

Can you say thin? State's Mr. Robinson can

By WARREN HYNES
Staff Writer

The flair ... the hair ... the charm ... the harm.

It's all gone now. Jim Valvano coached the N.C. State basketball program to 209 wins in 10 years. But, during that span, his program graduated only 11 of 41 players. The academic abuses, the 1989-90 probation, the Charles Shackleford case—all took their toll on the pride of N.C. State academics and basketball. The result, after months of investigation, was a \$613,000 settlement that ended the Valvano Era.

It was time for a new beginning. On April 23, 1990, Les Robinson was named head coach at State. A graduate of NCSU in 1965 and a former player under Everett Case, Robinson returns to State after 16 years as a college head coach.

Robinson guided the Citadel for 11 years from 1975-85, winning more games (132) than any other Bulldog coach. He then moved on to East Tennessee State, where he led the Buccaneers to two NCAA Tournament appearances. Last year, the Bucs went 27-7 in their best season ever.

The coaching credentials are there. But what drew N.C. State to Les Robinson was the fact that in 16 years, all but one of his four-year players have earned their degrees.

To make the match even prettier, Robinson is simply filled with State pride and tradition.

"What we want to promote and sell in our recruiting and overall is the great tradition at North Carolina State," he said. "We've had some great players that are doing very well in society. For those that did not graduate, my thinking is it's not a dead issue. They can still graduate. We're trying to focus on some of the positive things of the past."

Robinson's upbeat attitude has made the transition a remarkably smooth one for the State team.

"It's been really easy to cope with," senior guard Chris Corchiani said. "From day one, everyone's really given Coach Robinson respect. That's some-

N.C. State					
No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
12	A. Fletcher	G	6-0	185	Fr.
13	C. Corchiani	G	6-1	182	Sr.
15	R. Whitley	G	6-0	164	Jr.
21	R. Monroe	G	6-3	181	Sr.
22	M. Bakalli	F	6-6	190	Fr.
23	J. Knox	F	6-7	205	Jr.
24	T. Gugliotta	F	6-9	219	Jr.
33	A. Robinson	F	6-9	220	Fr.
34	B. Feggins	F	6-6	190	So.
42	K. Thompson	F	6-9	225	So.
45	M. Lewis	F	6-7	215	Fr.

Head Coach: Les Robinson (N.C. State, 1965). Overall Coaching Record: 213-232 in 16 years. Record at N.C. State: first year

thing that I thought was going to take time, but he's just really gained respect instantly."

Corchiani's senior backcourt mate, Rodney Monroe, agreed.

"For the first time in a long time, it's a relaxed atmosphere out there. The players are relaxed, the coaches are relaxed, even the student body is relaxed."

When he kept the spirit of N.C. State basketball from shattering, Robinson accomplished his most vital task. The program can now begin rebuilding.

And, as the Wolfpack roster clearly shows, rebuilding looks to be the name of the game this year.

State was prohibited from off-campus recruiting until Sept. 1. As the season begins, the team looks to have a strong starting five. The bench, however, is thin ... to say the very, very least.

"We have no scholarship player on the bench that's played a second of college basketball," Robinson said.

All talk about the Wolfpack begins at the guard position — for very good reason. Corchiani and Monroe, forever dubbed "Fire and Ice," make up one of the country's strongest backcourts.

Monroe is the ACC's most prolific shooter. Last season, the 6-foot-3 guard averaged 23.2 points per game, second in the conference. He buried 48.3 per-

cent of his 3-point attempts, tops in the league. With 1,715 career points, he is on track to break David Thompson's school record of 2,309.

Despite double and triple coverage, Monroe was the leading scorer in 25 of State's 30 games last year. Special defenses don't seem to faze the tall cool one. His game face never changes, and neither does his performance.

"He's probably the best player I've ever played against," UNC guard Hubert Davis said.

Corchiani, arguably the premier point guard in the nation, averaged 13.1 points, 7.9 assists and 3.1 steals per contest last season. With 739 career assists, he is on track to become the first NCAA Division I player ever to tally 1,000 assists. He sports an assist-to-turnover ratio of 2.6 to 1. Corchiani is also 39 steals away from the ACC career mark.

Blistering with emotion and drive, the 6-1 guard sizzles with an intense passion for the game.

"Chris is just a hard-nosed, tough kid," Robinson said. "He has a lot of the intangibles that coaches try to recruit. He's a winner, and he's tough. He doesn't back down from anybody."

The guards coming off the bench do show potential. Migjea Bakalli, a 6-6 freshman, poured in 25.3 ppg as a high school senior, Adam Fletcher, a 6-1 freshman, averaged 20.9 ppg, but Roland Whitley, a 6-0 junior, has played only 51 minutes in two years.

Up front, junior Tom Gugliotta and sophomore Bryant Feggins occupy the forward positions, while sophomore Kevin Thompson starts at center.

Gugliotta was the surprise of the ACC last season. "Gugs" dropped in 11.1 ppg and led the team with seven rebounds per contest. The 6-9 forward has a sparkling diversity of court talents.

"He does so much for us," Corchiani said. "He can lead the break, he can shoot threes, he led us in rebounding. He's just an all-around great player."

Feggins and Thompson, though full in spirit and talent, are lean in court experience. Feggins averaged 4.2 points and 2.5 rebounds in 10.6 minutes per contest last year. Thompson tallied 3.3 points and 2.8 boards in 12.2 minutes per game. But the recruiting restrictions made it clear to Robinson months ago that the two would start as sophomores.

"My thinking was, 'Let's go ahead and not try to fool these young men,'" Robinson said. "They started in May to



Chris Corchiani joins Rodney Monroe in State's 'Fire and Ice' backcourt

think like starters, and I wanted them to do that. I think it paid dividends."

The two will likely be given ample time to mature, for the Wolfpack frontcourt is not deep at all.

Freshman Marc Lewis, a 6-7 forward, averaged 23.1 ppg in leading Greensboro Page High to the state 4-A championship. Freshman Tony Robinson, a 6-9, 230-pound forward, was redshirted last season. He had never played organized ball before high school. Senior David Lee, a 6-8, 250-pound forward, was also redshirted last year. He averaged 1.1 ppg two years ago.

The Wolfpack coaching staff has also held tryouts for the student body, looking to add at least one more player to the bench. Yes, this is a team in recon-

struction. Robinson will rely heavily on the 3-point shot, as he did at ETSU. He has given Monroe, Corchiani, Gugliotta and Bakalli the green light on 3-point attempts.

While the Wolfpack coach prefers an up-tempo game, he knows the fast pace will fail if his starters play 40-minute games. Fatigue will set in quicker than a Corchiani steal.

"In most conference play, your game is won and lost in those last few minutes," Robinson said. "They're going to have to have some breathers. It's going to be a 'Catch-22.' It depends really on the quality of those substitutes and how much time we can give them."

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