

Tech's success depends on Hammonds

By NATALIE SEKICKY
Staff Writer

When contemplating the fate of the Georgia Tech basketball team this year, it is tempting to place all the responsibility for success on the broad shoulders of senior forward Tom Hammonds.

After all, the Yellow Jackets are significantly weakened by the graduation of key starters Duane Ferrell and Craig Neal and are counting on solid performances from three junior college transfers to fill the void. It would be easy to grant franchise status to Hammonds, a preseason All-American and first-team 1987-1988 All-ACC pick.

Hammonds definitely has the stats to go along with those accolades. The 6-foot-9, 217-pound forward was the only player to rank in the ACC top 10 in four crucial categories: scoring (second, 18.9 points per game), field goal percentage (fifth, .568), free-throw percentage (fifth, .826) and rebounding (eighth, 7.2 per contest). Impressively, Hammonds accomplished most of this while playing with his back to the basket, which led to some fatigue problems.

"The season really took a lot out of me last year," Hammonds said. "Having to play a lot of minutes and against bigger people really took its toll toward the end of the year."

While Hammonds was pounding away in the paint last year, he was not without help from the outside. Namely, sophomore guard/forward Dennis Scott. Scott rode the three-pointer all the way to ACC top freshman honors and a place on the All-Freshman team. Scott proved that Jeff Lebo is not the only long-range bomber in the conference, as he led the ACC in three-point percentage (47.6) and treys per game (3.1), while averaging 15.5 points, five rebounds and 3.6 assists per game from the small forward position.

Scott should be even more effective this year because he has slimmed down markedly during the offseason.

"Dennis Scott is only five pounds overweight compared with 45 pounds last year at this time," Tech coach

Yellow Jacket Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Hgt.	Wgt.	Year	Hometown
34	Rod Balaris	G	6-3	185	Fr.	Williamsburg, Va.
52	Maurice Brittian	C	6-9	225	Jr.	Atlanta, Ga.
5	Karl Brown	G	6-1	170	Jr.	Leicester, England
12	Brian Domalik	G	5-11	165	So.	Leesburg, Va.
20	Tom Hammonds	F	6-9	217	Sr.	Crestview, Fla.
44	Johnny McNeil	F	6-8	225	Jr.	High Point, N.C.
24	James Munlyn	C	6-11	206	Jr.	Aiken, S.C.
13	Brian Oliver	G	6-4	199	Jr.	Smyrna, Ga.
31	Willie Reese	F	6-10	200	Sr.	Atlanta, Ga.
4	Dennis Scott	G-F	6-8	225	So.	Reston, Va.
42	Anthony Sherrod	F	6-7	213	Sr.	Millen, Ga.
23	David Whitmore	G-F	6-5	195	Fr.	Los Angeles, Calif.

Head Coach
Bobby Cremins (South Carolina, 1970)
Assistants
Kevin Cantwell (UNC-Asheville, 1973)
Jimmy Hebron (UNC-Wilmington, 1973)
Sherman Dillard (James Madison, 1978)



Bobby Cremins said.

Scott's shooting, combined with Hammonds' intimidating strength on the front line, should give Tech a substantial inside-outside threat as the Yellow Jackets attempt to better their 1988 record of 22-10, 8-6 in the ACC.

This one-two punch will be crucial to offsetting the loss of Ferrell's 18.6 scoring average.

Completing the nucleus of returning starters is 6-4 junior guard Brian Oliver (12.6 ppg, 4.3 apg), who started all 32 games last year at the off guard spot. Oliver is Tech's defensive specialist, playing the thief 42 times in the last campaign. Oliver played 14 games at the point as a freshman and may see substantial time there this year as Tech tries to overcome the vacancy left by Neal, who set an ACC single-season record for assists with 303 in 1987.

Lest he should miss out on the latest trend in collegiate hoops, Cremins, in his eighth season with the Ramblin' Wreck, has jumped on the junior college bandwagon this year. He is relying heavily on the performances of three juco transfers — 6-9 center Maurice Brittian, 6-1 point guard Karl Brown and 6-8 power forward Johnny McNeil — to complement his returning nucleus.

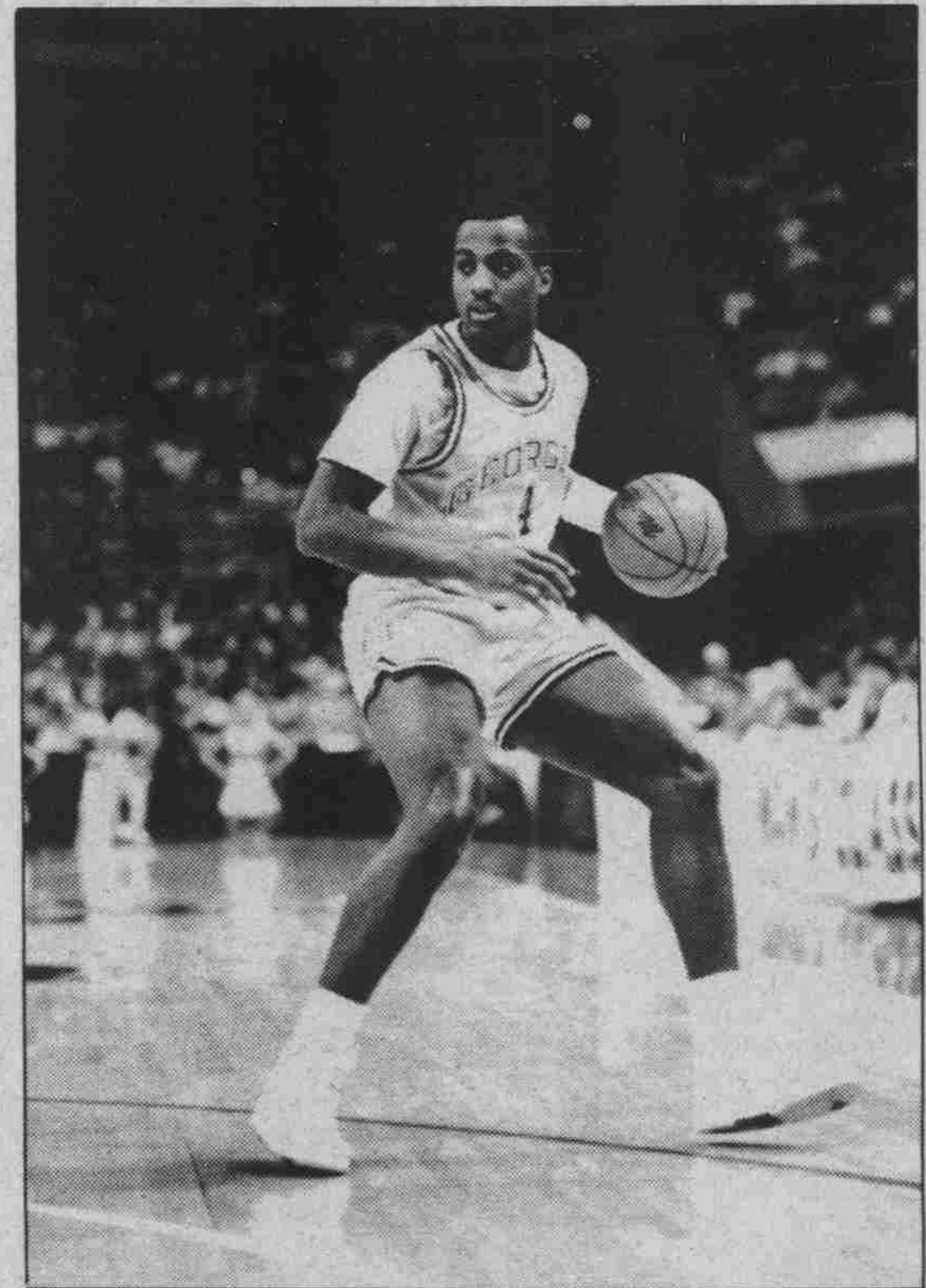
"In late November, early

December we had our recruiting meeting and made a decision to improve ourselves through the junior college ranks," Cremins said. "The game plan is for these players to hold the fort and for us, hopefully, to have an excellent season. The adjustments that these players will have to make will be the key."

Indeed, the jucos are the key to allowing the Tech returnees to shine this year. Brittian, a first-team junior college All-American at Hutchinson J.C. (12.4 ppg, 7.4 rpg), will provide additional rebounding and defense in the paint. Even more importantly, should Brittian find himself at home in the lane, Hammonds will be assured the opportunity to return permanently to the much more comfortable power forward spot, a move that can only make Tech better.

"He's a solid player with a great attitude on the court," Cremins said of Brittian. "He's a real banger inside and that's what we really needed."

Brown is another essential piece of the basketball puzzle for Tech this year. His responsibility will be to fill the void left by Neal, and that is no small job. The question mark at the point is a major obstacle for Tech this season, but Cremins believes Brown can perform adequately, thus allowing Oliver to remain at the shooting guard position where he is



DTH file photo

1988 ACC Rookie of the Year Dennis Scott will be dangerous

much more effective.

"Karl Brown doesn't look to score a whole lot," Cremins said. "He will have to look to score a little bit more. But he's a great passer. He's an excellent ballhandler. He can give us that controlled, set-up offense we need."

McNeil (13.5 ppg, 8.5 rpg), a

bruiser at 6-8, 225-pounds, will give Tech some much needed frontcourt depth, as the Yellow Jackets try to alleviate the rebounding woes which caused them to lose the battle of the boards in 19 of 32 contests last season.

"Johnny McNeil is not a great

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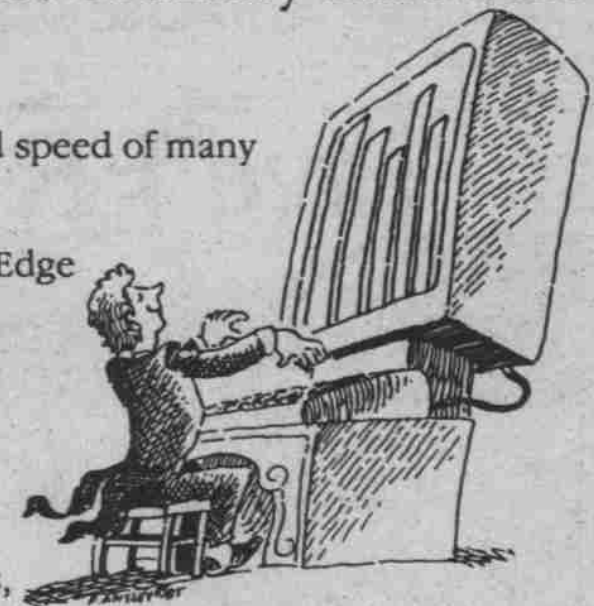
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