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YOUTHFUL LADY MT. LIONS LOOK TO GROW IN 2021 SEASON

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HAMBLETON – March 12, 2020 is the one day we will never forget. It was the opening round of the Class A High School Girls Basketball State Tournament. The Tucker County Lady Mountain Lions fell victim to undefeated Parkersburg Catholic, by the final score of 85-47. During the second half of that contest, word was spreading like wildfire about what we all have grown accustomed to today, Covid 19. As soon as the final horn sounded, SSAC officials suspended the rest of the state tournament and days later canceled the rest of the high school basketball season. That was the very last high school basketball game played in the state. Now nearly One full Calendar year later, the 2021 season will finally get underway. With it brings the same team that played the final game in the state last year, in the Tucker County Lady Mountain Lions.

Head coach Dave Helmick returns in his 4th year as the TCHS Girls' Basketball head coach. The Lady Mountain Lions return all but one player from last season's 18-8 ball-club. However, the one player was a huge loss, in all- state, 1000-point scorer, Terra Kuhn. As we fast forward to the present, coach Helmick returns seven players who had varsity experience a year ago. The team, despite the experience back, is still young. Only one senior is on the roster this year and that is a returning starter in the form of forward Gracie Rapp. Last season, Rapp averaged around 6 ppg and 6 rebounds per game. She will be joined up front with another returning starter in sophomore Kadie Colebank. The 6-0 Colebank led the team in block shots (102) and rebounds per game a season ago, (11). She averaged 10 points per game as a freshman as well. Junior Nevaeh Nichols also returns with varsity experience. Nichols (5'10) gives coach Helmick, plenty of versatility. At guard is where the lady mountain lions seem to be the deepest. Junior London Hood returns to run the point. Hood is the leading returning scorer from a season ago where she averaged 14 ppg. She will be joined in the backcourt by sophomore Autumn Russell and frontcourt sophomores Corrinia Lipscomb and Jacey Davis. There will be a pair of talented freshmen who will see a lot of varsity action on the outside this season, in the form of, Macy Helmick and Avery Colebank. Helmick is a talented newcomer that is an all-around player on both ends of the floor. Avery Colebank is a very good three-point shooter. These two talented freshmen are a part of a large and talented freshman class of, 11 girls.

Coach Helmick believes he has a good overall group returning. "I believe we will be strong inside and outside," says coach Helmick. He also stressed that replacing Terra Kuhn is going to be a huge challenge. "Teams I feel will double us more in the post." Coach Helmick is referring to the skilled and talented 6-0 sophomore Kadie Colebank. "She (Colebank) is learning how to handle double teams and she is also very skilled with the ball in her hands." Coach Helmick says that Colebank as a strong inside post game. "She is getting better each day and gives us a very strong low post and skilled presence." It's the guard positions that really excites Helmick. "I believe we will be able to run the floor more and get some easy baskets in transition." However, offense is not the concern of the veteran coach. "Defense is where I feel it will take us the longest to get going." Coach Helmick also referred to the shorter more compact schedule as a possible issue. "With 16-18 games packed in a shorter season, it's

going to make it hard to get things going early on.” Coach Helmick says timing is everything, “We are going to have to learn as we play, as we do not have a lot of time to correct things.”

As we know, Lady Mountain Lion basketball always prides itself on defense and as the season wears on, I personally think, this will become a strength.

For the 2021 season, the SSAC has a new 4-Classification System. Tucker County will remain a Class A School. Coach Helmick says, he likes the new system but there are still tough teams in Single A to be concerned with. “Gilmer County, Tug Valley and Tolsia are just a few of the talented teams that remain in the state. Coach however knows that if he wants to make a 17th consecutive trip to Charleston, he must find a way to get thru the new Class A Region 2 tournament. Tucker County will be in the same section with Union, Paw Paw and East Hardy. The other side of Region 2 will consist of, Tygarts Valley, Harman, Pendleton County and Pocahontas County. All familiar foes and teams that the Lady Mountain Lions will face this season.

So, it should be another strong and exciting season for the Lady Lions. They will open the schedule with two scrimmages. On Friday February 26, they will host Buckhannon-Upshur at 6:00 PM. Then on Monday March 1, they will travel to Lewis County for another scrimmage at 6:00 PM. Tucker County will then open up regular season play on Wednesday night March 3rd as they host Pendleton County. Junior Varsity action will begin at 5:45 PM with varsity set for 7:30 PM. Finally, Coach Helmick and athletic director, Jonathan Hicks have put together another tough schedule. “We always like to play a tough schedule, to get us ready for postseason play.” Coach Helmick says this year will be as tough as most because of the shorter season. “We play Lincoln, Gilmer County, Elkins, Notre Dame and Petersburg, all in the non-conference slate.” So, by the time playoff time comes, the Lady Mountain Lions will once again be toughened up and ready to go.

Overall, I personally think that if this teams comes together and plays hard on defense, the sky is the limit for them. Class A is going to be easier to navigate now that most of the private schools moved up in Class. However, it is going to take a strong team working together as one to do so. I firmly believe the pieces of the puzzle is there. I like the freshman class personally and I think sophomore, Kadie Colebank could have a big year. Should be fun. We will also have a handful of games that we will broadcast online at tuckercountysports.com, including the postseason.



2021 Tucker County High School Girls' Basketball Team