

One of these days, Duke may be Devil nation

By DOUG HOOGERVORST

Staff Writer

Chances are, with the odds, that one of these years we'll win the damn thing. — senior co-captain Clay Buckley.

Despite three straight Final Four appearances, and four in the last five seasons, Buckley and Duke have yet to claim an NCAA title. But the Blue Devils think their time could come soon.

Unfortunately for frustrated Blue Devil fans, this may be a down season in Durham. Still, Duke has received national recognition as one of the nation's best teams. That's how strong head coach Mike Krzyzewski's program has become.

Many preseason rankings list the Blue Devils in the bottom half of the top 10, despite the losses this team has suffered since 1989-90.

After enduring a humiliating 103-73 defeat at the hands of UNLV in last season's NCAA Finals, Duke lost Phil Henderson, Alaa Abdelnaby and Robert Brickley. The trio played in three Final Fours but finished their eligibility before winning a national title.

This season, Coach K and his staff will have to hide a size and rebounding disadvantage by employing a faster pace during games. The Blue Devils will rely on junior sensation Christian Laettner and sophomore point guard Bobby Hurley to lead a young team that lists five freshmen and three sophomores.

From his off-guard position, Henderson was tops on the team in scoring a year ago (18.5 points per game). Henderson was also the team leader, playing tremendous defense and displaying a penchant for taking clutch

Duke

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
3	M. Clark	G	6-6	200	Fr.
4	K. Blakeney	G	6-4	190	Fr.
5	B. McCaffrey	G	6-3	175	So.
11	B. Hurley	G	6-0	160	So.
12	T. Hill	G/F	6-4	195	So.
21	T. Lang	F	6-8	185	Fr.
22	G. Koubek	F	6-6	205	Sr.
23	B. Davis	G/F	6-6	195	Jr.
32	C. Laettner	F	6-11	235	Jr.
33	G. Hill	G/F	6-7	205	Fr.
34	C. Palmer	C	6-9	235	Jr.
45	C. Buckley	F/C	6-10	235	Sr.
54	C. Ast	F	6-8	205	Fr.

Head Coach: Mike Krzyzewski (Army, 1969). Overall Coaching Record: 304-160 in 15 years. Record at Duke: 231-101 in 10 years

shots.

"Big shots," Krzyzewski said. "Not just at the end of a ballgame, but if a team's making a run at us, we'd set some things up for Phil (Henderson), and most of the time he'd hit the shot."

Henderson will be tough to replace, but freshman Grant Hill, along with sophomores Thomas Hill and Bill McCaffrey, should be adequate performers at shooting guard.

As for replacing Henderson's ability in the clutch, Coach K said his big man, Laettner, would do the job. Remember, Laettner hit a double-clutch, last-second overtime winner against Connecticut in the NCAA East Regional Finals last year.

Last year, the 6-foot-11 Angola, N.Y., native developed into one of the finest frontline players in the ACC, but that was with Abdelnaby helping to take the pressure off on the inside.

"Christian has got to be a 32- to 35-minute-per-game player for us this year," Krzyzewski said. "Last year, he showed he can play with fouls, and he'll have to do that again. Scoring-wise, he has to be the hub of what we do."

Laettner's talent and versatility earned him a spot on the U.S. National team this summer, where he had lots of help inside with teammates such as Georgetown's Alonzo Mourning and Missouri's Doug Smith. But for Duke, he's the only proven post player.

As a senior, Abdelnaby finally fulfilled his high school hype. He gave Duke a steady interior scoring threat, and his four years of experience paid off during the Devils' run to the Final Four. More importantly, Abdelnaby's size and strength inside will be nearly impossible for Duke to replace.

Besides Laettner, the other players Duke will count on inside will be the 6-10 Buckley, 6-9 junior Crawford Palmer, 6-8 freshman Tony Lang and 6-7 Grant Hill — none of whom appear able to give the Devils another rebounder.

Buckley and Palmer have been projects under Krzyzewski for some time, and Duke will need to see some dividends or be decidedly undersized and outrebounded.

Lang and Hill are expected to contribute immediately. But Lang does not have a true rebounding physique, and Hill is foreseen as more of a wing and perimeter player with oh-by-the-way good inside moves.

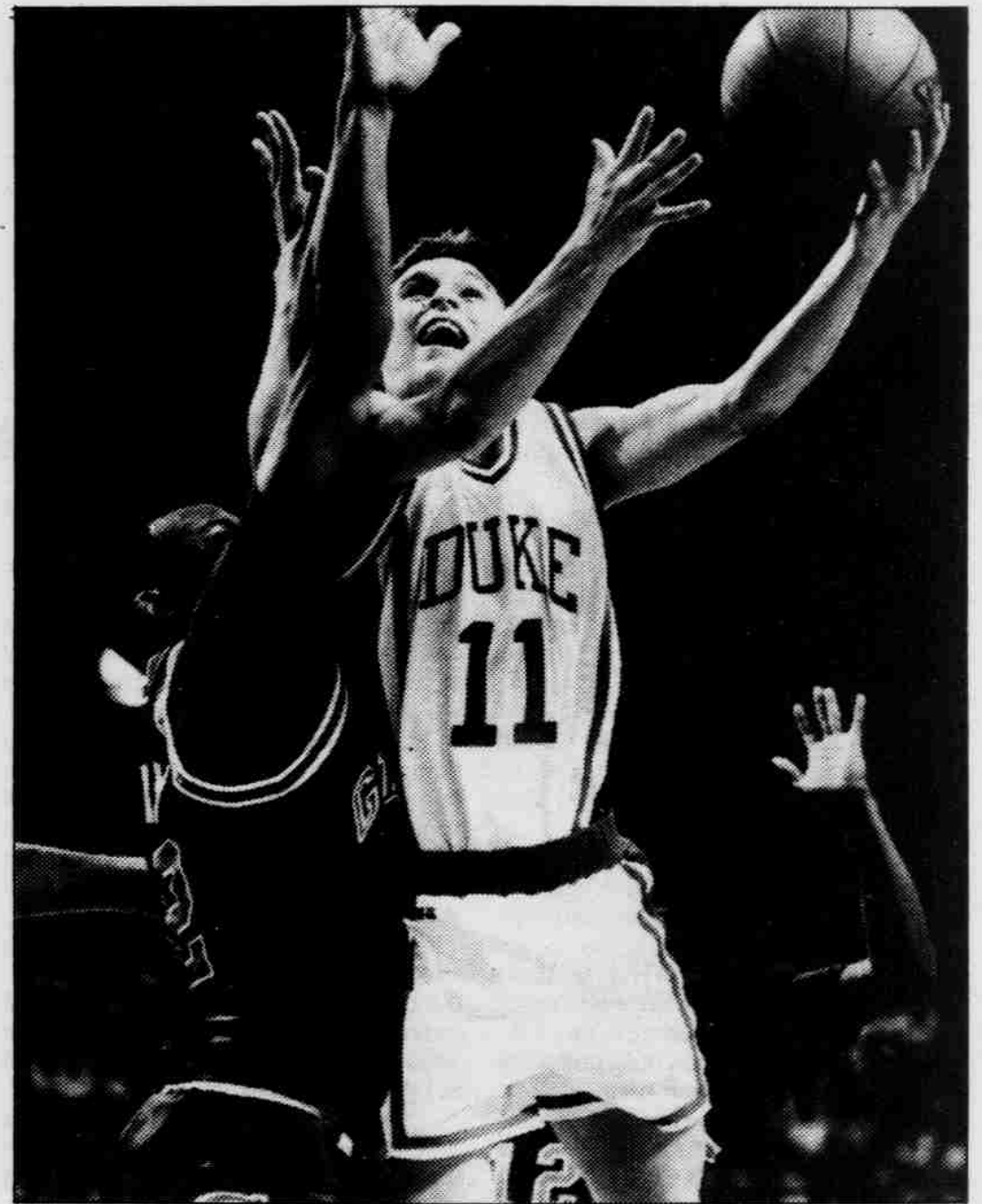
Duke will force the tempo, and Hurley does that better than anyone in the country except Georgia Tech's Kenny Anderson.

"We'd like to run a little bit more this year — press more and get Hurley the ball more in the open court," Krzyzewski said. "He's just very special. I think he's real good all the time, but I think he's very special in the open court."

Hurley stacked up 288 assists and more than eight points per game in his rookie season. But the 6-0 point guard also set an ACC record with 166 turnovers and shot a dismal .351 from the field.

Senior co-captain Greg Koubek said that Duke's floor general has improved and means even more to this team than last year.

"I think if we're going to win, we need Bobby Hurley out there," Koubek



Duke guard Bobby Hurley set an ACC record last year with 166 turnovers

said. "He's the man we really need."

Hurley will need people to run with, which should not be a problem for a Blue Devil team that boasts eight zillion wing players. Hill is the best of the bunch and will certainly start along with Hurley and Laettner.

Hill can do it all, literally, as he can play all five positions. He probably will play forward to start, but when Hurley needs a breather, Hill will move to the point.

"He may be our second-best inside, and he's also our backup point guard," Krzyzewski said. "He may look a little bit different at 6-7 (playing point), but he can handle it. That's what he did in high school."

The other Hill, Thomas, has worked on his perimeter skills, rounding out the rawest part of his game. He showed he

was a tremendous athlete with good moves to the basket as a freshman, but he could be unstoppable if he has added 3-point range.

If Thomas Hill can't earn the spot, Duke could also use the sharp-shooting McCaffrey, the veteran Koubek, the versatile Brian Davis or the talented Lang. All will participate in a strong nine-man rotation.

The Blue Devils' schedule could keep them further down in the rankings, too, as Duke looks as though it took a course in scheduling taught by Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz. Non-conference road dates with Georgetown, Oklahoma, Notre Dame and Arizona, plus the always-tough ACC grind, could result in 12 or 13 losses by the end of the season.

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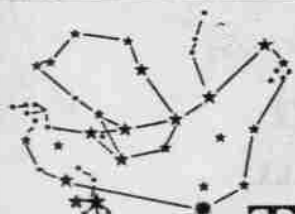
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