

December 2, 2019

By Dennis Garcia
SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - Asheboro High School girls varsity basketball coach David Hayes said there will be no sneaking up or surprising anyone this season. And that's just fine with him and his team.

Coming off a year in which the Blue Comets won the Mid-Piedmont Conference Tournament championship and then moved into the fourth round of the state 3-A playoffs, AHS is a mystery team no longer.

"We can't fly in under the radar any more," said Hayes, who returns a wealth of talent from a team that finished 23-8 last season. "We are going to take everyone's best shot."

After finishing 13-13 in his first year at AHS, the Blue Comets took a huge step last year with the emergence of Diamond McDowell, Tanaesha Ellison, Janiya Jackson, Kesley Nance and a number of others.

"We didn't have anyone coming into the season that was going to be a stud player," Hayes said. "We were able to grind out some wins against some teams that didn't know how athletic we were. There were several games we weren't supposed to win. Now with the run we had last year and the nucleus we have coming back, they expect to win and that's new for these kids."



Asheboro coach David Hayes. Photo by P.J. Ward-Brown/P.J. Ward-Brown Photography.

After earning the MPC Tournament title last season, the Blue Comets recorded playoff wins over East Rowan 55-39, North Iredell 49-47 at the buzzer and Statesville 55-49 before falling to Cuthbertson 63-43.

So far, the Blue Comets are 3-1 this season, posting wins over Southern Lee, Eastern Randolph and High Point Central with the lone loss coming to Providence Grove.

"I'm thinking right now, we're not where we need to be, but in reality, we're a lot further than we were last year at this time," Hayes said. "We are very athletic and still pretty young. We haven't come close to playing the way we can."

That could be very scary for the Blue Comets' opponents this year. With McDowell averaging nearly 20 points and 14 rebounds early in the season, Ellison adding better than 15 points and 7 rebounds and Jackson providing nearly 7 points while providing energy on both ends of the floor, AHS is set to have a banner season.



No. 5 Diamond McDowell. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/P.J. Ward-Brown Photography.

"What Diamond does on both ends of the floor is just amazing, Tanaesha is going to be the fastest kid on the court and Janiya runs as well as anyone," Hayes said of his three leading juniors. "Those three run so well and we need to figure out and get a feel for how we play with each other."

With Kesley Nance being the only senior on the team, Hayes has already seen freshmen Kaelyn Nance and Salem Lee play big roles as has sophomore Sarah Allred.

"Everyone we play this year is going to know what we do," Hayes said. "Our

big issue is having kids who can stretch the floor in terms of the perimeter, but Kaelyn and Kesley have already knocked down some and Tanaesha has shot better, too.

Having as many players return from a successful season only bodes well for AHS.

"We have four kids who have a ton of experience," Hayes said. "These kids have been on the big stage before. Now with that core group of kids back, they are doing things - they are basketball savvy and they have a lot of confidence. I have to make sure I don't overcoach. When they get rolling, they are pretty good."

But that doesn't mean they can't play with a chip on their shoulder.

"High schools put out a top 25 and we weren't on that, so I did take that and show them and tell them this is what people think of you," Hayes said. "That kind of fired them up. I am really lucky with this group, especially the ones I have had before. They may not agree with everything I do, but if you tell them to eat the sidewalk, they just start doing it. We still have to figure some things out, but when we do ..."

The Blue Comets are scheduled to play at Randleman Tuesday night and at Union Pines Friday night.



No. 4 Tanaesha Ellison. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/P.J. Ward-Brown Photography.