



Men's Basketball | 2/15/2016 5:20:00 PM | Shawn Smith, Sports Information Director

UMC Men's Basketball Staff Emphasizes the Process as Young Players Continue to Grow as Division II Student-Athletes



When practice opened up for the 2015-16 men's basketball season [Dan Weisse](#), the second-year Head Men's Basketball Coach at the University of Minnesota Crookston, had 10 faces that he knew only from the recruiting process. None of these guys had ever played a game in one of the best NCAA Division II conferences, the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference, and many of them were fresh-faced 18 and 19 year olds used to being the best players on their team.

The adjustment hasn't always been easy. It has been a process. But a process that is well in the works as Coach Weisse and his staff try to turn around the Golden Eagle men's basketball program. A process that hasn't shown up in the wins column yet, but one that has been able to be noticed with the way his young players have grown throughout the year.

"They have certainly taken a big step forward from coming in and having so many new guys at the beginning of the year," Weisse said. "They had to learn a new offense, as well as a new defense. They all came from many types of coaches, very good coaches, but every coach does things a little differently and have some subtleties in that regard."

The 10 newcomers, which includes six true freshman and four junior college transfers, also had to make an adjustment to the style of play in the league, which was faster and more physical than most were used to.

"Last year all of us freshman were the oldest guys on our high school team," said UMC freshman wing [Chase Knickerbocker](#). "We were 18 and 19 year olds playing against 16 and 17 year olds. Now we are 19 year olds playing against 23 year olds. The physicality is an adjustment. I think we have started to figure that out and we have been competing and we are continuing to get better."

"It is going to be a change any time you go from a different to coach a new coach, that is one thing, but then you come to a league like the NSIC, which is one of the best Division II leagues in the country," Weisse said. "You are going to have to compete with great players night in and night out and plays against physical players, who are longer and stronger than those our guys have faced in the past. It takes a while to figure out."

One of the biggest adjustments for players this season came especially for the guys who found themselves in the post against senior big men like Augustana University's Daniel Jansen, one of the nation's best, along with several other experienced and strong post players.

"The biggest adjustment for me has been strength down low," said freshman post [Nate Lorenz](#). "I am going to work to get stronger this off-season. The speed of the game is also faster. I also have needed to adjust to using different post moves to get an advantage and using my feet more in the post and getting angles."

While not all of the players were unfamiliar with playing college basketball, it has also been a major transition for the junior college players to get used to the style of play offered at the Division II level and within Coach Weisse's system.

"First off there is a difference in style of play between junior college and four-year basketball," junior guard [Xavier Hall](#) said. "It takes a while to understand the pace of the game. Sometimes it is okay to push in transition, but you need to realize when it is time to slow the game down and work on your half-court game. We just need to get better at understanding those parts of the game."

"Junior college is definitely a big change because at a four year it is more of a foundation and at junior college you are essentially bringing in a new team every semester," said junior forward [Ben Grygiel](#). "The hardest transition has been getting used to the style of play. I played on a transition team and we would run the ball up and down the court and this is more of a Wisconsin style basketball. It works out really well, we just have to get our chemistry down."

While it has been tough at times for the 10 newcomers to the UMC men's basketball program, the signs are in fact there. The coaching staff knew it wasn't always going to be easy this season.

"I like to think we have a great coaching staff here, but we don't have a magic wand that says that you will now be a good basketball player," Weisse said. "We try to recruit high achieving guys to this program and guys that will put in the time to get better whether the coaching staff is around or not around. They will get in the weight room on their own. They will get into the gym of their own. We feel like we have those guys."

[Kobe Critchley](#), a freshman point guard for the team, has seen the progress and vast improvements that he has been able to make along with his teammates.

"The results of our games isn't showing how much we have improved this season," Critchley said. "We have come a long way since playing that first game against Waldorf. Defensively we are getting better and offensively we are starting to make better decisions."

"Really it has been night and day from the first day to where they are today," Weisse said. "These guys were all very good high school players but now they are college players. They have had a great experience this year and I think they will see a big difference next year because we will have guys coming in next year that have been through it for a year."

As the Golden Eagles wrap up the 2015-16 season, it will be important to find ways to continue to grow and get better as they hit the weights and spend their time in the gym, trying to find those ways to become better individually to help the team become better, as a whole.

"I definitely need to get a lot bigger and stronger," Knickerbocker said. "The physicality was definitely an adjustment but I have started to figure that out. I also need to learn how to slow the game down. The game is so much faster at this level and you have to find a way to be comfortable."

"We have been doing a lot of individual stuff toward the end of the season to help us with that part of the game," Lorenz said. "It is a big thing that has helped me in the post. Learning how to use more of my face-up game and shot fakes to make it easier for me to score against bigger, stronger and longer guys than myself. They have been very patient with us because they know it is a process and we know it is a process."

One big area of improvement will be on the defensive end, always an adjustment for young players, but something that is necessary against the talent that UMC faces in the Northern Sun.

"Coming off the bench, I try to provide energy," Hall said. "My defensive ability is something that keeps me on the floor, so I want to continue to work on my shot and shooting the same way every time. The defensive part is very important in this league and we really need to improve on that coming into next season."

While it will continue to take time and hard work as the 10 players, who were new faces, but who will soon become veterans on the roster, it is one that the members of the team and coaching staff are excited for as the team continues to grow.

"I am really excited," Lorenz said. "I know that we are all hard-working guys and we are only going to get older, so with that we will be able to get stronger this off-season. We are only going to get better, as long as we work harder than anyone else in the off-season"

"There are not too many freshman playing in this conference, in general, and we have like five of our top nine or 10 playing," Knickerbocker said. "That tells you that their definitely needs to be some patience but with that patience we definitely have a reason that we see that there could be something bright in our futures."

But as the process continues to take its course, one thing is for sure, these guys will be together. For they might have been 10 individuals when they first walked into the locker room in the UMC Sports Center, but today they are teammates and friends, for the long run.

"I think it is going to benefit us in the long run that we all came in together," Critchley said. "We are really young right now, which everyone knows, but we can't blame everything on being young. We have to start producing at some point, but we will so I am not too worried about that."

But for now the focus is on the remaining three games UMC has guaranteed on their schedule. While they want to continue to get better and progress to more success for next season, the Golden Eagles are focused on sending their lone senior, Redd, out on a winning note.

"We are just trying to finish out this year as well as we can," Grygiel said. "We want to get as many more wins as we can for our senior captain [Derrick Redd, Jr.](#) I feel like if you are a good captain like D.J. is, all of your teammates want to follow you. You have to be able to set a good example on and off the court and have everyone on the same page and work toward getting the wins. That is something D.J. has done and something I look to strive for as I transition from one of the new guys to a senior next season."

To do something the right way often takes a process and if you haven't noticed that is a key word with the UMC men's basketball team. The Golden Eagles haven't been as focused on the wins and losses this season, but are they getting better? The answer to that question is a resounding yes. They are better than they were when they arrived in August and they will continue to get better. Be sure to tune in during the coming years when the proof of their work this season should pay dividends. The University of Minnesota Crookston men's basketball team is a program to keep your eye on.

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PLAYERS MENTIONED	
#10 Derrick Redd, Jr. G / 6' 1" / Redshirt Senior	#13 Kobe Critchley G / 6' 0" / Freshman
#32 Ben Grygiel F / 6' 5" / Junior	#25 Chase Knickerbocker G/F / 6' 6" / Freshman
#34 Nate Lorenz F / 6' 7" / Freshman	#14 Xavier Hall G / 6' 1" / Junior

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