IRON RIVER—Despite a steady stream of headaches involving injuries, grades, a thin roster and other distractions, West Iron County's boys basketball team still compiled a 13-7 record in 2011-12 and reached the district championship game. __PUBLIC__

As the team gets ready for its 2012-13 season opener against Westwood Dec. 3, Coach Dan Schive said the team is dialed in, focused on the new season.

Most of the squad played several nights a week on area courts during summer and went to a team camp at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. "I didn't have to force them to do anything," he said. "This set of kids likes to play basketball."

There are more of them, too. Last year, West Iron listed nine players on its varsity roster, and it dressed as few as six during the season. This year it lists 13 names, though several won't be ready for Dec. 3 due to injuries.

Nine deep: Austin Waara and Adam Newby should be regular starters, but Schive said he won't use a set lineup. The starting five will depend on the opponent and what their strengths are. "I'll rotate everybody in from there.

"I'm pretty comfortable nine deep, and I'm comfortable with letting everybody go. If I could rotate all 13 in, I wouldn't have an issue putting anybody on the floor at any time."

Wykon fans can expect to see frequent substitutions, with reserves giving two minutes of intense, energetic play when the starters need a break. West Iron wants to change speeds and tempos often.

Competition for playing time will be fierce, but the coach said he is confident in all of his players. At some point, every one of them "is going to have an opportunity to be a major factor in a game."

"Will you step up and do your job at that time?"

Quick review: West Iron was 13-7 in the regular season and 5-3 in the West Pac Conference. They lost to Iron Mountain in the district championship game, finishing their year at 14-8.

Unlike last season's misadventures, the run-up to the new season has been fairly smooth "A lot smoother than last year, because I don't have to install a new offense or a whole new set of kids coming up from the JVs. It's just, 'Let's be better at it than we were.'

"Most of these kids are straight-A students. So give it to them a couple of times, and then you just got to remind them."

The roster: Seniors on the team are Waara, Alex Ralston, Tyler Stafford and Brandon Clifford. Both Stafford (knee) and Clifford (concussion) are going to miss the start of the season with football-related injuries.

The juniors are Adam Newby, Aren Newby, Brock Hopkins, Ryan Rogers, Colton Pangrazzi, Tylor Capadagli, Andy Ridolphi, Joey Pisoni and Anthony Rule.

Among the juniors, Adam Newby played on the varsity all last season as a sophomore, while Aren Newby, Ridolphi, Rogers and Pisoni split the year between varsity and JV.

Be better: "We're trying to be technically better at everything," said the coach. The team is focusing on details: for instance, looking up on a fast-break so they don't run over a defender and get called for charging. "Little tiny details—I'm just trying to pound it into them.

"We're just trying to be better at what we're doing."

Schive had just read last week's season preview for Forest Park's boys. "It sounds like he's got the same kind of team that I have—not real big but smart."

The Trojans have several players who can play anywhere on the floor, and the team wants to

run. Ditto for West Iron.

Fast lane: “Everybody in the world knows we want to go fast,” Schive said. “We don’t want to get sucked into a slow half-court game where teams are going to pound it inside on us.”

When the Wykons get into a half-court set, the coach wants his team to be “patiently technical. It’s not intricate, but it’s a lot of stuff going on.” On defense, the team will have a variety of strategies, focusing on point guards.

It wouldn’t be a Schive team without a lot of nicknames. This year’s roster includes Cream of Wheat, Jimmer, Staff, Big Red Dog, Noob, Aren, Lesnar, Rogers, Little Pin, Festus, Sasquatch, Pisone and Skateboarder.

Start me up: The Wykons start the season with three straight at home (Westwood, Dec. 3; Forest Park, Dec. 11; Houghton, Dec. 17). “The first three are big.” They finish with four of their last five at home.

In between, nine of 12 are on the road, including five straight away games in an 11-day span in January.