

February 3, 2025

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SportsTone.net

CLIMAX - High School basketball is a game of adjustments and Providence Grove senior Mailey Way has had to make plenty of adjustments throughout her four-year varsity career.

There was the adjustment of playing under the direction of three different coaches, there was the adjustment of seeing her role steadily increase throughout the years and there was the adjustment of being asked to provide more offensive punch after strictly relying on her for her defensive prowess for two campaigns.

But the one adjustment Way has never had to make is how hard she plays the game. Called "the heart and soul of the team," by head coach Steve Cheek, if somebody could actually give more than 100 percent on the floor, it would be Way. Her defensive talents are extraordinary and she is certainly one of the keys as the Patriots seek their first back-to-back winning seasons since the 2009-10 and 2010-11 campaigns.



Providence Grove senior Mailey Way.



Patriots girls basketball coach Steve Cheek.

"She is the heart and soul of our team and she will give it her all every day of her life," said Cheek, PG's first-year head coach. "She comes to the gym to work. Her want-to is hard to teach. She wants to play. She listens and she's coachable. I can tell her what to fix and she'll never make that mistake again."

Along with Jada Nixon, Alyson Maze and Maggie Freeman, this senior class is attempting to accomplish two straight winning seasons for the first time in a while.

"It's all effort and wanting to be there," Way said of a team that was 4-4 in Piedmont Athletic Conference play entering this week and 11-6 overall after recording a record of 15-12 last season. "PG is not much of a women's basketball school. We don't have a lot of just-

basketball players. We might have three who play basketball outside our season. We have athletes and the athletes we have right now are willing to work hard to become basketball players."

Way is one of those athletes, excelling in volleyball and basketball for four years, softball for two years and track and field her junior year with plans to participate in track once again after basketball is over.

During her first two years in basketball, it was her ability on defense that garnered her playing time. Going against some very talented offensive players, she had to become solid on defense in order to get floor time.

"It used to be that I was there to be a body, play defense in practice and help them out," Way said of her freshman season. "I was the sixth man off the bench. I wasn't good, but he (Coach Dylan Eppley) saw I worked hard. Someone got hurt and I ended up starting and that's when I started really improving, gaining confidence."

But there were "rules" she had to abide by.

"I wasn't allowed to shoot my freshman and sophomore year," Way said. "We had what was called the yellow light. I could only shoot if I was open, wide open. And not three-pointers. So I get into my mindset of pass, don't shoot, pass, look, pass. (Head Coach Jonathan) Gainey tried to break me of that last year and now Coach Cheek has me shooting. I think I have been putting up more shots than I am comfortable with."

At just 5-feet-1, Way is averaging 5.8 points, 3.8 rebounds, 2.1 assists and 2.5 steals per game. She is shooting a very respectable 42 percent from the floor and 31 percent from 3-point range.

Of course, three coaches in four years have meant adjustments.

"It's different walking in on the first day of practice and having someone different coach you when you're used to someone else," Way said. "All three of my coaches have been great guys and have contributed to me as a player and a person. Eppley taught me how to play defense and I continued to get better with Gainey. Gainey pushed me offensively and Cheek, my current coach, is teaching me how to put it all together. Yes, it was hard to adjust. It was hard for the team to have different styles of coaching, but it was all worth it. It all benefited me."

The Patriots are now attempting to make the playoffs for the second straight year.

"We figured things out a lot quicker than we did last year," Way said. "We all get along so well. All those girls are my best friends and they will be for the rest of my life."



Warming up before a conference game at E Randolph.