

# Wayne City hosts balanced field

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BY JACK BULLOCK

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**WAYNE CITY** - The 63<sup>rd</sup> annual Conrad Allen Wayne City Holiday Tournament will begin on December 10 with a field of eight teams vying for the title with at least seven of the teams with a legitimate shot at the championship. The tournament will feature three teams that have already won tournament titles this season.

**Patoka** enters the tournament sitting on an 8-0 record, having went 4-0 in winning the Mulberry Grove Thanksgiving Tournament the first week of the season. Coach Joe Eddy led the Warriors to the IA Carbondale Supersectional last March and his club hasn't let up any, getting off to another great start. However Patoka entered this holiday event last season unbeaten only to slump to fifth place. Of the lows of last season's roller coaster ride, the week spent at Wayne City was one that Coach Eddy doesn't want to see repeated. The top two players from last season's 24-12 club return and both have put up "eye-popping" early season stats. ABV IA All-South first team selection from 2015-16 Jered Cain, a 6-foot-1 senior swing-man, continues his torrid pace of scoring. His average of 22.6 points and 9.3 rebounds a game is inspiring and his 7.7 assists a game and 3.4 steals shows that he can do it all on both ends of the floor. Cain's numbers are slightly lower than the end of last season, mainly due to his teammate Garrett Belcher taking care of more of the duties. The 6-foot-5 senior forward has put in 20.6 points a contest so far this season. His 10 rebounds and 3.4 blocks a night has made the Warriors much better defensively this season. Patoka is only allowing 40 points a game for the opposition while scoring 65 a game. The other three starters have combined to toss in just over 18-points a game for Patoka. Six-foot-four Jordan Cobb, 6-foot-1 Bailey O'Brien and 5-foot-9 Skylar Webb are seniors that are chipping right at six-points a night. Webb is new to the program having transferred in from Salem and according to Coach Eddy is starting to get comfortable in the system. Five-foot-eleven senior Joey Sturgeon and 5-foot-9 senior Mack Herrin also play valuable minutes while 5-foot-11 freshman Colton Hill has emerged as a key player for the Warriors early in the 2016-17 campaign. Patoka's best win so far this season was a 59-56 win over St. Elmo-Brownstown in the title game at Mulberry Grove in which tournament MVP Cain netted 30-points. They also have wins over South Central (twice), North Clay, Ramsey, Odin, Clay City and Mulberry Grove. It's safe to say that the competition this week at the Conrad Allen will be a tough test.

The host **Wayne City Indians** are the defending champions after taking home the title last season with a 53-49 overtime win over Cisne in the title game. Coach Don Kueper has his club off to a great beginning, having won the Christopher Thanksgiving Tournament with a win over the host Bearcats in the final, 61-57. Wayne City is also undefeated, sitting at 6-0 after a Tuesday night win over Cisne added to the resume. A trio of seniors have led the Indians to this successful beginning of this season but two of them will miss the tournament. Eric Green, a 6-foot-1 senior leaders, tosses home 18-points a night for the Tribe, 54 percent of his overall shots from the floor. Even more impressive is his long range skills as Green has excelled from the arc. He is knocking down 51 percent of his 3-point bombs so far in 2016-17 and on the defensive end he leads Wayne City in steals. He was diagnosed with a leg infection is his status for the week is questionable. Chad Dickey runs things in the paint for the Indians, as the 6-foot-4 senior vet is putting up 16-points a game along with six rebounds a contest. Unfortunately for Coach Kueper and Co., the third senior on this list will also miss the Conrad Allen this week due to injury. Clayten Tubbs, a 6-foot-3 senior starter and leader, is out with a sprained ankle injury. He will be missed but there are others in the ready to pick up the slack in the Wayne City rope. Junior Jaxon King, a 6-foot-3 forward, and 5-foot-11 senior Jordan Greenwalt are also mainstays on the squad. Landon Willet, a 5-foot-8 senior guard, usually comes off the bench to spark Wayne City. He is the top assist man for WC and he is hitting a team-high 88 percent from the foul line while averaging five-points a game. His Hail-Mary halfcourt shot at the end of overtime beat Waltonville in the semifinals of the Christopher Thanksgiving Tournament, an event the Indians eventually won with a 51-47 win over the hosts. "I feel for Chad and Clayten, as seniors this will be their last Conrad Allen tournament," said Coach Kueper. "If they do play this week, neither will be 100 percent."

**Crab Orchard** opened its season 7-0 but suffered their first loss of the season on Tuesday night at GEC rival Gallatin County 53-49 and stand 8-1 after a win over Galatia Friday night. Coach Jon Brown has a solid club coming into this tournament with a pair of leaders topping the scoring chart. Caleb Vaughn, a 6-foot-3 senior guard who excels inside and outside for the Trojans, is averaging right under 20-points a night for the Trojans while

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snagging 8.4 rebounds a night. Five-foot-ten junior guard Levi Vinson adds 12.7 points per outing to the offense. Cameron Stephens, a 5-foot-7 junior guard, ignites the offense at times for the Trojans, hitting for 9.5 p.p.g. Two inside players are also major factors for Crab Orchard. McKager Ferrell, a 6-foot-3 post presence, averages 9.5 points and 6.8 rebounds per night while Amos Beasley, a 6-foot-4 senior center, chips in 6.5 points and 3.4 rebounds. Coach Brown usually plays a lot of kids and there are more that will help out. Jaden Schell, a 5-foot-11 senior (6.1 points, 3.0 assists) and 5-foot-9 junior Zachary Holmes (1.4 points) are strong support. All of those numbers were from prior to the Gallatin County game.

For the **Red Hill Salukis** (3-5) and head coach Bryan Havill, they have found themselves a nice fit at the Conrad Allen. These Dawgs play a “dog-gone” brutal schedule and although the schools will be smaller at this event, the competition will still be a challenge. Red Hill enters the event with an overtime win over 3A Olney Richland in overtime along with a road win at Hutsonville-Palestine and a home triumph over Martinsville. Coach Havill has a veteran backcourt leader with Kameron Vinsel, a 6-foot-1 senior, back for his senior season. His numbers are even better than last season so far as he has put in 21.3 points per game against a mostly larger school schedule, especially at the Lawrence County Capital Classic where they lost to 3A Salem, Fairfield and juggernaut Marshall. He also tops the club with 2.4 assists and helps out with 3.6 rebounds. Five-foot-ten junior Corbin Shoulders (8.7 p.p.g.) while junior 6-foot-2 Andy Wells (6.1 p.p.g.) also lends a hand. Their strength of schedule heading into the Conrad Allen event makes them a major contender for the championship. After finishing fourth last season, the Salukis hope to add additional hardware this week.

**Webber Township** and head coach Brad Beaty also look to be a threat to capture the title this week as the Trojans are off to a fine start with a 5-1 mark overall with victories over Waltonville, Thompsonville (2), Odin and Zeigler-Royalton. Dylan Stratton, a 5-foot-11 junior guard, is over 16-points a night for Webber as he leads a quartet of double-digit scorers for the balanced Trojans' attack. Six-foot-four junior forward Charles Neal (16.3 points, seven rebounds) does his damage mostly in the paint. Six-foot senior Jaxon Helm scores from all over the court, inside on drives and outside from the arc. The same can be said for 6-foot-1 junior Brodie Mount. Both Helm and Mount are over 10-points a ballgame for Webber Township. A strong defensive effort this week could put them in the championship picture.

**Grayville** relies a lot on scoring ace Kase Robinson, a 6-foot-3 senior forward who is nearing 2,000-points for his prep run at the school. They are 2-4 heading into the tournament with wins over Cisne and Sandoval and losses to Gallatin County, Wayne City and 2A Edwards County twice. Robinson has scorched teams with 23.2 points a contest as he shows a knack of scoring inside and getting to the foul line. He has help coming from his senior class as six other seniors are part of the framework of the Bison program. Wyatt Hatcher, a 6-foot-4 forward, has added 14.6 points a contest for Grayville. Point guard Grant Leavens, a 5-foot-9 senior is the point guard for Coach Brian Hucker. John Reeves, a 6-foot-1 senior, along with 5-foot-8 senior guard Aaron Davis, also help run the show. Keaton Lingafelter, a 5-foot-10 senior, and 6-foot-3 senior Brandon Rhodes, round out the reserve unit that provides added support.

**Cisne** took the longest of anyone in this field to pick up a victory, having lost their first six ballgames before taking it out on Midland Trail Conference rival Clay City on Thursday night at home. Coach Adam Ellis' club have been competitive but haven't been able to finish games. The Running Lions have run into some injury issues this season and have had some defensive breakdowns. However all that could turn around this week at the WCHT. Lanky 6-foot-1 senior lefty Jared Taylor has produced some memorable games, with all but one coming in defeat. His high-water mark for the season was a 45-point outburst against Grayville at the Bisons' Thanksgiving Tournament, a 67-62 loss. He scored 22-points in the fourth quarter of that contest. Derek Thomason, a 6-foot-1 senior, is chipping in 12-points a night for the Lions. No other Cisne player is putting up over five-points a night for Coach Ellis as he is still searching for the right formula.

The **Fairfield Junior Varsity** is the eighth team in the event, caused by the defection of teams after last season and a cancellation by another school who was going to fill the void just a few weeks ago.

*Jack Bullock is the Editor/Web Publisher of A Baseline View.com; southern Illinois' only boy's high school basketball web publication. He has covered boy's high school hoops on the web since 2001-02*