

Argylls see big potential in first season under Cherry

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Grant Brown is one of six seniors set to lead Madison-Grant in its first season under new head coach Kevin Cherry.
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Kevin Cherry wasted little time in establishing his vision of culture for the Madison-Grant boys basketball program.

Cherry replaced Brian Trout as head coach of the Argylls early in spring of 2020 and immediately laid out the ground work in his first meeting with the players in his new program.

Cherry's vision starts with a mindset.

"I told them this is the expectation, this is the standard we're going to set for the program and that is to win the conference, to win the Grant Four and to win a sectional every year," he shared of his introduction to the team. "We're not going to be naive enough to think that that's what we're going to do every year, but we want to be in the fight. We want to be there at the end to have a chance to do those things.

"All those other teams in conference and sectional are practicing every day too. They have very similar goals," Cherry continued. "I believe it starts with a mindset. ... We're trying to establish a mindset of we are never out of the fight collectively as a group, winning as a program. If there's a problem we have a collective responsibility as a team

to fix it. That's just the mindset we brought in day one with these kids and they've bought in big time."

Cherry also believes the pieces are in place to start establishing a championship culture this season.

With six seniors, nearly all who've seasoned at the varsity level since their freshman year, and who have also experienced a good amount of winning in their basketball lives, the Argylls should certainly provide a formidable test to every opponent they encounter.

Cherry said he's seen great competitive spirit during practices and the seniors are holding themselves and younger players accountable for their effort and execution.

"It's just a group that I think wants to excel. I think there is some level of feeling that maybe they've underachieved at this point," he said. "So, I like that little chip on their shoulder that they're playing with.

"They're very anxious to start playing our season," Cherry continued. "Our practices have been very competitive, there's a consequence for everything. We try to compete every rep of every drill and try to develop that culture and that DNA and that expectation of we're just going to battle."

Though most of the faces for the Argylls are the same as last season, some of the roles players will fill are a little different, particularly in the case of senior Grant Brown.

Brown has handled point guard duties throughout his three years, but will move off the ball a little more for Cherry. Cherry was adamant that most everything M-G does on offense will still run through Brown, however he thinks taking some of the ball handling responsibility away will help open up the floor.

"We have high expectations (for Brown). Everything is gonna run through Grant for the most part," Cherry said. "He's a good decision maker and he puts a defender in such a bind. He shoots it well enough you have to go out and guard him and he can take you off the bounce, break you down, draw an extra defender and make the right read and kick. He does a lot of things well."

When Cherry talked to Brown about the change, he mentioned his senior would fill the same position in M-G's offense that former Butler standouts Kellen Dunham and Sean McDermott did at Pendleton Heights when Cherry coached there.

“His face lit up,” Cherry said. “His recruiting has picked up. The first thing I tell every coach is he’s the hardest worker in our gym. Every sprint, every drill he gives maximum effort.”

Brown (14.6 ppg) was one of three double-figure scorers for M-G last season along with seniors Kaden Howell (14 ppg) and Lance Wilson (11.6 ppg). Howell will fill the off-guard role while Wilson is likely to start the season as the Argylls’ sixth man.

Seniors Justin Moore (9.5 ppg, 6.1 rebounds) and Jackson Manwell (8.3 ppg) will once again join Howell and Brown as starters.

“Kaden is Kaden with the way he shoots it. He’s getting better off the bounce. I’ve been surprised about the way he’s been able to attack,” Cherry said. “Jackson Manwell is as steady as they come. He knocks down open shots, he’s a great screener. He does a lot of those things you don’t see on the stat sheet. Very efficient.

“Justin Moore he’s gotta be that guy, that presence inside, not only offensively. He’s gonna draw that assignment defensively most nights to take care of and protect the basket for us,” Cherry added.

Joining the four M-G seniors in the starting lineup will sophomore Jace Howell, Kaden’s brother, who Cherry said is “the ultimate point guard” and he’s quickly become an extension of the coach on the floor.

“We put in a lot of things (offensively) ... between 20 and 25 sets in right row,” Cherry said. “Jace Howell knows every one of them, every position. We sub him out and he’s teaching other guys what they’re supposed to be doing. His leadership is off the charts in that regard.

“The other thing I love about him is he brings some toughness that frankly that senior group does not have and they feed off him,” he added. “He challenges people in practice – block out drills, defensive type drills – he just competes and it rubs off. You either are gonna get your butt beat by Jace or you better rise up and compete if you want a chance to win. I love him.”

Madison-Grant also returns junior Seth Lugar, who averaged more than six points and four rebounds off the bench last season. Lugar just returned to practice after suffering an injury in football season so his availability might be limited until he gets back in basketball form.

Cherry said senior Zach Pretorius, juniors Myer Miller and Jalon Taylor along with freshman Teagan Yeagy could all fill key reserve roles with Wilson and Lugar.

The core values of Cherry's expectations for this season and beyond are displayed in M-G's locker room, as is the mission statement the team came up with. The main mission for the season is to have everyone pulling in the same direction to chase achievements and set an example for future Argyll teams.

"It's just about getting kids to buy in, wanting something bigger than themselves," Cherry said. "Building culture in today's age, that's sometimes tough to do. I don't think it's the kids' fault all the time.

"I'm a dad too and I want my kids to be the leading scorers and be the main face of the program, but in reality, that's not life," he continued. "Getting them to buy in, hopefully they'll take that back out to the community and to their parents then it just builds. We're all in this together in building that culture."

Madison-Grant hosts Wabash Saturday at 7:30 p.m. to open the season.