

2017 SPORTS SPECIAL

Friday November 10, 2017 • Volume 101, Issue Number 4 • An Independent, Student-Run Newspaper

the rocket

www.theonlinerocket.com

Women's basketball picked sixth in conference

By Oscar Matous

Rocket Contributor

PSAC WEST PRESEASON RANKINGS

1. INDIANA (PA.)
2. CALIFORNIA (PA.)
3. EDINBORO
4. SETON HILL
5. GANNON
6. SLIPPERY ROCK
7. CLARION
8. PITT-JOHNSTOWN
9. MERCYHURST



Following a 9-19 season last year, the Slippery Rock University women's basketball team will hope to turn things around this season and make a run in the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference (PSAC) playoffs. Rock head coach Bobby McGraw attributed a large part to last year's downfall to the loss of their point guard, Lexi Carpenter to injury.

"When you lose the tenth leading scorer, not in the conference, in the nation, who shoots 90 percent from the free-throw line, who nobody can take the ball off, and who nobody can get in front of, that changes everything," McGraw said.

McGraw said he recognizes that last season ended "rough." The women don't shy away from talking about last year, he said. Last season, the women gave up a total 2,109 points in the season, allowing 75.3 points per game, which was ranked 18th out of 18 teams in the PSAC.

"No matter who you have on the floor, if you finish 18 out of 18 in points allowed per game, you're not going to win a bunch of games," McGraw said.

Junior Ciara Patterson and sophomore Leeann Gibson, who will serve as the team captains this season, both said this year their team is focusing a lot on the defense.

"We are going to be very defense oriented this year," Patterson said. "We have a lot of quick guards out there that can move their feet and get all around the court."

At the moment, The Rock is ranked to finish sixth in the PSAC, according to the preseason coach's poll. McGraw, entering his fourth season leading the Green and White, said based off of who The Rock has returning and who other teams in the PSAC have returning, that being ranked sixth "sounds about right."

"It has to do with us competing in not just the best league, but in the best conference in the best league in the country," he said.

Starting off the season, McGraw said the starting five could vary from game to game. At the moment, McGraw said the five getting the most reps on the court are Patterson, Gibson, sophomore Brooke Hinderliter, sophomore Madison Johnson, who transferred from

PICTURE: KENDALL SCOTT/THE ROCKET
GRAPHIC: CODY NESPOR/THE ROCKET

SEE NEWCOMERS PAGE A-4

Men's hoops seeking PSAC prominence in 2017-18

By Brendan Howe

Rocket Contributor

Following a preseason matchup with Pittsburgh in which it held the lead for almost the entire first half, the Slippery Rock University men's basketball team will open the regular season this weekend.

At the Rock's forefront will be four returning seniors who eye an improvement over the previous years' Slippery Rock team, which reached the conference tournament but exited in the first round. The team will benefit from a veteran backcourt comprised of guards Khyree Wooten and Merdic Green, the only two players on last year's team to start all 29 games. In 2016-2017, Wooten, this year's team captain, played more minutes than any other player and Green averaged 10.8 points per contest, enough to be the team's leading returning scorer for the approaching season.

The two other returners, center Christal Malalu and forward Tony Gates, also look to contribute to the team's success. Malalu, a 6'9" center native of the Netherlands, was last season's top rebounder on both the offensive and defensive ends of the court. He registered five double-doubles and grabbed a season-high 19 boards in a January matchup with Edinboro. Gates was a key player off the bench for The Rock, averaging almost four points and three rebounds in the 23 games he appeared in.

The four returning seniors were helpful in the process of bringing together a team that added many new members during the offseason. "They've done a good job of leading the team, that's been a strength," head coach Kevin Reynolds stated. "They've taken good ownership in the team, whether it's been their day or not their day, whether they're starting or not starting."

Malalu considers it a responsibility for him and his fellow seniors to help the team coalesce. He said, "The ability of the seniors to step up and lead the team [with so many new players] has been important. I think we got better as a whole and have kind of now figured out how people play. I've seen guys getting better every day."

Though the team lost eight players from last season's roster, most notably second-team All-PSAC Western Division guard Naquil Jones, it welcomed twelve new faces throughout the offseason. Of the dozen additions, nine of so come as transfers.

Guard Aaron McDonald and forward Micah Till move to SRU from Harford Community College, where they both averaged in the double figures in points while leading the Fighting Owls to their second of two straight Region 20 championships last season. Third-year sophomore guard De' Shae Lee comes from Garrett College averaging 16.8 points per game. Center Troidell Carter arrives from Henderson State University and forward Ryan Skovranko played as a West Chester Golden Ram last season. Brandon Simmons, a forward, previously played for Marshalltown Community College, the same school that SRU mainstays Malalu and Green attended before throwing on the green and white.

Newcomers Richard Bivens, a senior forward who comes by way of Florida International

PSAC WEST PRESEASON RANKINGS

1. INDIANA (PA.)
2. GANNON
3. MERCYHURST
4. SLIPPERY ROCK
5. CALIFORNIA (PA.)
6. PITT-JOHNSTOWN
7. SETON HILL
8. EDINBORO
9. CLARION



PICTURE: REBECCA DIETRICH/THE ROCKET
GRAPHIC: CODY NESPOR/THE ROCKET

SEE ROCK PAGE A-2

Men's Hoops Finding Success With Less

The men's basketball has achieved a 98 win turnaround in the past decade. **▶ Page A-2**

Mihalik's Lasting Coaching Influence

The Rock's former football coach has inspired a whole generation's worth of coaches. **▶ Page B-2**

A Look Back at a Historic Career

Senior Marcus Martin has enjoyed one of the most prolific athletic careers in school history. **▶ Page C-5**

Rock Basketball Brings In Transfers

Two men and one women basketball players transferred to SRU from Harford College. **▶ Page D-2**