

**BASKETBALL**

# Girls Basketball: Old Bridge "getting better every day"

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At the end of last year the Old Bridge High School girls basketball team learned what it was capable of, and this season the Knights are looking to build on that momentum and the lessons they learned.

Old Bridge went 4-12 last season before winning six of its last seven games and advancing to the Greater Middlesex Conference Tournament quarterfinals. Coach Alec Alspach isn't one to dwell on the past, but acknowledged that the late season run had a positive impact on his players.

"I try not to harp on last season and get the girls to look to the future, 24 hours is our rule about wins and losses, but it's helped in showing the girls that if we play the basketball that we can play, we're a competitive team," Alspach said. "I think that it showed the girls last year that once we figured things out, we played some really good basketball and beat some really good teams. The girls just bought in and came back and worked every day and that's one of our signature program sayings, 'Getting better every day,' and they're living up to that and we're building off the momentum and getting better every day, and I think they're doing a really nice job."

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Old Bridge only lost one player from last year's team, guard Abby Zimmerlink, and even though there are six varsity players returning, the Knights will still be a young team. Despite

the youth, Alspach is excited to see what this year's squad is capable of. In his second year as head coach, he was able to fully take control of the program and point it in the direction he wanted it to go.

"Going into my second year as head coach, the big thing was really in the offseason to grow and have a full offseason and a summer program and a fall strength and conditioning program where the girls were playing together and growing together," he said.

That growth will start with the three returning seniors, forward Mia Alcorn (4.9 ppg.) and guards Rachel Kuhl (1,000-point scorer, 22.3 points per game, 51 3-pointers) and Jordan Totten (5.1 ppg.). Junior forward Avery Cangro also returns.

"Our three seniors, Mia Alcorn, Rachel Kuhl and Jordan Totten, they're great leaders. They're two-year captains in the program and they know the expectations and it's like having another set of coaches on the court," Alspach said. "They're really helpful in mentoring the freshman girls that are coming up that are going to give us significant minutes on the varsity level, and last year we had freshmen play varsity that are going to be sophomores."

Those sophomores include guards Payton Alcorn (9.7 ppg., 43 3-pointers) and Sabrina Huezo, who according to Alspach were thrown into the fire last season, but return a year older and wiser and will know what to expect at the varsity level.

Alspach is also looking forward to seeing what the incoming group of freshmen are capable of. Along with senior guard **Alex Lalama**, freshmen guards Leena Tran, Gabby Walker, Cara McCartney, Alyssa DiMarco and forward Zainab Soomro will see significant minutes this year.

Alspach said that this is the first time in several years that the program didn't lose any incoming freshmen to a private school, and he credited baseball coach Matt Donaghue and his hashtag, [fullscholarshiptoOldBridge](#). Alspach explained that Old Bridge's middle school programs are some of the best in the county, but when it comes time for the players to move up to high school, a majority of them would transfer to private schools.

"The biggest thing for me last year was to get involved with the middle school teams and showing them what Old Bridge is all about, educationally and on the court," Alspach said. "We have seven freshmen this year who were key players on last year's middle school teams that are going to play minutes for us, and that's the first time in a while where I don't think we lost any girls to a private school and I'm really excited about that and I'm hoping it continues to be a thing."

With strong senior leadership and a talented nucleus of underclassmen, Alspach is confident that Old Bridge will see success this season, as long as they're willing to compete.

"A big thing that we're talking about right now it just the word compete," Alspach said. "It's really important to us because in practice we want to compete against each other, iron sharpens iron is the saying, and make each other better. Hopefully that will lead to us competing in games and competing in the GMC Red Division and in the GMC Tournament and a big goal this year is to qualify for the state tournament, we want to get in on that. We have a good caliber of teams that we have to compete against and I'm really excited for the season as a whole. It'll be great to get out there against other great teams and play some basketball."

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