

Following Mentor's 10th game of the season (65-64 win over Euclid), we are now at the half way point in the regular season. The Cards are off to a great 8-2 start and are now preparing for a much tougher second half of the schedule. All three of the big LEL games (Cleveland Heights, Shaker, Euclid) will be on the road in January and February. Along with a road game against Brunswick, Mentor has some tough home games against rival Lake Catholic, VASJ, and Warren Harding. If Mentor can find a way to at win 5 or 6 in the second half, they should go into the Euclid district as one of the favorites.

Before the season began, the Mentor basketball program faced some serious adversity. The Cardinals graduated three starting seniors (Rich Huggett, Matt Greene, and Brett Granger) that were a valuable part of last seasons' success. Mentor also lost promising sophomore Ryan Rowe to a season-ending ACL injury. To make matters worse, a number of players who contributed to last year's team ended up quitting before the season began. Due to a number of reasons (mostly because of specialization in a sport other than basketball), four seniors and three juniors decided not to play basketball this winter. How did this team handle such hard times with a great start? Well, a pretty favorable schedule and excellent play from four new starters are some of the reasons. But we can boil down Mentor's success to three things:

Three Keys to Success

1. It starts with some great coaching and a group of kids buying into the system - especially on the defensive side of the ball. Coach Krizancic and his staff have done an excellent job preparing the team to play the kind of basketball that best suits everyone. Like teams of Mentor's past, the 2007-08 Cards do a great job of putting full-court pressure on opponents. Some nights it works better than others, but this Mentor team has certainly forced more turnovers than teams in recent years. Despite a lack of size (tallest starters are 6'2 and 6'3), Mentor has found a way to do an admirable job defensively against much bigger teams.
2. Last year's Mentor team had a group of shooters and slashers, but nobody to run the offense as a true point guard. Current senior Joey Meyer often ran the point last year, and it took away from his ability to score. Super sophomore Jaron Crowe (younger brother of former Mentor players Jason and Jon) has done a great job at setting up the offense to do what it does best: make the open three-pointer. Crowe is joined in the back court by Meyer and freshman Cole Krizancic. The entire teams does a great job of handling the basketball, making good passes, and doing the right decision with and without the ball. For the most part this young team (starting only one senior) limits mistakes. The Cards have been forcing much more turnovers than committing themselves, and that has put them in position to win a lot of games so far.
3. Equally important as the other two keys to Mentor's success thus far has been their unbelievable accuracy from beyond the three-point line. Traditionally, Mentor is a dangerous shooting team - but this year they are more accurate than almost* every Cardinal team in recent memory. Instead of having just one or two three-point shooters out on the floor, nearly every guy on the floor has the ability to nail the shot. Meyer leads the team in three-pointers made and has over a 60% shooting percentage from beyond the arc. Crowe and Krizancic give Mentor one of the most talented shooting back courts in the area, and maybe even in the state. Forwards like Scott Branchick, Ben Pike, and Daniel Hammonds have also proven to be effective at shooting

the trey. The team routinely makes a dozen or more three-pointers in a game, and that will take them a long way if they can keep it going.

What to Expect...

As the second half of the schedule begins, Mentor has some very winnable games early on with two home dates against Warrensville Heights and Lake Catholic along with a road game against St. Thomas Aquinas, a team currently looking for its first victory. As a whole, January should be a pretty successful month for Mentor. This young team should continue to get better and hopefully will add a little more depth from the bench.

Mentor should enter the month of February with a 12-4 or 13-3 record. They will need to get as many wins this month as possible as February is an absolute meat-grinder. Road games against Cleveland Heights and Euclid are followed by home dates against a couple of state-ranked teams (VASJ and Warren Harding). Luckily for Mentor, the voting for the seeds at the Euclid district are done in early February and two or three late losses won't impact their playoff position. Look for Mentor to grab the No. 2 seed at Euclid just behind currently undefeated Glenville.

If this team continues to stay committed defensively, makes good decisions with the basketball, and shoot lights out from beyond the arc – they are going to be a dangerous team in the playoffs.

** The 2000-01 team made 275 three pointers, which is the 3rd highest total in state history. Halfway through the regular season, these young Cards have made 109 three-pointers. If they continue on this pace, they will have 218 after the regular season. The 00-01 team won their district and ended up playing 25 total games. In order to surpass Mentor's single season record, this team would have to get even hotter (is that possible?) and/or play a lot of playoff games. Neither is out of the range of possibility.*