Ready or not, the Cleveland State men's basketball team will open its 2012-13 season Friday night at the Wolstein Center against the Grambling State Tigers.

The Vikings will have a very youthful presence this season as they start four sophomores. There are a combined nine freshmen and sophomores on the roster and only one senior.

"This has got to be more of a team effort for us to be as good as we've got to be,"CSU head coach Gary Waters said. "And the positive thing with this group is they understand that, it's not one guy trying to do it by himself."

The Vikings will have to find a way to replace the production of departed lettermenTrey Harmon, Jeremy Montgomery,
D'Aundray
Brown and Aaron
Pogue
, who combined for 40.0 points, 13.9 rebounds and 8.1 assists per game last season.

The lone returning starter is fifth-year senior Tim Kamczyc (9.1 points, 3.9 rebounds). The Stron gsville
native led the nation in field goal percentage (.585) last season and will be counted on for more of a leadership role
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Rounding out the starting lineup are sophomore point guard Charlie Lee (4.1 points, 2.2 assists), redshirt sophomore guard Sebastian Douglas (2.9 points, 2 rebounds), sophomore wing Marlin Mason (3.7 points, 2.6 rebounds) and sophomore center Anton Grady (8.5 points, 6.4 rebounds).

"They played in a lot of important games (last year) for a group of young kids," said Waters.

Grady, a second team all-league preseason pick, has already shown that he can handle the role of go-to guy as he scored 17 points and grabbed 10 rebounds inCSU's exhibition game.

Mason, a human highlight film last year, is expected to provide more offensive production.

Lee has shown the ability to be a good leader as he's been mentoring freshman point guard Josh Ivory.

And Douglas is still recovering from a knee surgery, but has been CSU's best defender in the preseason.

The Vikings also return junior forwards Luda Ndaye (1.3 points, 1.3 rebounds) and Devon Long (1.2 points).

Major concerns

Heading into the season opener, Waters says his three biggest concerns are the interior defense, where the points will come from and overall depth.

Injuries have left the team shorthanded as the Vikings only dressed eight scholarship players for their exhibition game Tuesday night against Malone.

The Vikings have been without highly-touted freshman wing Junior Lomomba, who broke his foot while playing in CSU's summer league and is out until mid to late November. Ndaye is still recovering from hip surgery and has been "limited." And freshman center Aaron Scales tweaked his knee during the shootaround Tuesday and missed the exhibition game.

Waters expects Grady, Mason, Kamczyc, and Lee to carry much of the scoring load until Lomomba comes back from injury.

Young guns

Waters is also excited about his incoming recruiting class, which he nicknames his "young guns." The class consists of five freshmen: Lomomba, Bryn Forbes, Ivory, Scales and Penn State transfer Trey Lewis.

"They've won a combined eight state titles," said Waters. "When you get winners they find ways to win. When you get losers they find ways to lose."

Lomomba, a 6'5" wing from Montreal, chose the Vikings over UCLA, Cincinnati, Washington State and New Mexico State, according to CBSSports.com. If it wasn't for the injury, Waters said Lomomba had a chance to start at the 2-guard.

"What Junior gives you is he can score and he has a good head for the game," said Waters. Forbes, a 6'3" guard from Lansing, Mich., can really shoot the basketball. He made 60 three-pointers as a senior and averaged 19.0 points, 5.0 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game last season for Lansing Sexton High School.

"Forbes is more polished right now then when J-Mo (Jeremy Montgomery) and Trey (Harmon) were freshmen," said Waters.

Ivory, a 6'2" combo guard from Alexandria, La., is known for his defense. He averaged 15.0 points, 5.0 assists and 3.0 steals per game last season for Peabody Magnet High School. He will back up Lee at point guard.

"Josh could end up being our second-best defender," said Waters.

Scales, a 6'9", 260-pound center from Kernersville, NC, was CSU's most improved player during the summer. The one-time Missouri recruit spent last season prepping at the American Basketball Institute in North Carolina where he averaged 14.0 points and 10.0 rebounds per game.

"Scales is the only big man I have ever had that will dive for a loose ball," said Waters.

Lewis, a 6'2" guard from Garfield Heights, has to sit out the season due to NCAA transfer rules. Lewis played in 20 games (including six starts) for Penn State last season as a freshman, averaging 5.6 points per game. As a senior at Garfield Heights High School, he finished runner-up for Ohio's Mr. Basketball (Trey Burke).

With such a young team returning, Waters knows this year is going to be a learning experience for his "young guns."

That was the case during CSU's exhibition game on Tuesday as the Vikings struggled in the first half and trailed by 12 at the intermission to a Malone team that went 12-15 last season in Division II. They played much better in the second half and rallied for a 79-70 victory.

Waters says he has been reading John Wooden's book "The Wisdom of Wooden" about how to be patient with a young group.

"(We know) this is going to be a process," said Waters. "They have to go through the trauma. Once they go through it, teams (in the Horizon League) better look out."

Waters signs new deal

On Thursday, Waters signed a new seven-year contract extension that will keep him at CSU through the 2018-19 season.

"I am excited about the commitment that Cleveland State has made to me and my family," Waters said in a written statement. "With this vote of confidence by President (Ronald) Berkman, Director of Athletics John Parry and the Cleveland State community, it will allow me to basically finish out my career here at Cleveland State."

In six seasons at CSU, Waters has compiled a record of 122-82.