

Saunders' game makes Wolves proud

Off-season improvement makes Region 4's top player from last year even better

By Jon Clifford
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The best player from last year's best team has bested her game. That's not the best news for the rest of the region.

Riverton senior forward Whitney Saunders spent the off-season playing travel ball for the first time. Her experience with Salt Lake Metro helped expand her skill set in advance of the upcoming high school season.

"I learned a lot of things, got a different perspective playing on a different team," said Saunders, last year's Region 4 player of the year. "I was more of a guard on that team, so it opened up my game a lot more.

"I'm way more confident shooting, instead of just making layups. I feel like I'm going to be a better player now."

It's a case of the rich getting richer for the Silverwolves, who have won six region titles in the past seven years, including the past two in Region 4.

Saunders, who led the team at more than 10 points per game last season, leads a scoring trio along with seniors Jamie Smith and Gerika Ballard that once again will have the Silverwolves near the top of the region standings.

"We're going to be really fast," said Saunders, who will start the 2012-13 season Tuesday against Davis. "Super fast, and we have a lot of good finishers. We have a ton of heart and we all want to win really bad, so we are ready to commit to a lot and work really hard. "Though she is capable of consistently delivering double figures in points and rebounds every time she hits the floor, the execution hasn't always been there.

Riverton coach Ron Ence said it's after a sub-par game that opponents usually see Saunders at her best.



Whitney Saunders was Riverton's offensive scoring leader.



"She always bounces back with a very good game, rebounding — and scoring — wise" Ence said. "She's very capable any night of having a double-double. To have that in a high school player is awesome.

"She makes good use of her size. She's able to find spots to score in. She stays very comfortable in what she is capable of doing."

Ence said Saunders first showed what she was capable of as a sophomore, when she scored 21 points and grabbed 13 rebounds against Bingham. She topped the 20-point mark once — with 21 points against Lone Peak — and scored in double figures 13 other times last season.

But that consistency waned at times, and she was held to seven points or fewer on five occasions, including a one-point performance against Fremont.

"Everyone hates off nights," Saunders said. "I hate having games that when I look back on it I think about what else I could have done. When I get to practice the next day, I get to work and make sure it doesn't happen two games in a row."

High expectations are nothing new to Saunders, especially given Riverton's consistent success. As a captain in her final year wearing purple, the drive to maintain that success is as strong as any other motivation.

"I don't want to let Riverton down, and all my past teammates," Saunders said. "I love Riverton and I just want to represent it well."