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By SHAWN YORKS

• *Leader & Times*



For the Forgan boys and Beaver girls basketball teams, the culmination of a season of hard work begins Thursday as the 2011 Oklahoma State Basketball Tournament gets under way in the Oklahoma City area. Beaver and Forgan, as well as the Balko girls, all play their quarterfinal matchups Thursday at 8:30 p.m.

For the Lady Dusters and the Bulldogs, the state tournament is old hat, while Balko makes its first-ever appearance at state.

Beaver (24-2) opens Thursday at Midwest City High School against Chattanooga, a team head coach Casey Jones and the Lady Dusters are familiar with.

“We go down there to their team camp during the summer,” Jones said. “So we know their kids pretty good.”

The Warriors (22-6) are led by a dominant post player in 5-foot-11 junior Jamie Brown, whose dad is the boys basketball coach and is originally from Hardesty, Okla., in Texas County.

“She’s been in a gym her whole life, she’s a big post player, very dominant,” Jones said.

Five-foot-5 junior guard Bailey McBride will also be hard to stop.

“We’re going to have to work hard on our trapping and pressing to give her problems,” Jones said. “She’s a shooter/penetrator, she’s a good all-around guard.”

Chattanooga’s offense revolves around Brown, and she is Beaver’s first priority. They’ll try to get it to her inside, but if that’s blocked, they kick it outside to their 3-point specialists.

“We have to go into the game trying to stop Brown,” Jones said. “That’s got to be the key, getting rebounds and not picking up silly fouls against their big post player.”

This is Beaver’s 13th trip to the state tournament and third in the last four years. In 2008 and 2009, Beaver lost in the quarterfinals to the eventual state champion. Two years ago it was a 60-59 setback to eventual champion Preston.

“It’s not new to us,” Jones said. “For some of the players it’s new, and their roles have changed since two years ago. It’s a big stage, and that’s what we’ve been preaching all year long — being on the big stage and loving what you’re doing.”

The Bulldogs have taken a businesslike approach to things. After being upset in last year’s Area playoffs, the Bulldogs had one goal in mind — the state tournament.

Forgan (24-2) opens Thursday at 8:30 p.m. at Southern Nazarene University in Bethany against Lookeba-Sickles (22-8).

“I think they are a really good basketball team,” Forgan head coach Todd Kerr said. “They’re very balanced offensively, very athletic, shoot the three well. They’ve got several kids that can mid-range and their post game is pretty decent.”

The Panthers are led by three seniors — Mason Marshall, Zach Mogg and Alex Wolfe.

Lookeba-Sickles has made 11 state appearances, but this is their first since 2004.

Beaver girls, Forgan boys have one goal: the Gold Ball

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Forgan is making its sixth appearance in the state tournament, last was in 2009, a 68-64 loss to Big Pasture in the quarterfinals. Forgan played for the state championship in 1999, losing to Frontier 76-46.



The Balko girls (24-3) open against tournament favorite Red Oak (25-3) at State Fair Arena. Balko played No. 1 Hammon close, leading late before falling 55-50 in the area championship last Friday night.

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