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### Daily News-Record (Harrisonburg, VA)

December 30, 2011

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## Injuries Test Other Eagles

MIKE BARBER, Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG - At times, Don Burgess sees his two children growing up so fast, he finds himself wishing they'd stay young forever. As for his Bridgewater College basketball team, Burgess feels exactly the opposite.

"I want them to hurry up and grow up real fast," Burgess said Thursday.

The Eagles went into the year knowing they'd have a young and inexperienced roster, but that challenge was amplified when BC lost two of its more seasoned players - point guard Cody Griffith and forward Daniel McClain - to injuries.

Griffith was injured three minutes into the Eagles' 79-70 win over Johnson & Wales in the opening game of the Don Glick Classic on Dec. 9. Griffith suffered a sprained ankle, stripping BC of its only senior.

Eight days later, McClain - a sophomore - sustained a knee injury three minutes into BC's 98-84 loss to Ferrum, part of the Eagles' current four-game losing streak.

"If we could get past the first three minutes, that'd be something," Burgess said.

The team played a pair of games in Florida without either player and Burgess isn't sure when either will be back. McClain is scheduled to see a doctor today and Griffith has an appointment Monday.

With that duo out, Bridgewater has been forced to lean more heavily on its untested players, including sophomore forwards David Larson and Kenneth Waugh and freshman guards Beniah Wise and Ryan Johnson.

"It's two starters out, so it's a lot different," Waugh said Thursday. "The rest of the team is trying. That's a lot of minutes and a lot of points the rest of us have to pick up."

Griffith was averaging 16.6 points a game before being injured. McClain was adding 6.3 and 5.3 rebounds per outing.

In the two losses in Florida, the Eagles (4-6 overall, 1-1 in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference) managed just 52 and 50 points.

After a short break, BC went back to practicing on Thursday. They will practice again today and Saturday, then play at Averett on Sunday, the first of three straight road games to open the new year.

The top two scorers after Griffith are sophomore guard Ronnie Thomas (10.3 ppg) and freshman wing Aaron Adams (9.8 ppg).

Waugh said the injuries haven't altered BC's strategy. They still look to push the ball in transition every chance they get.

"We really haven't changed at all," Waugh said. "Where Dan McClain got hurt, David Larson has stepped right in. With Cody getting hurt, we have a team full of guards. We haven't changed our style of play at all."

Adams said Burgess has made sure the young players understand that.

"Our style won't change no matter who's out on the floor," Adams said Thursday. "Coach Burgess wants us to push the ball. He knows we have such an athletic team."

Burgess acknowledged there have been times the past two games when he's been happy to see his team settle into a

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half-court set, as the players all work together to figure a way to get through the injuries and regain a competitive form for the conference schedule.

"We have to play with some smoke and mirrors at times," Burgess said. "We want to eat a little clock, but we still want to push it."

Beyond experience, Adams said losing Griffith deprived the Eagles of their go-to scorer, something he said the team is still working around.

"It's still kind of a process," Adams said. "For the most part, we kind of look toward the big guys. Towards the end of games, we try to work the ball inside."

As he always does, Burgess found the silver lining in the early-season injuries. He said because the young players saw action early, with the veterans out, they will be more ready to contribute in January and February.

"That's always the view that Coach tries to instill in us," Waugh said. "I mean, we want to win every game. But most importantly we want to be ready for January and February."

Still, Burgess admits the inexperienced lineup can test his patience.

"Oh man, you try to stay positive as much as you can with the guys," Burgess said. "You try to keep teaching them and coaching. Some of those guys we were counting on to come on in January and February, we're counting on here in December."

"Sometimes you have to take a deep breath and count to five."

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