

# Thunder basketball on a mission

## Women prepare to defend provincial title

ANDREW DIRIENZO

The Thunder women's basketball team are preparing to begin their quest to take home a third straight OCAA title.

The season gets underway Nov. 2 and so too does the defense of last year's championship. This year the Thunder roster includes a number of players who have been a part of one or both of the last two championships.

"We've got the rookies who were there last year and have that experience as well as five veterans from our national silver two years ago," said third-year forward Stacey Poapst.

Second-year forward Sarah Ferguson said there are a number of returning players from last year which is great for the team.

Head coach, John MacInnis, said having veterans on the team is huge for him.

"Having kids that have gone through it and have been successful just makes my job easier," he said. "I don't have to be pushing so hard because I know what it takes to get there. A lot of kids know what it takes to get there so it makes a big difference."

First-year forward Ciara Churchill said she thinks having veterans on the team is important. She said they are welcoming and they help push her and the other rookies to get better.

MacInnis, along with the players, are once again looking to the fans to increase their support for the team. Poapst said while the men get most of the attention, "there's a lot about women's basketball that people would enjoy."

"I think it's a good quality of basketball and we have a fun team to watch," said MacInnis, who is in his fifth year as head coach with the team.

The players say while the season hasn't started yet, they know what the team is capable of and are expecting a lot from the season.

"We know what it takes to win and we're all just pushing each other to get back to that," said second-year guard Abeer Farhat.

"Obviously we're still coming together, but we have a lot of talent and we just need to bring it together as a team," Ferguson said.

With the team's past success, there will undoubtedly be some pressure this year, but the players don't seem to be fazed. They say they understand why there is pressure, but feel the team can handle it and thrive on it.

"There is some sort of pressure because we have something to prove this year," Farhat said. We have a target on our backs right now so it's pressure, but I take pressure as a challenge and I think it's exciting that everybody wants to beat us. I think we're all pretty amped to silence people."

While the team doesn't want to get ahead of itself before the season begins, the message is clear between the players themselves and the coach: the three-peat is the goal for the season.

The team's practice jerseys illustrate this goal with a slogan on the backs of their jerseys reading "The Mission."

Notes from the sideline: Trish Grey, Abeer Farhat and Sam Lariviere have been named captains of this year's team.



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First-year guard Brittany Phannenhour cruises to the basket for a lay-up. Phannenhour is among quite a few talented rookies playing for the women's team.