

Spartan hoopsters working hard to make run past first round of playoffs

by Joseph Bahr
Mail Staff Writer

The desire to make it past the first round of the state tournament is strong. After the Spartan basketball team lost its first playoff game in back-to-back years, many players said their goal this season



Photo by Joseph Bahr
Salida High School senior Aaron Morgan attempts to keep the ball away from Grand Valley during the Buena Vista basketball tournament. Morgan shot 67 percent from the free-throw line last season.

was to overcome that barrier.

Senior Braden Collins said he thinks the team needs to do that “to prove ourselves to the state.” Collins was optimistic about the team’s chances of achieving that goal. He said, “We just need time to get into the flow of things.” He emphasized the importance of playing together as a team to overcome any obstacles they face.

After he graduates in the spring, Collins said he plans to go to college, likely at the University of Northern Colorado. He wants to major in wildlife management and become a game warden. He said, “I’ve been an outdoors guy my entire life.”

For senior Aaron Morgan, making it past the first round is not enough. He said, “I want to win state and get my name on the record board.” He said having the highest free-throw percentage was the record he was aiming for, but he would be happy setting any team record. “The game stuck with me,” Morgan said. He has been playing basketball since he was 5 years old.

Morgan said he was concerned about the team’s ability to play well together, noting,



Photo by Brian McCabe
The 2021-2022 Salida High School boys varsity basketball team includes, from left front, Beau Cleckner, Caiven Lake, Aaron Morgan, Aiden Hadley, Damon Redfeather and Daniel Edgington. Back: Ashton Walker, Ben Clayton, Chase Diesslin, Jackson Ewing, Nate Yeakley, Braden Collins and Anthony Ortiz.

“We don’t have much chemistry.” He said the team has been trying to improve their chemistry in many ways. Aside from practice, they have been spending time together

off the court by eating meals with each other.

Senior Damon Redfeather said Salida has a “solid team,” but he was concerned the team did not approach the game the

right way. He said, “I want to work and get better, but others have no mindset. They goof around in practice.”

Redfeather’s inspiration to play basketball came from

watching former Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant play. He said he admired Bryant’s motivation and how he played and approached the game differently than anybody else.

Redfeather is undecided on what to do after he graduates, but he is thinking about becoming a fashion designer. He said he likes basketball shoes and is interested in trying to design his own brand of shoes.

Senior Beau Cleckner said he has personally improved a lot at basketball coming into

this season. He hopes his improvement will bolster the Spartans’ chance of success. He said, “I want to win games and do what I can to help us win games.” Cleckner indicated he was likely to get a job around town after he graduates in spring.

The Spartans have the benefit of strong leadership in their locker room. Chase Diesslin, a junior, said “Braden Collins leads the team pretty well.” He described Collins as quiet, but somebody who sets a strong

Christensen promoted to head coach

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While this is Adam Christensen’s first season as head coach of the Salida boys’ basketball team, it is his 10th year of coaching. Last season he was an assistant coach for the Spartans under Donnie Kaess.

Because of Christensen’s prior experience with the team, the transition has gone smoothly. Junior Nate Yeakley said Christensen was the “best fitted to come into head coach for varsity.” Senior Beau Cleckner echoed that sentiment. He said Christensen “has a lot of good ideas and definitely knows what he’s doing.”

Christensen said the team’s strategy has largely remained the same, but he



Christensen

“put in some new offenses and man D variations.” He said playing a regular 21-game season this year gives them an opportunity to adjust to the changes.

“It’s not X’s and O’s so much,” he said. “It’s how they fit together on the court. If we gel, we could

beat anybody.” Last year the team played 14 games in a season shortened due to the pandemic.

The past two years, the team made the state tournament only to be ousted in the first round. Christensen determined to change that. “We all feel like it would be a disappointment if we didn’t play at least two games in the state tournament,” he said. “The team has the talent to compete with anybody in the state.”

Christensen spoke highly about the players on the Spartans’ roster “Cleckner’s an outstanding kid,” he said. “He makes you want to coach.”

Christensen will be assisted by coaches Chris Bainbridge, Sevrin Kaess and Zach Yeakley.

Schedule*

Date	Time	Opponent	Location
Dec. 18	3 p.m.	La Junta	Salida High School
Jan. 4	7 p.m.	Alamosa	Alamosa High School
Jan. 5	7:30 p.m.	Florence	Salida High School
Jan. 8	2 p.m.	Lake County	Salida High School
Jan. 13	7:30 p.m.	James Irwin	Salida High School
Jan. 15	4 p.m.	Manitou Springs	Manitou Springs High School
Jan. 18	7 p.m.	Colorado Springs Christian	CSCS High School
Jan. 21	7:30 p.m.	Woodland Park	Salida High School
Jan. 27	7 p.m.	Banning Lewis Academy	Banning Lewis
Jan. 29	2 p.m.	Pueblo Centennial	Salida High School
Feb. 2	7:30 p.m.	Ellicott	Salida High School
Feb. 4	7 p.m.	The Vanguard School	Vanguard High School
Feb. 12	4 p.m.	Lamar	Lamar High School
Feb. 15	7:00 p.m.	Buena Vista	Buena Vista High School

*As of Dec. 17

example through his actions. Diesslin said he is determined to give 100 percent effort this season in hopes that the team will have a winning record. He plans to study engineering in college after he graduates from high school.

Junior Nate Yeakley’s love for basketball comes from his mother, who he said was his “coach and main encourager.” Like many of his fellow athletes, his goal for this season is to become better at teamwork and not turn the ball over as

much. He had five turnovers last season.

The Spartans said they are committed to working together, and if they can realize that goal they might be poised for a deep run in the state playoffs this year.

Roster

Seniors

Beau Cleckner
Braden Collins
Aaron Morgan
Damon Redfeather

Daniel Edgington
Jackson Ewing
Caiven Lake
Anthony Ortiz
Ashton Walker

Juniors

Simon Bertolino
Chase Diesslin
Aiden Hadley
Tristan Jackson
Nate Yeakley

Freshmen

Joey Brown
Ben Davenport
Avery Duquette
Dylan Grant
Brody Hudson
Sam Jones
Oliver Siegfried
Ryan Osness
Kason Westphal

Sophomores

Karl Brown
Ben Clayton
Jett Ecker

3A Tri-Peaks League

Banning Lewis Academy
Buena Vista
Colorado Springs Christian
Ellicott
Florence
James Irwin

La Junta
Lamar
Manitou Springs
Salida
St. Mary’s
The Vanguard School

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