

Brick Township Bulletin



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Mustangs hitting the road to create unity

BY WAYNE WITKOWSKI
Staff Writer

Brick Memorial's girls basketball players had a rooting interest in the University of North Carolina in the recent NCAA Women's Tournament Final Four.

They'll be heading down there for a team camp on June 27 to 30. The program will split into two teams for that camp and fundraising has paid for virtually all expenses. Coach Rayna Petach and her players also were looking into camps at Duke and the University of Virginia but 26 of 29 players voted to go to the UNC camp, not just because of basketball.

"Many of them are on the soccer team and were down there for a camp," said the coach. "There'll be teams from across the nation. There will be some individual instruction but mostly team concept drills."

And that, more than anything in the playbook or in fundamentals, is what Petach feels her team needs. The Mustangs won only two games in Petach's just completed first season and she is so interested in building team unity in things like the UNC camp that she is bringing in Keith Waldman from Optimal Performance Associates in Cherry Hill next month to address team unity and leadership in a team-building seminar.

"We had a problem with the team concept," said Petach. "We played too much as individuals."

Petach feels the good numbers of players coming back - only three graduate - will give them the opportunity to spend a lot of time together bonding between now and next season. They'll play in summer leagues and even participate in a Relay for Life at Brick Township on June 3-4, which is a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society's research and awareness.

"We're among the biggest fundraisers of those entered," said Petach, whose team has raised nearly \$3,000.

A huge group of sophomores are preparing for next season led by Ann McCarthy, the point guard and team Most Valuable Player. A consistent scorer, McCarthy averaged 13 ppg and finished as the team's top scorer narrowly ahead of Sarah Perri, a graduating senior who exploded toward the end of the season with a barrage of three-point baskets and some big scoring games.

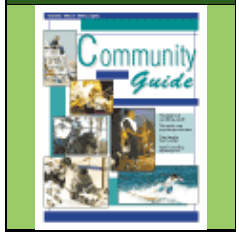
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"Annie hustled, stayed under control and did not take bad shots," said Petach. "She looked to pass and kept things (with other players) under control."

Jess Bavaro, another starter, and widely used backup Dawn Marciani are the other soon-to-be-alumnae.

"I think the season went well in that the team definitely improved," said Petach, as the Mustangs closed their campaign positively with a victory over Long Branch. "Instead of losing to certain teams badly like in the past, we were losing those games by 15 points. Coaches were talking about the players' improvement. This year, we were teaching them things they had to learn and the players were learning those things. We didn't have a No. 1 scorer so I was teaching them to play defense and rely on that. Everybody was learning."

Along with McCarthy, the nucleus of returnees includes freshman Kathryn LaMastra and sophomores Olivia Krupinski, Michelle Esten and shooting guard Courtney Kroeze, who received the team's Most Improved Player award.

"She (Kroeze) tried to do what she was capable of and, as one of the strongest girls on the team, was able to bang with the big girls," said Petach.

But Petach said she "also is looking for the big girls to improve" and puts that responsibility largely on the shoulders of 5-foot, 9-inch sophomores Nikki Nelson and Lauren Pickowicz, who both played their best ball at the end of the season.

"The sophomores were the bulk of the team this year and we have a great group of eighth- graders coming up," said Petach, who also has some prospects from the junior varsity team that finished just under .500.

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