

Williams Wildcats win YRAA Tier 1 Senior Boys Basketball Championship; ranked #4 in Ontario



The Dr. G.W. Williams Wildcats captured the YRAA Tier 1 Senior Boys Basketball championship in a convincing 92-66 victory over the Sir William Mulock Ravens at Bill Crothers SS at the end of February.

Based on their 12-0 record in York Region and stellar tournament play across Ontario, the Wildcats are ranked #4 in the province heading into the OFSAA championship this week in Hamilton.

To prepare the Wildcats for OFSAA and celebrate their York Region title, a video-rich pep rally took place on Friday morning at Williams. Hundreds of students packed the cafeteria and Wildcats' Co-Head Coach Kent Ravelle described his squad: "This is our unicorn team. We had the best starting player at each position in the Region and we're very athletic. We match up well with any team."

Co-Head Coach Mark Fuller was most impressed with his team's depth: "We built the team from the bench out and those guys seized their playing opportunities."

Coach Fuller noted that the Wildcats, who qualified for the OFSAA basketball championships for the first time in school history, will have to be at their best in Hamilton: "We'll need to get up and down the court. We'll also need to play aggressively, create turnovers, and turn them into easy buckets."

Coach Ravelle augmented his colleague's assessment: "We like to run. Our true strength is our athleticism on defense. We're also adaptable. Our team is ready to play any style. We can play a good half-court game, too, and adapt to zone defenses."

Coaches Ravelle and Fuller introduced the team to thunderous applause at the rally which featured a video montage encapsulating the Wildcats' brilliant 24-3 season. It also included congratulatory clips featuring Raptors' TV color commentator Jack Armstrong who extolled the virtues of team play and reminded the team to "Get that garbage outta here at OFSAA. Go Wildcats!?"

Armstrong's broadcast partner and Raptors' play-by-play voice Matt Devlin also congratulated "the Wildcats for advancing to OFSAA for the first time in school history." He implored the Wildcats to "Get out there and get it done!?"

Devlin's radio counterpart, Eric Smith, also congratulated the team for "making OFSAA for the first time" and discussed the "importance of intangibles and team camaraderie as key factors when competing for the Ontario championship."

Mayor Tom Mrakas, an ardent advocate of youth sports, applauded the team for its York Region title in his on-stage address and reminded the Wildcats that "All of Aurora is hoping for a GW Williams provincial championship!?"

After the Mayor's congratulatory address, Coaches Ravelle and Fuller introduced the Pep Rally's Special Celebrity Guest.

Raptors' Broadcaster and former York University and Team Canada stalwart Paul Jones motivated the team both with his words during the rally and on-stage with the Wildcats after the rally.

The former Oakwood Barons' backcourt star joked that he was "torn by my new connection to Williams and loyalty to my alma mater. The Barons are the defending Ontario champs, but I'll be voting for the Wildcats in their games until they get to the finals against my old high school."

The congenial commentator elicited a warm response from his audience and his comfort with the assembly as a former Principal was evident. Jones noted that the best part of chatting with the Wildcats was "trying to get them to understand how special this is. There are only 16 teams left in Ontario. You're in the top 1% in the province and anybody can beat anybody. Instilling a sense of urgency was a key today. There are so many pitfalls in a provincial championship tournament."

The educator-turned-broadcaster loved being back at school: "It's great to feel the energy and, in spite of everything that has happened in the school system in the last four years, kids are still kids and it's great to see them having fun and celebrating success. It was fun to connect at that level and I enjoyed my Freedom 55 moment on stage."

Jones also offered a key insight about the value of high school basketball: "High school basketball is still very important, even though we've seen lots of growth in Elite leagues. These are the guys that you see every day and they share and know your daily experience. No rep club ever has that level of connection."

Two of the "connected" Wildcats to which Jones referred are team captains Rehan Qureshi and Yonatan Abramov.

Captain Abramov's disclosure about the root of the team's success mirrored Jones's sentiments about the importance of connection.

"Our team showed great energy " including bench energy. We have passion for one another and we want each other to succeed."

Captain Qureshi spoke in the same collective terms: "We all did our part. We weren't worried about individual stats."

Qureshi added that the key to the team's success at the provincial championships "is not worrying about the seed we're playing. We have to play our game and that way we have our best chance to succeed."

Abramov complemented his co-captain's remarks by noting that winning at OFSAA will be "about composure. We're going to be in high pressure situations so trust in each other will be a big factor."

It's clear that the team has developed a high level of composure and trust during this magical season. The Wildcats' pathway to the YRAA Finals featured a 73-57 semifinal win over the St. Theresa of Lisieux Lions, a 90-71 victory over Markville in the quarter-finals, and a decisive 85-63 win over Father Bressani Eagles to open their playoff run in February.

Prior to their perfect 12-0 YRAA record, the Wildcats won the Sacred Heart tournament in Newmarket, lost in the semifinals at tournaments in Waterloo and at St. Mike's in Toronto, and won the Battle of Aurora championship tournament. The team's variety of opponents during their 27-game season so far will be great preparation for the teams they'll face at OFSAA.

By Jim Stewart