

Breese Central remains the team to beat

Marquette Catholic, Pana, Pittsfield all bring upset credentials

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VANDALIA – For head coach Stan Eagleson, preparing for another Class 2A Sectional is old hat. This coach is going for his eighth sectional championship, including what would be four-consecutive trips to the supersectional.

His **Breese Central Cougars** finished as the top-ranked team in 2A in the final regular season poll and have been the ABV top-ranked Carbondale Supersectional Area team since being picked as the preseason choice to reach Peoria once again.

Central stands at 29-1 on the campaign, with a lone blemish coming at the hands of St. Louis (MO.) Vianny back on January at the Highland (IL.) Optimist Shootout. The accomplishments this season are many, including winning the championships of all three tournaments; Effingham St. Anthony Thanksgiving, Breese Mater Dei Holiday and Nashville Invitational.

They managed to beat their crosstown rivals and perennial power Mater Dei four times this season, including a 45-29 triumph to capture their fourth consecutive regional title last Friday night at Freeburg, which was their eighth in ten seasons.

Leading the way is the school's all-time leading scorer 6-foot-6 senior forward Brandon Book (20.3 p.p.g., 8.7 r.p.g.) who is a four-year starter. If the Cougars win their next two games, he will become one of only a handful of players to have ever played in four-consecutive supersectionals.

Defense is the name of the game in this part of Clinton County and the Cougars shut teams down with a suffocating man-to-man. Opponents are averaging a mere 40 points a game while Central is putting up over 20-points per game more than that.

As they were last season, the backcourt tandem of 5-foot-10 senior Nick Grapperhaus and 6-foot-11 sophomore Jacob Timmerman have delivered the mail on both ends of the floor. Offensively they have each scored just under 10-points a contest for the Cougars this season but their main objective that they have achieved this season is been to lock down the opposing team's backcourt.

The main reason that Breese Central has been so successful this season (and in the past) is that other teams simply can't muster up enough points. Five-foot-eight junior Justin Becker and classmate Austin Rickhoff, a 6-foot-2 junior, have stepped up this season to average around six points a contest.

Six-foot-five Kyler Scheer miss all but 12 games this season but is back and has contributed by adding much needed size to the frontcourt. Gavin Thomas is a 5-foot-10 junior guard who, along with Book, Rickhoff, Grapperhaus and Timmermann, has played in all 30-games for BC. Andrew Schulte is a 6-foot-11 senior contributor of minutes and points for Coach Eagleson as is Greg Meyer, a 5-foot-9 junior who is another good backcourt player.

Alton Marquette Catholic will get the first shot at dethroning the Cougars in a semifinal on Wednesday night. The Explorers also boast quite a resume, having also won all three of their tournaments at Lebanon, Columbia and Litchfield, beating some of the same teams that Central has.

Coach Steve Medford has just one senior on the squad who has become a top reserve after missing the early part of the season due to an injured ankle.

Derrick Starrett, a 6-foot-4 forward, is a 1,000-point scorer but isn't called upon to do much scoring now that he has a lot of help. The leading point producer on the club is D'tae McMurray, a 5-foot-10 sophomore guard, who averages 11.1 points a game.

Jake Coddington, a 6-foot-5 junior forward, is right there with 11.0 p.p.g. Four other Marquette

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players are averaging between ten and eight points a game. Six-foot-two junior Sam Scheiter averages 9.8 p.p.g. while 6-foot-1 sophomore guard Deion Lavender adds 9.7 points a game. Mike Williams-Bey, a 5-foot-8 sophomore, adds 8.4 points to the game stats each night. Five-foot-six sophomore Keshon Young averages four points a contest.

Marquette has a pair of shootout losses, to Flora 43-40 at Centralia and a 48-34 loss to Glenbard North at a shootout in St. Louis. Offensively the Explorers (28-2) are good enough to hang with Central. But the real test will be defensively whether or not they can shut down Book & Co.

In their win over Roxana to claim the regional title at East Alton-Wood River, the Explorers experimented by spreading the ball to make the slower Shells play a 'shell' game. It paid off with a 25-13 win. The ability to run clock and limit possessions could become a factor in trying to slow down Central.

The **Pana Panthers** (25-4) are in the sectional on the strength of its win over Vandalia last Friday night to win its own regional. Head coach Gary Bowker knows a thing or two about making postseason runs having taken the Panthers to Peoria a couple of times (2001, 2004) and he has some weapons that could get him a third trip in the cards fall into place.

The top two guns on the Panthers' squad are 6-foot-3 senior Jared McMillen (17.7 p.p.g.) and 6-foot-4 Mitchell Beyers (13.4 p.p.g.).

As this duo goes, so go the Panthers as they are the only two players in double-digits in scoring for a club that was the 'bride's maid' in the only two tournaments in which they played in 2011-12. The Panthers were the runners' up at Vandalia losing to Flora and were second place after a 60-53 loss to Marquette in the title game at Litchfield.

Coach Bowker's team does have some other contributors with Allen Kile (8.4 p.p.g.) and Avery Hrabak (6.8 p.p.g.) also pitching in points. Hrabak netted a game-high 17-points in Pana's 57-43 win over Vandalia in the regional title game.

The **Pittsfield Saukees** are taking a new route to what will hopefully be another trip to Peoria.

Coach Brad Tomhave will have his kids ready for a Tuesday night game with Pana. After a rough start to the season the Saukees are on a roll and stand at 20-9 on the season.

Six-foot-five senior Dalton Hoover is the top-gun for Pittsfield, averaging 17.5 points a game.

Wayde Smith, a 5-foot-11 sophomore, is second in scoring with 6.3 points a game for Coach Tomhave.

Five-foot-eleven senior Seth Petty (6.3 p.p.g.) 5-foot-10 junior Ethan Borrowman (5.5 p.p.g.) and 5-foot-10 junior Kennedy Kattelman (5.0 p.p.g.) are all capable of making big shots.

Hoover and Kattelman helped propel the Saukees into the sectional by hitting for 15 and 14-points respectively in a 51-44 regional title win over Winchester West Central last Friday night at White Hall-North Greene. The Saukees upset Teutopolis at the Springfield Supersectional last March and would like to add to the long standing legacy at this school by advancing back to Peoria for a second straight year.

Pittsfield is third in all-time wins in the State of Illinois (1,795-888 in 106-seasons) behind only Centralia and Collinsville.

ABV Projected Sectional Champion – Breese Central.

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