

Bulldogs look to stay on top in MAC White

Another in a series of girls basketball previews. Today, county teams from the Macomb Area Conference White Division:

By **John K. Schroder**
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Dakota

Coach: Phil McCune
2008-09 record: 8-2 White, 17-6 overall

Outlook: Despite losing four starters, coach McCune feels comfortable looking down his bench at all the depth that he can call on to help the Cougars overthrow Romeo as defending MAC White champs this year.

Senior small forward LaQwana Dockery is the lone starter back, but if the 2nd Team All-County honoree can improve slightly on her 15 points and five rebounds per game average of a year ago, Dakota will be in good hands.

“Even though we lost four starters, I’m really happy with what we have,” said McCune. “All the players mesh very well. We’re going to be quick and we should be able to run a little bit.”

Several other players will be vying for minutes in the starting rotation. Five-foot-7 junior shooting guard Kourtney Thomas and 5-foot-10 senior power forward Kaitlyn Downey are frontrunners to land starting spots. Heather Kehrer, a 6-foot-2 senior center, who played quite a few minutes per game last year, is expected to contribute after suffering a torn ACL injury six months ago. Ashley Thomas heads a list of other contributors that includes sophomore Erica Manduzzi, senior Lauren Galanty, and junior Jackie Abraham.

Two freshmen guards – Miranda Bates and Olivia Savage – could push other players for significant minutes. McCune calls Bates the best freshmen he has seen in his five years with Dakota.

As far as moving up in the MAC White standings, McCune takes a wait and see approach.

“I wouldn’t count Romeo out. They’ve got some good players and they’ll be tough. Utica has some good players back, too, and they will take a big step up,” McCune said. “I think we can compete with the amount of talent we have. We preach defense. Everybody can’t just talk about playing defense, they will have to go out and play tough defense for us to win.”

Girls Basketball MAC White Preview

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— **Tom McDonald**
Utica girls basketball coach

Romeo

Coach: Connie Hernden
2008-09 record: 10-0 White, 22-3 overall

Outlook: The Bulldogs are coming off a banner year that concluded with a loss to Lake Orion in a Class A regional championship game. Before the post-season finally ran out though, the Bulldogs had posted a 22-3 overall record, including a 10-0 run in the MAC White, and garnered some district championship hardware.

“It’s going to be real difficult to do that again. We had one of those special years that just came together. It was really unexpected. We had special kids, talent, and team chemistry. Everybody understood their roles,” said Hernden.

The Bulldogs must overcome the graduation loss of Paige Sickmiller, the MAC White MVP and The Macomb Daily player of the year, and Samantha Tomaschko, who set the school season and career records last year for blocked shots.

“It’s definitely going to be hard to top that. Last year is over with. It was a great season, but it’s time to wipe the slate clean,” Hernden added. “It’s a different squad with different personalities and we have to set new goals.”

Hernden will look to three returning players to keep momentum going and maintain the success the Bulldogs have experienced over the past several campaigns despite being a smaller team.

Junior Ashley Flinn, at 5-foot-10, is the tallest girl on the roster and senior Katie Becker, who has verbally committed to Northern Michigan, are expected to share time at power forward and to help ignite the Bulldogs’ attack.

According to Hernden, junior point guard Shanyyn McIntyre is

the “catalyst to what we do offensively and defensively.” Junior Marie Mets and senior Jessica Ratkiewicz are also expected to step up and contribute.

“We’re very deep at the guard position, but I haven’t really set a rotation yet. We’ve got a lot of young girls fighting for positions and minutes,” Hernden said. “The team chemistry last year was incredible. We never had a team come together like that. The girls have to accept the new challenge that this year brings. We’ll need some leaders to emerge.”

Utica

Coach: Tom McDonald
2008-09 record: 3-7 White, 5-17 overall

Outlook: It’s almost déjà vu all over again for coach McDonald as he starts his 14th campaign as head coach. When the horn sounds he sees six of his top eight players from last year still on the court.

“We lost less than most of the teams in the division,” acknowledged McDonald. “We were playing our best basketball at the end of the year last year. As coaches we hated to see the season end when it did. Our hope is that we build off that experience and do some good things this year.”

With hopes of turning around their 3-7 record from a year ago and competing for the MAC White crown instead of throwing in the white towel, the Chieftains will rely on four returning starters. Heading the cast of returnees is senior guard and four-year player Katrina Suchoski. Senior Katherine Johnston is expected to fill up the post and possibly reach double-double averages after sporting 7.5 points and seven rebounds per game last year. Leading scorer junior Eryn

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