQueen**, a 2007 inductee into the Magic Hall Of Fame for her achievements as a player at Meramec in years past.

McQueen, considered one of the area’s top high school coaches at Lutheran South, has told her squad that the sky is the limit for the new season.

“I told them that they can do pretty much whatever they put their mind to,” said McQueen. “If they keep working hard you never know what they can accomplish. They could go to nationals if they do the things they need to do.”

Recruiting has already improved substantially since McQueen’s hiring as head coach in the off-season. Last year’s squad languished with approximately 10 players all season, while the ‘08 roster already boasts a healthy 15 athletes.

“There’s been some great leadership on some of the ones who have come back, Sonya and Leslie, they’ve been great leaders as far as bringing the team together and working hard and demonstrating what we’re all about,” said McQueen.

The leadership referred to is **Sonya Galloway** (Farmington), a catcher/infielder, and **Lesley Kennedy**, an infielder/pitcher (Quitman, AR.) Kennedy will pitch along with hurler **Jessica Lanuius** (Parkway South) and play short while Lanuius is on the mound.

Sophomore **Alex Branstetter** (Parkway West) will play first, with **Kristin Kaltenbach** (Herculaneum) is at second, and **Tabitha Bahre** (Lutheran South) holds down third base.

In the outfield, sophomore **Nikki Thomas** (Union) will play left, **Michelle Smith** (Mehlville) in center, and **Lucia Rooker** (Principia) will be in right. Outfielder **Theresa Weil** (Oakville) also returns from last year’s squad.

“It could be a very good season. If they keep working hard and believe in the things they can do, and working together as a team,” said McQueen. “I keep telling them that, you work together as a team and you keep making each other better and you’ll be surprised at what you can do.”

Jenell Franken Becomes New Head Volleyball Coach

The Meramec volleyball team has a new head coach in **Jenell Franken**. Franken, a talented player with varsity high school and club coaching experience, takes over a Magic team with much promise.

“I’m real excited about it. It looks like there’s a lot of potential and I can’t wait to get started,” said Franken. “I know our first open gym is on Mar. 2 and that’s when I’ll really get the feel for it. I have heard there’s a lot of talent.”

Franken would know about talent. She was a four year varsity player at Tipton High in Missouri, winning personal All-Conference and All-District honors three years. She was also a team captain her junior and senior years.

"I'm excited. You always want to go to a place where it's known for athletics and they're also known for their academics," said Franken. "Anytime you have strengths all the way around it's very exciting."

More recently, she was head varsity coach at Francis Howell High the past two seasons, and starred as a collegiate player at Central Methodist University, playing all four years and being named a team captain as a senior. Franken has also coached the Mid-Missouri and St. Charles Stars club select teams.

The new leader feels the transition will be a simple one. "I like to motivate. My girls are usually in pretty good shape - we'll outlast another team. I'm very approachable."

Franken has a Bachelor's Degree in Biology and is employed by the St. Louis County health Department as a field inspector.

Women's Basketball Team Bows Out In Regional Semi's

In a mild upset, the Meramec women's basketball team fell to Cottey College in the semi-finals of the Region XVI Tournament Friday, Feb. 29, 65-56. The Magic were seeded second, while Cottey was third.

Meramec held the lead much of the game until the 3:18 mark of the second half when Cottey overtook them to go up 55-54. The Magic managed to score just two points in the final 3:18.

Michelle Senf (Mehlville) finished a spectacular two year career at Meramec, earning a first team All-Conference and All-Region spot. **Jonica Booth** (Ft. Zumwalt S.) and **Capri Savage** (Orofino, ID) also were named to the All-Region first team.

Meramec finishes the season at 15-16.