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## *Sesser-Valier, Waltonville grab top two seeds @ S-VHT*

**BY JACK BULLOCK**

**SESSER**—The unbeaten **Sesser-Valier Red Devils** are the top seeded team at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Sesser-Valier Holiday Tournament slated for December 26-30.

Coach Chip Basso's club stands 8-0 on the year having won the Christopher Thanksgiving Tournament and are leading the Black Diamond West Division with a 4-0 mark. The Red Devils were the Preseason Number One team in the ABV Class IA Deep South and with good reason.

All five starters returned from last season's 23-6 regional championship squad – including top scorer Justin Matyi. Matyi is a 6-foot-4 senior who is a four-year varsity starter. He is once again a dominating force after a junior season in which he averaged a double-double in points and rebounds. This season - after seven games - Matyi is averaging 19.9 points and 9.6 rebounds per contest. He is perhaps the best post player in southern Illinois counting all of the classes and he is one of the keys to this season's tournament. According to first year head coach Chip Basso the Red Devils are rounding into shape. Which is just in time as Sesser-Valier hosts a strong group of challengers ready to battle.

"You could go down the list of the first 7-to-8 teams and make a case for any of those teams to have a chance to win this tournament," said Coach Basso. "This is as strong of a tournament as it has been in a long, long time."

Sesser-Valier also has other offensive weapons with Dane Eubanks – a 6-foot-3 guard/forward – averaging 8.6 points a game while T.J. Eubanks (8.3 p.p.g.), Kendall Gibson (7.1 p.p.g.) and Myles Tinsley (4.1 p.p.g.) all put up good numbers.

The **Waltonville Spartans** (7-1) sport four players averaging double-figures in points so far this winter. Waltonville is the number two seed in the tournament and have just a loss to Du Quoin spoiling a perfect season.

Coach Mike Denault's club has wins over Cairo, Carterville and Benton from the Du Quoin Tip-Off Classic and a key 69-57 win at long-time rival Woodlawn. A recent road win at Mount Carmel (79-61) was also impressive in the fact that the Golden Aces played top-ranked Indiana power Princeton to within single-digits just three nights earlier. Tuesday night's 57-52 win over Hamilton County is a big victory for the Class IA Spartans.

Skyler Witges – a 6-foot-3 senior – has averaged 16.2 points a game for the Spartans. Six-foot-three senior Joseph Lewis isn't far behind at 16.0 p.p.g. Both have passed the 1,000-point mark for their respective careers. Brock Wheatley has been "the glue" that has held this group together for the past two seasons and this point-guard has come up big in big games. The 6-foot-1 senior averages 11.0 points a game for the Spartans and his 28-point outburst at Woodlawn was a game-changing performance. Six-foot-three senior Gavin Bassett averages 12.2 points a game. Those four senior vets would love to add a S-VHT title to the resume.

"There are nine or ten good teams here so we are going to have to come and play every night," explained Coach Denault. "Looking at the top seeds Sesser-Valier hasn't been beaten yet and they are playing good basketball. Goreville is playing exceptional right now and have some big recent wins. Woodlawn got a big boost getting Verhines back and that is going to make them very dangerous. Sparta has played very well and has beaten some good teams and New Athens has a lot back from last season so there are some good teams here that have a chance to win it. As we found out last year if you don't show up every game you will go home early."

The number three seeded **Woodlawn Cardinals** have struggled coming out of the gate without point-guard and leader Dawson Verhines in the first six games of the season. Woodlawn (4-3 overall) after a win over Webber Township in game seven - has leaned on two returning players from last year's 30-2 state runner-up.

Five-foot-eleven senior Casey Hammond (12.8 p.p.g.) and 6-foot-7 junior Josh Wiggs (12.0 p.p.g., 8.0 r.p.g.) have tried to pick up the slack against a tough early season schedule. Seniors Kirk Dunbar, Christian McNeil and John Cavender have been forced to grow up in varsity games this season and should get better as the season progresses. Dunbar has helped out with 8.2 points a game while Cavender (4.5 p.p.g.) and McNeil (4.7 p.p.g., 8.3 r.p.g.) have stepped up. The Cardinals are the defending tournament champs and will be a tough out if Verhines is back near 100 percent.

**Sparta** – the tournaments' fourth seeded club – is perhaps the most dangerous of the group because of its school size (the largest of the field at 412) and its strength of schedule. The Bulldogs are 6-3 with just losses to Class 1A undefeated Madison and SIRR teams Du Quoin and Murphysboro. All three of those schools are a combined 22-1 heading into the Holiday's. Head coach Rich Williams has the Bulldogs playing well with Dartanus White – a 5-foot-11 senior guard – leading the way with 17.8 points per game. Maurice Austin – a 5-foot-11 senior guard – has added 8.0 points per outing. Five-foot-eight senior guard David Sams has chipped in 7.6 p.p.g.

The Bulldogs have quality wins over Anna-Jonesboro, Columbia, Piasa Southwestern and Steeleville.

**New Athens** drew the number five seed in the 16-team field and head coach Marc Derwort has a club that shocked two seeded teams last season to reach the tournament finale and has the squad in place this season to make another sprint to the final day. The Yellow Jackets (4-3) have a win over Woodlawn during the Okawville Post-Thanksgiving Tournament and have lost two narrow games to Okawville and a seven-point decision to Cahokia Conference rival Lebanon.

Six-foot-three senior Tyler Womack (14.6 p.p.g., 4.6 r.p.g.) along with 6-foot-4 junior Vince Kiefer (13.1 p.p.g., 8.1 r.p.g.) have led the way. Six-foot-four senior forward Cody Gaubatz has added 8.7 points to the totals while Adam Ingles – a 6-foot-1 sophomore – contributed 8.6 points thus far this season.

If you are looking for a "dark-horse" pick for the 2009 S-VHT it would be **Goreville**.

The Blackcats have been in this tournament for many years and this might be the season that they break through for a championship. Coach Todd Tripp has his club playing well heading into the Christmas break and they took a step toward winning the SEC regular season title by beating previously undefeated Meridian last Friday at home. Three seniors and a junior have led the Blackcats to 6-2 mark to begin the 2009-10 season.

Six-foot-three senior forward Martin Powell (14.1 p.p.g., 7.0 r.p.g.), 6-foot-3 senior forward Brandon Potocki (10.6 p.p.g.), and 5-foot-10 junior Lee Sopczak (12.6 p.p.g.) along with 5-foot-10 senior Tyler Shadowens (9.3 p.p.g.) have been the leaders so far this season. Wins over Carmi-White County and Hamilton County – along with the Meridian win – show that this team was perhaps under appreciated when the seeds were sown for the bracket.

**Zeigler-Royalton** (8-5) has played in a pair of tournament championship games and have two second place finishes after losing to both Sesser-Valier and Crab Orchard by a total of six points.

Coach Jamie Moyers' Tornadoes rely on forward Tyler Mitchell – a 6-foot-2 senior – who has averaged double-digits a game. A pair of guards senior guard – 5-foot-8 Jake Wawczak and 6-foot Jimmy Stevens – have solidified the Z-R backcourt. If the Tornadoes are going to reach a third title game this season – all three will need outstanding efforts this week.

**Century** (4-4) is led by Chris Baker – a 6-foot senior guard - who just passed the 1,000-point mark. Baker is the team catalyst for the Centurions who left Eldorado for a return to the Sesser-Valier Holiday Tournament.

Coach Tyson Boarman has 6-foot-1 senior guard Jacob Wyatt in his smallish lineup along with JaRed Clemons – a 6-foot senior – and sophomore guard Josh Wright. Five-foot-eleven senior Trevor Pullett also sees significant minutes along with 6-foot-3 senior Antwaon Salley.

The **Cobden Appleknockers** (6-3) have been led in scoring by 6-foot-3 senior Steve Draper with 16.5 p.p.g. and 6-foot-1 junior Robby Lehr with 15.0 p.p.g.

**Marissa-Coulterville** (2-6) has two players averaging in double-figures. Six-foot-two forward Michael Lloyd (15.2 p.p.g.) and 5-foot-9 guard Cody Mahan (11.0 p.p.g.).

Six-foot-two senior Matt Davidson, 6-foot-1 junior Steven Dial and 6-foot-2 junior Devin Austill lead the 4-4 Christopher Bearcats into the tournament.

**Vienna** has Drake Sanders – a 6-foot-1 senior – and 6-foot-2 junior Markus Stram – leading the 1-6 Eagles.

Zach Lochhead is a 6-foot-2 junior who – along with 6-foot-2 senior Aaron Grah and 6-foot senior Brett Bathol – have paced coach Robert Bell's **Chester Yellow Jackets** (2-6).

**Shawnee** (1-7) looks for a Tyler Trio for leadership and scoring.

Six-foot-two senior Tyler Davis tops the Redskins along with 6-foot senior guard Tyler Glidewell and 6-foot-1 senior Tyler Spurlock lead coach Brett Pinion's team.

**Johnston City** (0-8) and Elverado (0-8) are the only two winless teams in the field and drew tough first round assignments. Six-foot-one senior Nick Dean (JC) and 6-foot-2 senior Kyle Kempfer (Elverado) pace their respective clubs.

**Jack Bullock is the editor/web publisher of A Baseline View.com. For more information about Southern Illinois Boy's High School Basketball—go to [www.abaselineview.com](http://www.abaselineview.com).**