

After the past two state postseasons were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, New Canaan basketball head coach Danny Melzer and his Rams will finally get a chance to defend their 2018-19 CIAC championship.



“I’m really excited,” Melzer said. “Last year there was so much uncertainty and we were just thrilled to be playing at all. We still are very happy to be playing, it just feels a lot more normal. To have our JV and Varsity in the gym together is great – that’s the way it should be. There has been a lot of excitement in the gym. As coaches it’s really easy to come to practice every day because we have a group of young men who are so eager to be coached, eager to learn and get better every day.”

\*\*\*Mike Sanseverino (#4) and Jack Hladick (#5) in action last season. Photo: Mike Wilson\*\*\*

Learning will be the key to success for the 2021-22 Rams. After a successful 9-3 season last winter that saw New Canaan reach the FCIAC semifinals for the first time since 1984, the Rams enter this year with a brand-new cast of characters. The Rams lost all five of its starters and top two bench players from a year ago to graduation and transfers, leaving Melzer and the Rams in uncharted territory.

“I’ve been coaching 17 years and I played 15 years before that and I have never been a part of a team that lost their top seven guys,” Melzer said. “The starting lineup may or may not stay the same throughout the course of the season. There is a lot of uncertainty heading into this year. But one thing that is certain is that we have a great group of kids and great leadership.”

Foremost among the leaders are New Canaan tri-captains Ned Brady, Mike Sanseverino and Logan Sykes.

Brady—who on Wednesday signed his National Letter of Intent to play football at Army—is an imposing presence in the New Canaan frontcourt. The 6’5” senior gives the Rams physicality and an edge on the boards. More important than that are the intangibles Brady brings to the table.

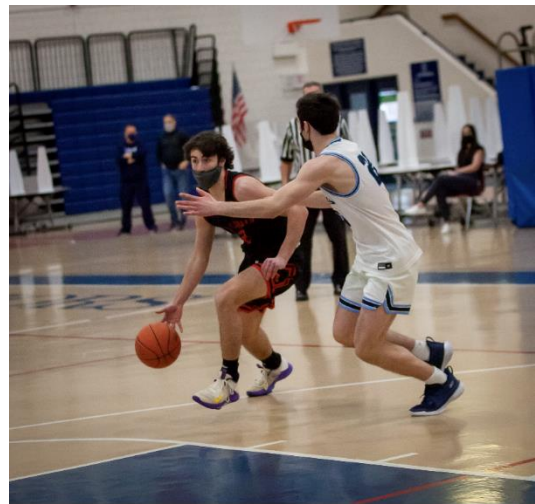
“They don’t make them like Ned anymore,” Melzer said. “He is the nicest young man that you will ever meet but when he is on the court there is no nonsense. He doesn’t let his teammates hang their heads or get down on themselves and is constantly holding people to a higher standard. That is exactly the kind of leadership we need for such a young and inexperienced team.”

Sanseverino is another physical two-sport athlete and a consistent performer who leads by example.

“Sans knows where to be and understands everyone else’s jobs,” Melzer said. “He is always in the right position on defense and is so reliable in terms of understanding what we’re trying to do.”

Sykes is a vocal leader and someone Melzer describes as a true team player.

“Logan has been a really selfless player who gives everything he can to be the best possible captain he can be,” Melzer said. “He communicates really well with the younger guys and has done a great job of echoing what the coaches are saying. He puts the team above himself and as a leader that’s so important to demonstrate.”



\*\*\*Logan Sykes in action last season. Photo: Mike Wilson\*\*\*

Junior Jack Hladick is New Canaan’s most experienced returner and will start for the Rams when they open their season Thursday at home against Pomperaug. Equally adept at perimeter shooting and driving to the basket, Hladick is someone Melzer will rely on for offensive output.

Sophomore Griffin Bramwit also logged Varsity minutes last season and is New Canaan’s top ball handler and passer. He will open this year running point for the Rams. Junior Jack Lenihan joins Bramwit in New Canaan’s starting backcourt after an impressive preseason in which he showcased his versatility. 6’3” Junior Santiago Lacayo made huge strides from last season and will join Sanseverino in New Canaan’s starting frontcourt.

One strength New Canaan will showcase this season is its depth, giving Melzer plenty options to mix and match as necessary. One of New Canaan’s most intriguing players is 6’7” junior Spencer Fuller-Wright, who missed all of last season due to injury.

“He is a force in the paint and a good passer with great instincts,” Melzer said. “As he gets more acclimated to varsity basketball, he will be a big contributor.”

Juniors Ty Groff, Will Larson and Buster Zwick along with seniors Brendan Tiscornia and Matthew Wronski should also figure to see action for New Canaan off the bench this season.

“It’s hard for me to sit here and tell you the rotation because I don’t know yet,” Melzer said. “We’re still learning about ourselves and how it’s all going to fit so we might look completely different a month from now. The one thing I can tell you is that I guarantee we are going to enjoy being around these guys every single day. You’re going to see a team with a whole lot of energy and passion. All of these guys want to see each other be successful.”



And while that enthusiasm might come with some growing pains, Melzer expects New Canaan to compete in every game and improve throughout the course of the season.

“You are never going to see a team that gives up,” Melzer said. “This team will play to the end and I think what you’re ultimately going to see is a team that will be a whole lot better in February than December. Our effort is A-plus. Our attitude is A-plus. I don’t remember having a team where I can say that about every single player. This year, I can which makes it really enjoyable to be here. I’m really looking forward to this season and the future.”

\*\*\*Ned Brady in action last season. Photo: Mike Wilson\*\*\*