

St. Ambrose University Men's Basketball - 2008-09 Preview

After a disappointing 2007-08 season which saw the St. Ambrose men's basketball team finish 13-19 overall, there is optimism that the Bees will bounce back to their winning ways in 2008-09.

A handful of returners along with another strong incoming class of newcomers will be expected to contribute for head coach Ray Shovlain, who enters his 26th year at the helm of the Fighting Bees. More than 40 players are currently preparing for the November 8 season opener at Cardinal Stritch.

The roster features several new faces, including a large group of freshmen and Loras College transfer Pat Conrad.

Eight players return from last season. Junior forward/center Alex Burkle and sophomore guard Reggie Shipp are the team's top two returning scorers. Burkle was third on the team in scoring (12.5 points/game) and second in rebounding (5.1 rebounds/game) a year ago. Shipp averaged 10.5 points, 3.7 rebounds and 3.0 assists while starting 31 games.

Sophomore guard/forward Jamey Meyer came on strong at the conclusion of 2007-08 and averaged 7.2 points per contest. Junior guard/forward Alex Washington averaged 6.5 points while appearing in all 32 games. Sophomore point guard Kevin Mullen started the final 10 games of last season and averaged 2.6 points per game.

Three seniors are also back – guard Josh Binder, forward John Hammar and guard Adam Parrot – giving the Bees experience to go along with all the youth.

“We feel we have a lot of versatile players who can make an impact this year,” said Shovlain.

Still too early to determine his starting lineup, Shovlain will rely on his team's depth, expecting 12-15 players to contribute each and every game.

“Our goal is the same every year,” said Shovlain. “I want to see us play better throughout the year and be playing our best basketball by the end of the season. That fits this club really well. We are counting on several first-year players to blend with our returning players, and by the end of the year, we could be pretty good.”

Once again the Bees will face a challenging schedule. Possible games against NCAA Division I opponents such as Iowa, Marquette, St. Louis University and Loyola did not materialize and a potential spot in a tournament hosted by Drake fell through due to NCAA Division I game limitations. But SAU will face a non-conference slate that features several games against NAIA Division I opponents and a clash with rival Augustana College, ranked #2 in the NCAA Division III preseason poll.

St. Ambrose, picked fourth in the Midwest Collegiate Conference preseason coaches' poll, will again be tested throughout the conference season. Defending MCC champion William Penn sits atop the preseason poll, with Grand View and Iowa Wesleyan rounding out the top three.

After opening the campaign with a pair of road contests, the Bees return home to host the Pepsi Challenge on Nov. 14-15. SAU will play Sioux Falls on Nov. 14 at 7:30 p.m. before hosting Northwestern (Iowa) on Nov. 15 at 3 p.m.