

Wake stakes claim as national-caliber squad

By **BOBBY McCROSKEY**

Staff Writer

Last year Dave Odom's Demon Deacons flirted with a return to conference and national prominence. This year, they hope to turn it into a season-long love affair.

Things started well enough for Odom in 1989, his first year as head coach at Wake Forest. The team had been picked high in the preseason polls and tabbed as the No. 5 team in the ACC poll. Excitement was high in Winston-Salem as talk of a winning season and postseason play gathered strength.

In the early going, Wake did nothing to disappoint its believers. On a cold December night in Winston-Salem, the Deacons defeated 20th-ranked Alabama 67-65 without senior forward Sam Ivy to go 6-1, their best start since a 10-0 run in 1983-84.

Then the Deacons took a road trip, and reality came along with them. In the Fiesta Bowl Tournament at the University of Arizona, Wake lost 66-52 to Purdue and 67-63 to Penn State, looking horrible in the process.

"That tournament was a test," Odom said later, "and we failed it miserably."

At that point, the honeymoon was over. Eleven straight conference losses followed, and a season that began so well started looking like all those that came after 1983-84, Wake's last winning season. The Deacons finished eighth in the conference with a 12-16 record, 3-11 in the ACC.

Despite the setbacks, Wake learned a lot about itself as a team, junior forward Chris King said.

"I had a lot of high expectations for us, but we got into some slumps and we had a lot of injuries," King said. "Some of the things weren't clicking some nights, and other nights they were. When they did click, we played real well. Last year at the end of the season, we did that."

That late-season clicking led to three big conference wins against Maryland, Virginia and N.C. State in Wake's last four games, once again raising expectations for 1990-91.

But things are different this year. For one thing, the players go into this season knowing what to expect from Odom and what he wants from them. That is a difference that cannot be measured.

"Last year was his first year," King said. "It was a new coach, a new system and everything, and I think that was sort of hard for some of the players. A lot of the players weren't confident last year. This year I think coach Odom has helped them be a lot more confident in themselves."

Odom has confidence in this team as a whole. He knows that with just three seniors returning, the talented junior class will have to assume a greater leadership role.

"We have a good nucleus of players coming back, with an experienced individual at almost every position," Odom said. "This is not a freshman league. As excited as we are with our incoming players, we can only expect them to contribute so much. At our level, good teams win with leadership and production from their upperclassmen."

Leading the way for the Deacons will be King. The 6-foot-8 junior from Newton Grove has paced the team in scoring and rebounds the last two seasons. He scored 16.1 points and collected 7.4 rebounds per game in '89-90, and he also led the team in blocked shots (31) and field-goal percentage (54.6). He has the muscle, size and quickness to play with anybody.

Junior Anthony Tucker will join King

Wake Forest

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
3	D. Hedgecoe	G	5-11	165	So.
4	D. McQueen	G	5-11	180	Jr.
13	S. Ray	G	6-0	175	Sr.
21	R. Siler	G	6-3	200	Sr.
22	R. Childress	G	6-2	175	Fr.
23	R. Doggett	G	6-3	185	Fr.
25	M. Blucas	G	6-3	190	Fr.
30	T. Wise	C	6-9	240	Sr.
31	A. Tucker	F	6-8	225	Jr.
34	T. Sanders	F	6-6	215	Sr.
40	T. Owens	F	6-8	240	Fr.
44	C. King	F	6-8	225	Jr.
45	P. Medlin	C	6-9	235	Jr.
51	S. King	C	7-0	245	Fr.
54	R. Rogers	F	6-7	235	Fr.
55	M. Forester	F	6-6	210	So.

Head Coach: Dave Odom (Guilford, 1965). Overall Coaching Record: 50-58 in 4 years. Record at Wake Forest: 12-16 in 1 year

in the frontcourt. After transferring from Georgetown, he was second on the team in scoring at 13.0 ppg, and he led the Deacons in steals with 37. At 6-8, he is also Wake's most versatile player, seeing action at every position except center.

The third junior starter returning is point guard Derrick McQueen. McQueen had such a rough 1989-90 campaign that Lloyd's of London would think twice about issuing him insurance. He broke his nose during the Fiesta Bowl Tournament, suffered a severely

sprained ankle Jan. 20 against Duke that hampered him the remainder of the season, and ended the season with a concussion against Clemson in the first round of the ACC Tournament. The injury sidelined him with double vision through the spring and early summer.

The team's lack of depth at point guard didn't help matters any. McQueen had to go solo against arguably the most talented point guards in the nation. But with this year's freshman class to back him up, McQueen is sure to improve on last year's less than impressive 6.1 ppg, 3.1 rpg and 5.2 assists per game.

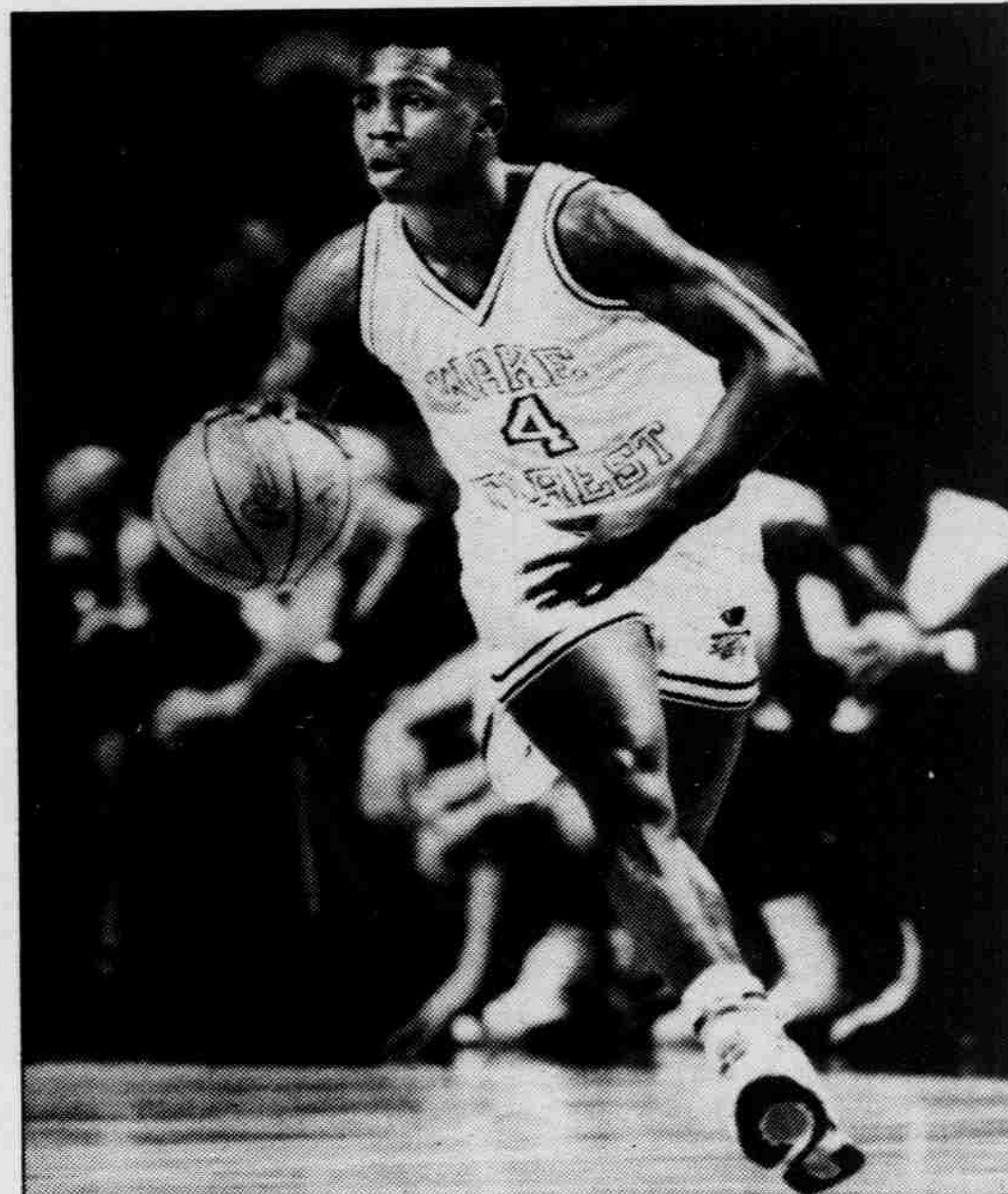
Senior Robert Siler was expected to team with McQueen in the backcourt, but Siler had to undergo a second surgery for ligament damage to his left knee. He is not scheduled to return to action until after the season starts.

Joining this cast of performers is a group of six individuals who have collectively been labeled as the third-best recruiting class in the conference, right behind UNC and Duke. Leading them is Durham Hillside's very own Rodney Rogers.

Big things are expected from this freshman. Rogers averaged 28.3 points and 12.3 rebounds as a high school senior and was named North Carolina's player of the year. Odom has been impressed with Rogers thus far.

"He's legit," Odom said. "He has inside and outside abilities now. He's a good ballhandler and a good shooter. Defensively, he has a lot of work to do."

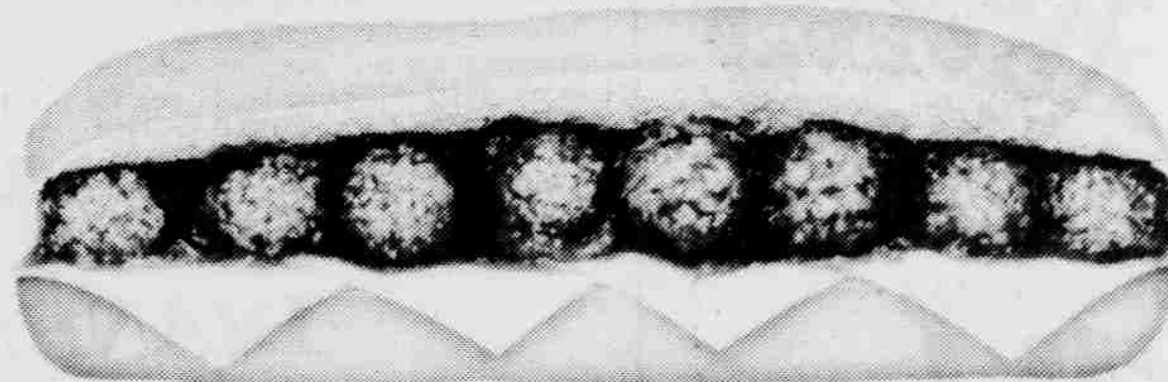
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Point guard Derrick McQueen is one of three returning starters for the Deacs

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