

Exciting season for Norton Blue Jay ladies

By DICK BOYD

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With eight returning letter winners from last season's Class 3A state tournament team, coach Kevin Jilka's Norton Community High School girls basketball team produced an outstanding 2008-09 season with a final 17-5 record.

The Lady Jays' season ended with a loss to eventual Class 3A state champion Southwestern Heights in the semifinals of the Substate Tournament played in Holcomb. Although Norton won the championship of the Mid-Continent League and the championship of the Mid-Continent League Tournament, one of the Lady Jay losses was to Ellis, who eventually placed runner-up in the Class 2A state tournament. Another loss was to Wray, Colo., the defending state champion, and was followed by a third place finish in the annual Topside Tip-Off Tournament in Goodland.

Norton's other losses were to outstanding teams from Hoxie and Colby.

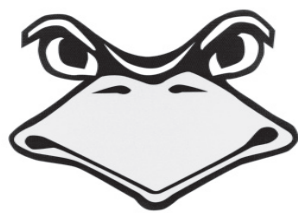
Returning starters for Norton were: Taylor Rossi, 5-foot-3-inch guard; Laura Lee Baird, 5'9" guard; KaraJo Jones, 5'9" guard and Hayli Bozarth, 5'10" post, all seniors.

Other returning letter winners were Katharine Roy, 5'8" senior wing; Ashlie Stewart, 5'3" junior guard; Amanda Ray, 5'10" junior post and Shelby Jones, 5'4" junior wing.

Lacey Wallingford, a 5'10" senior forward transfer, was also an instrumental player on the Norton team.

Assistant coaches again this season were George Rossi and Joan Bolt. Student manager was Bryan Henry.

The Lady Jays got the season off to a great start on Saturday afternoon, Dec. 6 when they de-



feated Atwood 59-29 in Atwood. Norton hit five three-point baskets and 26 points in the first quarter! The Lady Jays also forced 30 turnovers. Baird led scoring with 17 points. Norton did not have Bozarth due to a practice injury.

Next came the annual Topside Tip-Off Tournament Dec. 11-13 in Goodland and the Lady Jays were without Bozarth once again. Norton defeated McCook 39-33 in the first round and Wallingford had a double-double with 14 points and 10 rebounds. In the semifinals versus Wray, Colo., the score was tied after three quarters but Norton lost 57-50. Rossi was leading scorer with 14 points. Wallingford was injured in the second half and did not return.

In the consolation bracket, the Lady Jays placed third with a 49-41 win over Weskan. Baird led scoring with 17 points.

At the completion of the tournament, Baird was named to the 10-player All-Tournament Team.

Games with Stockton and Phillipsburg were postponed until the new year due to inclement weather.

The Lady Jays got the new year off to a great start on Tuesday, Jan. 6 when they outscored a visiting Oberlin quintet 62-25. Baird led scoring with 17 points. Bozarth tallied 16 in her first game of the season and Wallingford added 13.

Norton traveled to Osborne on January 9 to play the always outstanding Lady Bulldogs and returned with a 55-43 victory. Bo-

zarth hit 26 and Baird added 14.

A visit to WaKeeney on January 16 to play the Lady Golden Eagles ended in a 51-34 win after Norton pulled away in the second half. Wallingford and Bozarth each hit 16 points.

In the first round of the annual Mid-Continent League Tournament, No.2 seeded Norton defeated Stockton 62-32 on January 20 in Norton. Rossi hit the wall in the second quarter while going after a ball, was injured and lost for the season. Bozarth hit 22 points and Baird added 16.

The semifinals of the tournament were played at Gross Memorial Coliseum in Hays. On Friday, January 23, Norton played Osborne again and with the same results. The Lady Jays defeated the Lady Bulldogs 45-36 to advance to the semifinals. Norton's defense limited Osborne to 22 percent shooting. Bozarth was leading scorer with 20 points.

The next evening, Norton met No.4 seed Phillipsburg in the finals. It was a tight game but the Lady Jays won 37-34 to capture the championship! Stewart hit two free throws with 7.9 seconds remaining to ensure the win.

Baird and Bozarth led Norton with 9 points each. "We found a way to win at the end," said coach Jilka.

The Lady Jays continued their winning ways when they returned to the friendly confines of the NCHS Stull Gymnasium on Tuesday, Jan. 27 to play Goodland. Norton hit 71 percent from two-point land and breezed to a 65-20 win. Bozarth recorded 18 points and Baird hit 16.

The first makeup game from 2008 came on January 30 versus Stockton in Stockton and the Lady Jays continued to breeze with a 75-21 victory on 59 percent shooting. Bozarth hit 20 points and Walling-

ford added 15.

On February 3, Norton traveled to Smith Center and returned with an impressive 60-37 win. Baird hit 6 of 10 from beyond the arc and ended with 24 points.

The Lady Jays entertained Hill City on February 6 and the No.4 state ranked Norton quintet outscored the Lady Ringnecks 74-45. Norton left the nets smoking with 52 percent shooting from the field. Baird tallied 25 points, Bozarth hit 22 and Wallingford swished 17.

At Oberlin on February 10, Norton continued to burn the nets. The Lady Jays hit 62 percent from the field in a 77-25 victory. Baird hit 21 points and Bozarth added 18.

The second makeup game from December was on February 12 versus Phillipsburg in the NCHS Stull Gymnasium and it was another good one between the long-time rivals. Just as they had in the Mid-Continent League Tournament finals, Norton prevailed again, this time by a 57-47 score. It was Phillipsburg's first league loss so put Norton on top of the standings. Baird scored 18 points and Bozarth hit 15.

Norton took a 15-1 record to Hoxie on February 17 to play the 18-1 Lady Indians, who were state-ranked in Class 1A. Although Bozarth hit 23 points and Baird added 13, the Lady Jays were defeated 73-46 by the hot shooting Hoxie players, who hit 65 percent from the field!

The Lady Jays returned to Norton on February 20 and suffered their first Mid-Continent League loss to an outstanding Ellis team by a 51-49 score. The Lady Raiders, who made a run on the Class 2A state tournament later, held a slight lead the entire game and hit enough free throws at the end to win. Bozarth was leading scorer with 17 points.

February 23 was "Senior Night"

for Norton and the Lady Jays returned to their winning ways with a dominating 51-14 win over Plainville in a rare Monday night game. Baird hit 54 percent from the field and finished with 17 points.

Norton traveled to Colby the next night and did not receive a very good reception from the Lady Eagles as they suffered a 48-31 loss. Bozarth led Norton with 12 points.

Class 3A substate basketball play began the next week and the No.3 seeded Norton girls hosted Holcomb on March 2 and fashioned a 55-34 victory to advance. Bozarth led the way in scoring with 24 points and Wallingford added 15. Baird was ill and did not play.

On Thursday, March 5, Norton traveled to Holcomb to play No.2 seed Southwestern Heights and the Lady Jays' outstanding season ended with a 51-33 loss. On Saturday, Southwestern Heights defeated previously unbeaten Thomas More Prep-Marian of Hays to win the substate championship, extend their record to 19-1 and advance to the State Tournament in Hutchinson, where they also won the championship.

Norton played well against Southwestern Heights, who didn't pull away until the fourth quarter. Again, Norton played without Baird. Wallingford was high scorer for Norton with 9 points.

"We had a great effort from our girls," said coach Jilka. "They played hard all night long but we were just outmanned."

"We had some adversity this season and, through all the adversity, not one time did these girls complain. They came to practice every day and worked hard and we are very proud of them."

"This senior class will be greatly missed; they were a special

group!"

Season statistics

As a team, Norton outscored opponents 53.7 points per game to 37.7. The Lady Jays hit 41.1 percent of their field goal attempts compared to 33.9 percent by opponents. From the free throw line, Norton swished 59.7 percent and opponents averaged 57.1 percent.

The Lady Jays had 288 steals on defense for an average of 13 thefts per contest. Norton's aggressive defense caused 453 turnovers by the opposition for an average of 20.5 per contest.

On offense, Norton had 284 assists or 12.9 per game. The Lady Jays had 554 total rebounds for an average of 25.2 per game.

Hayli Bozarth was leading scorer with 17.1 points per game. She was the most accurate shooter on the team, hitting 56.9 percent from the field. She was also third high in free throw percentage at 65 percent.

Laura Lee Baird was the most accurate from the free throw line, hitting 67.9 percent and was second leading scorer with a 13.9 points per game average. Baird was also most accurate from beyond the arc, hitting 30.8 percent of her trey tries.

Lacey Wallingford was second high in free throw percentage at 66.7 percent.

Bozarth was also the rebounds leader with 117 for an average of 6.5 per contest. Wallingford pulled down 108 caroms for an average of 5.1 per game. KaraJo Jones averaged 3.6 rebounds and Baird averaged 3.

Baird was the steals leader with 68, followed by Bozarth, 44 and Wallingford, 41.

Assists leader for the Lady Jays was Ashlie Stewart with 60, followed by Baird, 49; KaraJo Jones, 38.

Blue Jay boys struggle during rebuilding season

By DICK BOYD

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The Norton Community High School boys basketball team had a rebuilding year in the recently concluded 2008-09 season.

Last year's 15-7 squad left them with no returning starters and only three returning lettermen. They were Zac Dreher, 6-foot-2-inch senior post; Landon Hamel, 5'9" junior guard and J.D. Gall, 5'10" junior guard.

Coach Doug Reusink's assistant coaches again this season were David Stover and Todd Fulton. Student managers were Hannah Fulton and David Cressler.

The Blue Jay boys played hard on both offense and defense but were not very accurate shooters and that statistic cost them some games. They were better at the end of the season and the experience gained by many should help in the upcoming season.

Norton opened the season with a 62-27 loss at Atwood on December 6. "Our inexperience showed," said coach Reusink.

The annual Topside Tip-Off Tournament at Goodland was next on December 11-13. Norton lost 73-35 to eventual tournament champion Ottawa, lost 52-40 to Burlington, Colo., then defeated Weskan 61-44 to place seventh in the tournament.

Hamel hit 56 percent from the floor in the Burlington game and tallied 20 points, then hit the same excellent percentage in the win over Weskan when he finished with 23 points. Gall added 16

points against Weskan.

Hamel was named to the 10-player All-Tournament Team.

Games with Stockton and Phillipsburg were postponed until the new year due to inclement weather.

On Tuesday, January 6, Norton lost a 52-47 thriller to Oberlin in the NCHS Stull Gymnasium in Norton. Norton led after one quarter and at halftime and the Red Devils were ahead 33-31 after three periods. Both teams hit about the same number of field goals but Oberlin had more free throw points.

Hamel was leading scorer with 21 points. "I was pleased with our effort," said coach Reusink. "We played hard the whole game."

The Blue Jays traveled to Osborne on January 9 and played in another very close contest before losing 51-50 when a fourth quarter rally fell short. Hamel and Zac Dreher each tallied 14 points.

A trip to play a veteran Trego Community squad in WaKeeney on January 16 ended in a 54-25 loss. Gall led Norton with 11 points.

On January 19, Norton traveled to Phillipsburg to play the No.2 seeded Panthers in the first round of the annual Mid-Continent League Tournament. Freshman Jordan Wahlmeier hit 10 points in a 62-30 loss.

In the consolation semifinals, Norton traveled to Ellis on January 22 to play the No.6 seeded Railroaders. The Blue Jays outscored Ellis two of the four quarters be-

fore losing 46-37. Hamel was ill and did not play. Zac Dreher led Norton with 13 points.

On Saturday morning, January 24, Norton played No.5 seed Smith Center in Gross Memorial Coliseum in Hays and put together one of their better games of the season.

The Blue Jays took an 8-0 lead and never looked back in defeating the Redmen 48-35 to place seventh in the tournament. Hamel led scoring with 15 points and Dreher hit 11. "We hit shots early and played good defense," said coach Reusink.

The Blue Jays found a lid on the basket; however, following the tournament when they played Goodland in the NCHS Stull Gymnasium and hit just 17 percent from the field in a 60-28 loss. Luke Ninemire was leading scorer with 7 points.

On January 30, Norton played Stockton in a makeup game in Stockton and outlasted the Tigers in overtime to win 65-57! The score was tied 52-all at the end of regulation but the Blue Jays built some momentum in the extra period when they held the Tigers to one field goal in outscoring them 13-5 for the win.

Hamel had his best offensive game, ending with 33 points on 56 percent shooting. Gall added 15 points to the Norton total. "We did not quit when we got behind," said coach Reusink. "Down the stretch, we played with confidence and made big plays and especially hit our free throws."

Norton traveled to Smith Center on February 3 for a rematch with the Redmen and found them in a revenge mood after the loss in the league tournament. Smith Center got even with a 53-44 win, despite 17 points scored by Hamel and 11 by Gall.

The Blue Jays hosted Hill City on February 6 and lost 55-30. Dreher was leading scorer with 13.

On February 10, Norton traveled to Oberlin where 22 turnovers led to a 62-41 loss. Hamel scored 18 points and Ashton Draper added 12.

A makeup game with Phillipsburg in Norton on February 12 ended in a 60-29 loss when the Blue Jays hit just 22 percent from the field. Zac Dreher led scoring for Norton with 10 points.

A trip to Hoxie on February 17 resulted in a 58-34 loss.

On February 20, Norton hosted Ellis, a team they had played very well against in Ellis in the league tournament but the Railroaders prevailed 53-34 this time. Dreher led Norton with 14 points.

Monday, February 23 was "Senior Night" for Norton and Zac Dreher, the Blue Jays' only senior player, was honored. Norton played well enough to win against the Plainville visitors before losing 62-52. The Cardinals' three-point shooting made the difference. Hamel scored 13 points and Draper hit 12.

Norton traveled to Colby on February 24 and lost 59-44. Gall was leading scorer with 12



points.

Next, it was time for Class 3A substate tournament action. No.8 seeded Norton had to play No.1 seeded Holcomb in the first round on March 3 in Holcomb. The Blue Jays lost 87-35 to the No.4 state ranked Longhorns.

Holcomb extended their season record to 18-2, won the tournament and continued on to the Class 3A State Tournament in Hutchinson.

Hamel scored 14 points for the Blue Jays, who ended the season 3-18.

"We know the positive in this season is that we only lose one senior in Zac Dreher, who has given us great effort in the last four years," said coach Reusink.

"But, we will need some boys to step up and be leaders for us next year to turn things around. Our players coming back will need to believe in themselves."

Season statistics

As a team, Norton averaged 39.8 points per game, hit 32.2 percent from the field and 52.4 percent from the free throw line.

The Blue Jays had 170 steals on defense for an average of 8 per contest. The Norton defense caused 352 opponent turnovers

for 16.7 per game.

Norton had 193 offensive assists which is 9.2 per game.

The Blue Jays grabbed a total of 565 rebounds during the season for an average of 26.9 per contest.

Landon Hamel was leading scorer for Norton with a 12.7 points per game average. Second high was Zac Dreher, averaging 7.3 points and J.D. Gall was third high with a 6.5 point average. Fourth best was Ashton Draper with a 6.1 average.

Zac Dreher led the team in field goal percentage by hitting 48.2 percent of his shots from the field. Hamel was second most accurate with a 34.7 overall percentage and led in shots from beyond the arc at 30 percent.

Ashton Draper hit an exceptional 81.8 percent of his free throws to lead the team in that category. Hamel was second high from the charity stripe at 57 percent and Zac Dreher third high at 55.9 percent.

Leading in rebounds were Zac Dreher with 125 and Draper with 124, averaging 6.2 and 6 rebounds per contest, respectively.

Hamel was the leader in steals with a total of 55. Gall had 37 thefts and Draper had 17.

Assists leader for the Blue Jays was Hamel with 59, followed by Gall, 48; Tye Nickell, 27.

Zac Dreher led in blocked shots with 9; Jordan Wahlmeier rejected 7 shots by the opposition. Dreher was also the leader in charges taken with 22.

Norton player to take floor in All-Star Classic Sunday in Concordia

Lacey Wallingford, a 5-foot-10-inch senior forward from Norton Community High School, has been chosen to compete in the annual North Central Kansas All-Star Basketball game which will be held on Sunday in Arley Bryant Gymnasium at Cloud County Community College in Concordia.

Wallingford will play in the girls

contest, which tips off at 5 p.m.

Coaches of the girls game will be Dallas Cox, Beloit and Ken McClanahan, Clifton-Clyde.

An all-star boys contest will follow at 7 p.m.

Purpose of these games is to allow area high school senior basketball players to showcase their talents in postseason competition.

Norton state champion wrestler on mat tonight

By DICK BOYD

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Zach Bainter, Class 3-2-1A 140 pound state champion wrestler from Norton Community High School, will compete in the annual Kansas Wrestling-Senior Classic 2009 dual this evening in Topeka.

The Senior Classic is sponsored by the Kansas Wrestling Coaches Association and the USA Wrestling-Kansas.

The top Kansas senior wrestlers were invited to compete. Wrestlers from Class 3-2-1A and 4A will comprise the Small Schools

Team and the Big Schools Team will consist of wrestlers from Classes 5A and 6A.

The matches will be three two-minute periods with national Federation folkstyle rules applicable.

The matches will begin at 7 p.m. and will be held in the Expo Centre in Topeka.

KQNK Radio of Norton will broadcast the matches and will begin broadcasting at 6 p.m.

Zach Bainter compiled a nearly perfect 21-1 record in winning the state championship this season. He is a four-time state placer.

Zach will wrestle Linwood Peoples, Blue Valley-Northwest. Coaches of the Small Schools Team will be Brock Hutchinson, Smith Center and Matt Sims, Colby.

Big Schools Team coaches will be Brett Means, Goddard and Greg Buckbee, Emporia.

Number of other area wrestlers will be competing. Matches, in addition to Bainter's, will feature the following wrestlers:

119 - Dan Weigel, Plainville, vs. Diamond Wilson, Wichita North; 130 - Aaron Geist, Osborne, vs. Trent Cox, Maize; 135 - Cade

Hewitt, Beloit, vs. Sal Tovar, Emporia; 145 - Cas Spangler, Beloit, vs. Mitchell Means, Goddard; 145 - Trevor Rempe, Smith Center, vs. Colby Crank, Hutchinson; 152 - Marshall McCall, Smith Center, vs. Blake Fullbright, Maize; 171 - Breck Arberger, Colby vs. Alex Feldkamp, Derby; 189 - Sawyer Krone, Beloit, vs. Nate Davis, Liberal; 215 - Steve Kyler, Ellsworth, vs. Luciano Gutierrez, Turner and Exhibition - Tanner Kriss, Colby, vs. Boaz Beard, Goddard.

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