he ACC was lauded universally as the best conference in the land when this season began. Prognosticators were giving the conference seven bids to the NCAA Tournament, and as late as Dec. 19, there were seven ACC teams in the top 25. Now, the league would be lucky to earn five bids to NCAAs, and the ACC Tournament likely will determine the final two spots. Here is a breakdown of all 11 teams competing in Washington, D.C., this weekend. The "Prognosis" section analyzes the season the team is having and its chances in the MCI Center. "NCAA Dreams" tells for what - if anything - each team is playing.

NORTH CAROLINA



No. 1 (26-3, 14-2)

Prognosis

The two biggest question marks for UNC this season were winning on the road and winning close games. The last two weeks have settled both of those concerns emphatically.

NCAA Dreams

The Tar Heels have all but secured a No. 1 seed in the friendly confines of the Charlotte Coliseum. The ACC Tournament might be, as Roy Williams called it, a "glorified cocktail party" for UNC, but the senior class wants this ring.

CLEMSON



No. 9 (15-14, 5-11)

Prognosis

Despite winning three ACC games in a row late in the season, the Tigers will have a tough task in the MCI Center. Sharrod Ford has been heating up of late, including a 24-point performance to win at Maryland.

NCAA **Dreams** Clemson has never won the ACC Tournament, and don't expect it to happen this year. The Tigers will be happy to take an NIT selection college basketball's consolation prize. Such is the life in the cellar of the toughest league in the country.

DUKE



No. 3 (22-5, 11-5)

Prognosis

Duke still is reeling from UNC's blistering comeback Sunday, but don't count the Blue Devils out. If Duke can stay out of foul trouble
— and J.J. Redick can score in both halves — it can capture the crown.

NCAA

With losses to Maryland (twice) and Virginia Tech, Duke played its way out of a chance at an NCAA -No. 1 seed. A strong showing at the Tournament (and possibly a sixth title in seven years) would seal a No. 2, and at worst a No. 3.

FLORIDA STATE



No. 10 (12-18, 4-12)

Prognosis

The Seminoles have floundered at the bottom of the league all season. But FSU did put a scare into UNC, and if Adam Waleskowski gets hot, they could be dangerous emphasis on could.

NCAA Dreams

The Seminoles are not even in NIT contention at this point, they have been so bad. Winning the ACC Tournament would give them an NCAA berth, but if that happens check for pigs flying around the MCI Center rafters.

GEORGIA TECH



No. 5 (17-10, 8-8)

Prognosis

Many thought Ga. Tech's midseason struggles were because of B.J. Elder's injury. But last year's NCAA finalists have been just as inconsistent since the sharpshooter returned to the Jackets' lineup. The win against Clemson was just

NCAA as important as the struggles of the **Dreams** teams around them. A win against in the NCAA Tournament, if the

Va. Tech on Friday should put them Yellow Jackets aren't in already anything else will improve seeding.

MIAMI



No. 6 (16-11, 7-9)

Prognosis

Guillermo Diaz and Robert Hite can score with the best of them, but the supporting cast is pathetic. If the 'Canes can bomb away from 3point land, they can surprise some teams. If not, hello, South Beach.

NCAA

The Hurricanes have had their share of ups and downs this season, nearly toppling some of the ACC's top squads — but it's a long road to at least two wins and a potential berth in the NCAA

MARYLAND



No. 8 (16-11, 7-9)

Prognosis

The Terrapins beat Duke twice but also were swept by Clemson (that's right, Clemson). The Terps have the potential to repeat last year's surprise run to the title, or they could bow out in the first round.

NCAA Dreams Maryland's dreams might have gone up in smoke in Blacksburg, Va. A repeat run to the title is about all that will save the Terrapins from an embarrassing trip to the NIT - the first time Maryland will miss the NCAAs since 1993.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE



No. 7

(17-12, 7-9)

The 'Pack is yet another team that is impossible to predict this **Prognosis** year. Julius Hodge has put up fine numbers, but his teammates have disappointed. Tony Bethel and Ilian Evtimov must step up.

NCAA **Dreams**

NCSU watched a golden opportunity slip through its hands after its lastsecond collapse against Wake. State needs to at least beat Wake in the quarters, but that might not be good enough if the Deacs are without Chris Paul, who might be suspended.

VIRGINIA



No. 11 (13-14, 4-12)

The Cavaliers pretty much will need divine intervention to capture **Prognosis** their first title since 1976. But winning two games will clinch a cov-

NCAA

Dreams

UVa. was a hot ticket after creaming Arizona and climbing to No. 19 in the polls. But after a disastrous ACC season, the Wahoos are in danger of missing the NIT and probably will have to win the Tournament to save Pete Gillen's job.

eted spot in the NIT. Unfortunately,

it will have to beat Duke to do so.

VIRGINIA TECH



No. 4

(15-12, 8-8)

Prognosis

The newcomers were known for football but have proven their worth on the hardwood this year, with a respectable record and an upset of Duke. But a lack of star power will hurt the Hokies in D.C.

NCAA Dreams A .500 record is normally good enough in this league, but the Hokies have a sub-par RPI and probably need to get to the championship game to even think about getting a bid — and that road likely goes through North Carolina.

WAKE FOREST



Prognosis

No. 2

(26-4, 13-3)

The Deacons will ride Chris Paul as far as he will carry them — and that will be deep in the Tournament. An epic rematch with the Tar Heels could be in the works for ESPN's dream of a final matchup.

NCAA Dreams

The Deacons have all but secured a No. 1 seed, barring an early upset at the MCI Center. This team is talented and deep enough to make a run to the Final Four for the first time since the Billy Packer era — back in 1962.



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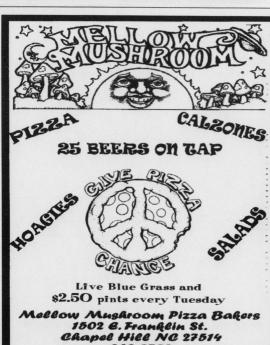
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