

Every shot counts

Hoping to return to state, the Eagles rely on confidence and experience

by Shyloh Gavierrez

After making it to the NSAA State Basketball Tournament in the 2022-2023 season, the Southern Valley Girls Basketball team came back this year with higher expectations. Their goal isn't just to make the tournament, but to also win games in Lincoln.

"When the season started, our goal was to get back," said head coach Richard McDonald. "One of the biggest things is that we have to earn our trip. It's not given, and it's not guaranteed."

The Eagles know that every game, every play, and every shot counts. They hope their hard work pays off in the post season, but the path to getting there has not been easy. "I think the hardest part of the season has been getting through injuries. We have had three girls hurt, but they all pushed through, and they're all back," said Laurel Stalder, a senior on the team. "I hope we will be able to persevere and push through with confidence without overlooking any opponents."

The Lady Eagles have worked through their difficulties, becoming stronger and gaining confidence along the way. "Because of injuries, we've had to play with a mix match of starters— nine different girls have started a game— and that's always difficult, but I think the girls are playing well with adversity," said McDonald. "The girls are continuing to improve, and that is the other aspect that I really like. As the games get bigger and bigger, the girls become more and more confident in their abilities."

So far this season, the Eagles have a 19-1 record. They won the RPAC conference on January 27, 2024, over the Maywood-Hayes Center Wolves. Now, they have their sights set on districts. With a shot at the top seed in their subdistrict, the Eagles are continuously working to get better. "Something we can always improve on is rebounding. I feel that it's something that we're working on, and I feel like it's also something we're getting better at," said McDonald.

As an upperclassman on the team, Stalder also sees ways for the Eagles to improve. "I think something we need to work on a little is looking in more at our posts. I also think a big thing is just staying healthy, but despite everything, I'm confident in where we are at right now."

With just four regular season games remaining, the Eagles are striving to reach their goals while still enjoying the rest of the season. "We have some qualities that I think set us apart from other teams," said McDonald. "The girls are poised and as a group have great upperclassmen. They really do a great job of playing under control and as a team."

As for winning games in Lincoln, McDonald said, "Last year when we were just excited to go to state, the girls get there," he continued, "but it was kind of like a vacation. Let's go to the pool, let's go to the mall. This year it needs to be more like a business trip," he said. "We need to have the mindset that we're here for a reason, to win games, but still have some fun in the process."

The girls are poised and experienced, and we as a group have great leadership from our upperclassmen.



Coach McDonald presents Laurel Stalder with her RPAC champion medal.



Talking to the Eagles during a timeout in the RPAC championship game, Coach McDonald encourages his team to keep up their intensity.