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(Neb.)-CSC Men's Team To Host Kearney Monday Night

By: Dennis and Kathi Brown Posted at: 11/10/2012 10:16 AM

CHADRON – The Chadron State College men's basketball team will open its season Monday night by playing one of its archrivals—the University of Nebraska-Kearney Lopers. Tip-off will be at 7 o'clock in the Armstrong Building.

After Kearney left the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference last year to join the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletics Association that is comprised primarily of Missouri and Kansas schools, it was feared that the Lopers might never return to play the Eagles. The games with UNK annually drew Chadron State's largest crowds.

However, UNK will open its season Sunday afternoon by playing South Dakota Mines in Rapid City and play at CSC en route back to Kearney.

The Antelopes and the Eagles have met on the basketball court 178 times dating back to 1921-22. Kearney holds a 112-66 bulge in the all-time series, although Chadron State nipped the Lopers 75-73 during the regular-season finale in Chadron last season.

Two nights later, when the teams met in Kearney in the first round of the RMAC playoffs, the Lopers prevailed 82-62.

Both teams have undergone considerable changes since then.

After graduating its top three scorers from a year ago and losing point guard Sammy Hines to a knee injury just a few days before the 2012-13 practices began, Chadron State has no full-time starters returning. However, seven players who were associated with the team last year will be on the roster Monday night.

Kearney also has had considerable turnover.

Two starters in the final games last season and four more players who were on the roster are back from the UNK team that finished 16-12.

The returning starters in the late-season games are senior guard Jon Henderson, who averaged 12.1 points and made 83 of 101 free throws last winter, and sophomore forward Tyler Shields.

Also back is forward Mike Detlinger, a 6-6 junior who was leading the Lopers in scoring at 14.9 points a game when he suffered a knee injury 20 games into the season.

Following the injury, Shields, a native of Kearney, replaced Detlinger in the lineup and capably took up much of the slack.

Another returnee, senior guard Akeem Morissaint, started part-time last season and is a 3-point threat.

Kearney flew to Gainesville, Fla., last week and played the University of Florida in an exhibition game. The Gators won 101-71, but UNK had some impressive performances. Two natives of Arizona who joined the Lopers this season combined to score 37 points.

Freshman Sami Bzai connected on seven of 10 field goal tries, including five of eight from 3-point range, for 19 points, and sophomore Newton Prince scored 18 points.

Detlinger added 11 points.

CSC coach Brent Barga said this week that his young team has been up and down in practices and he's not sure what to expect.

"With no starters back after we lost Sammy, we could take our lumps early," Barga said. "But I like our team. I'm encouraged that we are athletic enough so if we play hard and execute like we should we can be pretty competitive.

"We're just so young and don't have much Division II experience. We've got some talent, but none of the players has been here more than a year. Nearly everyone is learning a new system and has new teammates."

Barga said he expects all of the returnees to contribute more than they did last year.

The lettermen are 6-6 Josh Hatcher, the team's only senior now that Hines is sidelined; junior guards David Downey and Tim McDavid, both of Scottsbluff; and sophomores Kendrick Holliman (6-4) and Michael Safer (6-10).

The roster also includes sophomore Mouhamed Diop (6-8) and redshirt freshman Justyn Anderson, who is being counted on to take Hines' place in the starting lineup at point guard. Both were injured last season and did not play.

They are joined by three community college transfers—Grant Stone, Chris Taylor and Zac Barga, the coach's son. All three are 6-5. Two freshmen also are being counted on to help. They are Dominique Watkins, who will back Anderson at point guard, and 6-8 Brandon Pippenger.

The coach said each of the transfers has made big strides in recent practices while becoming more familiar with the system.

Two graduate assistants are helping coach the Eagles. They are Chadron native Will Pope, who also was on the staff last year, and Matt Majkrzak, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

After hosting Kearney, the Eagles will play an exhibition game at Colorado State in Fort Collins on Thursday, Nov. 15 and then meet Montana Tech and Westminster College in the Westminster Tournament in Salt Lake City on Nov. 23-24