

Graduation forces Virginia to rebuild

By ERIC WAGNON
Staff Writer

In another, less competitive conference, Virginia might be looking forward to battling for a conference title. But in a particularly tough ACC race this year, the Cavaliers will be trying to avoid the cellar.

Following last year's 13-18 season — Virginia's first losing season in 11 years — 15th-year coach Terry Holland must look for someone to fill the scoring vacuum left by the graduation of second-team all-conference forward Mel Kennedy and slick point guard John Johnson.

"Chemistry is going to be a very big factor for us this year," Holland said. "We'll need five players consistently in double figures to pick up the scoring slack."

With respect to the average points per game of Cavalier returnees, Virginia retains only 50 percent of its scoring punch — a substantially lower percentage than the other seven ACC clubs.

Holland may find his answer to the scoring problem in 6-10 Brent Dabbs, who averaged 19.1 points and 12.2 rebounds last year as a first-team junior college All-American.

Dean Smith, who rarely seriously recruits from the juco ranks, had also courted Dabbs. However, Dabbs' signing with Virginia last spring marked the first time since Ralph Sampson that a player recruited by both schools chose Virginia over North Carolina.

"Brent Dabbs will be a player who can put a lot of numbers on the board," Holland said. "He can face the basket and shoot the ball with good range, maybe not three-point range, but close to it."

After Dabbs' signing, Holland seemed positive about recruiting junior college players.

"It's been proven junior college players can play the game well," Holland said. "Not only that, they can take you to the Final Four, take you to national championships. Our experience with jucos has been very positive."

Holland also plucked 6-6 Curtis Williams from the junior college ranks. Another member of the juco All-American first team, Williams averaged 20.6 points, 12.1 rebounds



Coach Terry Holland's Cavaliers are picked to have a long year

and 3.7 blocked shots in pacing Alleghany Community College of Maryland to a 34-4 record.

"Curtis Williams reminds me a lot of Robert Brickey of Duke," senior guard Richard Morgan said of his new teammate. "He probably has no right to be in the paint, but he's strong, he's a great jumper and he's quick on the boards. He'll help us right away."

Holland looks for Williams to fill the role of the departed 6-5 Kennedy as an all-around scoring threat.

Holland's recruiting class did not look quite so promising last December, with only one signee from

the fall recruiting period — 6-6 forward Bryant Stith of Lawrence, Va.

"I don't think that when he was a little kid he ever walked, Morgan said. "He was just born to run. He has an incredibly quick jump to the basket and a very strong move to the hoop. He's a scorer — no doubt about it."

Stith, a third-team Parade All-American, showed his scoring potential in his senior season, averaging 29.3 points per game. Stith added to that mark an average of 11.5 rebounds a game.

Holland certainly did not have to

worry about Prop 48 in Stith's case, because Stith's averages in the classroom were just as impressive: he was class valedictorian.

With a lone signee, albeit an outstanding one, the future certainly appeared brighter as the spring signing period progressed. In addition to Dabbs and Williams, Virginia successfully recruited Anthony Oliver and Ted Jeffries.

Oliver, a 6-3 guard out of Faison, will probably back up sophomore John Crotty. Along with 22.7 points per game, Oliver averaged just over six assists and almost five steals per game at North Duplin High.

To gain any recruiting attention while playing at a small school like North Duplin, Oliver had to play well against Hobpton High. The scouts had come to watch Hobpton's highly touted Chris King, who is now with Wake Forest. Oliver responded by playing the best games of his senior year and joined Holland's fold as Virginia's first spring signee.

Jeffries, a 6-9 center from DeMatha Catholic High in Hyattsville, Md., grabbed the attention of scouts in a similar way. Jeffries played behind Maryland's 6-10 center signee Jerrod Mustaf, who was considered one of the nation's top prospects.

Although he was eligible to enroll at Virginia this fall, Jeffries, who is rather young for his class, felt a post-graduate year at Fork Union Military Academy would best prepare him for college.

As Virginia's top returning scorer, Morgan is hoping to provide senior leadership.

"At the end of the game, when that ball is hanging on the rim, it all comes down to how you live," Morgan said rather philosophically. "If you haven't been livin' right — like the problems we've had here in the past — it's not gonna fall for you. If you've been living a good life, you're gonna get the roll."

"This year we have guys that live the right way."

Morgan would also like to improve his shooting percentage from the floor. In his junior year, Morgan shot only 41.9 percent from the floor overall and 40.3 percent in ACC action.

Morgan's percentage from the foul line dropped 12.5 percent from his

sophomore season to 65.6 percent in his junior year. Morgan's number of free throw attempts also fell from 64 as a sophomore to 32 as a junior. Those 32 attempts average out to just one attempt for every 25.3 minutes of playing time. In the ACC, only Quentin Jackson of N.C. State went to the line less frequently.

Crotty returns with Morgan in the Cavalier backcourt. The 6-1 point guard from Spring Lake, N.J., started the last six games of last season after Johnson was dismissed from the team. Crotty averaged 6.3 points and 2.3 rebounds a game and had 92 assists on the season — second only to Johnson's 107.

Bill Batts, a 6-8 junior center-forward, and 6-6 sophomore Kenny Turner are the only other returning players who started at least seven games.

Batts started every game for the Cavaliers, averaging 7.9 points and leading the team with 6.4 rebounds per game. Batts' most statistically impressive performance of his career came last season against Rhode Island, when he came up with 16 points and 15 rebounds.

Although he is an effective rebounder, Batts has a reputation for being reluctant to shoot. Last season, he attempted but one shot in about every five minutes of playing time.

Turner averaged 6.2 points a game, with his season high of 12 points coming against Jacksonville. Like Batts, Turner has a reputation of reluctance to shoot. Turner finished just behind Batts and Kennedy with a rebounding average of 5.3 per game.

Last season, the Cavaliers lost eight non-ACC games, the highest total of non-conference losses since 1962—63. This year's schedule should prove kinder to the Cavaliers than last year's, which included 22 games — including nine non-ACC games — against teams receiving post-season bids.

Holland called this year's slate demanding but more realistic than last year's schedule.

Nevertheless, the only NCAA tournament participants on this year's non-conference slate include Arkansas, Fairleigh Dickinson and Louisville. Virginia will also face DePaul or Seton Hall in the Sugar Bowl Classic in New Orleans. The defending NIT champion Connecticut Huskies travel to Charlottesville as the only NIT participant on Virginia's non-conference schedule.

With 15 of the 22 games mentioned above coming on the road last season,

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