

Experienced Terrapins Now Final 4 Insiders

By CURT KENDALL
Staff Writer

This season, Maryland hopes to produce a sequel to its first Final Four appearance in school history.

With four returning starters from last year's original cast, the Terrapins are poised to put on a good second showing.

But Terps coach Gary Williams doesn't put much stock in any critics' reviews. "You prove yourself every year," Williams said. "You hope you're as good as people say you are, but you have to go play people."

Maryland's offense, which ranked third in the nation last year with 85.2 points per game, will rely on many of the same weapons this season.

The Terrapins (25-11, 10-6 in the ACC last season) return leading scorers and All-ACC performers Juan Dixon and Lonny Baxter, as well as junior guard Stephen Blake, who led the conference in assists a year ago.

While Dixon, who averaged 18.2 points per game, attacks from the perimeter, Baxter will provide scoring from the low post.

"They feed off each other," Williams said. "They really help each other, one inside and one outside."

Baxter, an agile 6-foot-8, 260-pound center, will provide a physical defensive presence in the paint. The senior averaged 7.9 rebounds and 1.5 blocks per game last year.

The duo must shine if Maryland is to make a run in the Big Dance.

The loss of Terrence Morris and Danny Miller will weaken the frontcourt, but the Terrapins still have experience

and depth at the forward positions, where Byron Mouton leads a strong supporting cast.

Mouton, who started 30 games last year, will start at small forward. The 6-6 senior adds second-chance scoring opportunities with his ability to crash the offensive boards.

"Basically, we lose one starter out of the rotation," Baxter said. "We're basically the same team. Tahj Holden is going to have to step in and Chris Wilcox, too."

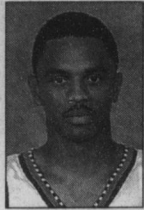
Williams will rely on Drew Nicholas as his sixth man. Nicholas, a versatile junior, can play either guard position or small forward. He also adds a 3-point threat off the bench.

Maryland will perform in Cole Field House for one more season before moving to the new Comcast Center next year.

Maryland is hoping to duplicate and improve on its four instant classics and three losses against Duke, the team that eliminated Maryland from both the ACC and NCAA Tournaments.

The Terrapins have their eyes set on at least two more showdowns with the Blue Devils this season.

"It's a great rivalry," Dixon said. "(The Blue Devils) believes that they can win the national championship every year. If we believe that, we can get back to the Final Four and go a little further."



Maryland guard Juan Dixon was an All-ACC guard last year after averaging 18.2 points per game.

N.C. State Freshmen Lead Revival

Herb Sendek has struggled to build a strong program and needs help from his celebrated freshman class.

By RANDY WELLINGTON
Staff Writer

For Herb Sendek, the 2001-02 season is his sixth at N.C. State. Without an NCAA Tournament berth this year, it will most likely be his last.

Recruiting has not been Sendek's problem. This year's class, rated No. 1 in the ACC by prepstars.com, proves that, but his results on the court have been paltry.

His record at N.C. State stands at 86-74. Last season, the Wolfpack finished a mediocre 13-16 overall and 5-11 in the ACC, breaking a streak of four consecutive trips to the Little Dance, the National Invitational Tournament.

This year, though, the Wolfpack has a

distinctly different look from the large, bruising teams of Sendek's first five years in Raleigh.

"One of the most engaging aspects of our team right now is our position-less nature," Sendek said. "We have a lot of guys who are interchangeable and versatile."

Fitting into that versatile mode is prized recruit Julius Hodge, a 6-foot-6 shooting guard from Bronx, N.Y., rated among the top 25 in the nation by most recruiting publications.

Two freshmen from Maryland, both ranked among the top 100 in the nation, figure to see significant playing time this year: Jordan Collins, a 6-10 center, and Levi Watkins, and a 6-7 junior.



N.C. State coach Herb Sendek led the Wolfpack to four straight NIT appearances before last season.

The fourth jewel in the class is Ilian Evtimov, a 6-7 forward from Winston-Salem, brother of former North Carolina forward Vasco Evtimov.

In the Red-White scrimmage on Oct. 27, Hodge scored 15 points on 6-for-12 shooting.

He also scored on a layup with 1.1 seconds left to give his Red team a 44-42 victory.

Watkins, too, was effective, scoring 12 points on 5-6 shooting. Collins and Evtimov both scored four points.

The scrimmage was the showcase for the Wolfpack's new motion offense, created to utilize the quickness of players like sophomore guard Scooter Sherrill, who led all scorers with 16 points.

Other returning contributors are sophomore Clifford Crawford (7.7 ppg last season) and last year's leading scorer, Anthony Grundy (14.6 ppg), who as one of only two returning seniors, likes the way the freshmen have started the season.

"They're willing to learn, they're all

willing to put in the extra effort," Grundy said. "And surprisingly, all of them have stood out and showed great skill and composure and the ability to learn quickly."

The other senior is Archie Miller, a 5-10 guard who is a proponent of Sendek.

"There's not a guy who works harder, there's not a guy who wants to win more, a guy who does things the right way," Miller said.

"He's a straight-arrow guy. He deserves it."

In a league that lacks strong contenders after Duke and Maryland, N.C. State has a chance to land a fifth-place finish this season, an ending that would most likely bring the team and Sendek their main goal: an NCAA Tournament bid.

"I think everybody who follows the Wolfpack is anxious for us to go to the NCAA Tournament," Sendek said.

If they don't, expect those same followers to be anxious for Sendek to leave town.

Seminoles Look to Sneak Up on ACC

By BRANDON COWARD
Staff Writer

Underdogs.

Florida State's men's basketball program is slated to finish just above Clemson in the ACC basement this year.

It's a good thing, then, that Florida State (9-21, 4-12 in the ACC last year) is mostly the same team of underdogs that upset NCAA tourney semifinalist Maryland last

season. That upset changed the doubts of many and has people wondering about the capabilities of this year's squad.

"I think we made the plays and kept making plays the entire game, and then we got stops on the defensive end, and we just kind of hung in there and got it done," Florida State coach Steve Robinson said. "I think we played good basketball down the stretch of the season."

A vital part of last year's team will return this year in the form of senior guard Delvon Arrington. It's hardly a memory that he came close to not making it into college.

Four years ago, Arrington found his niche playing basketball, but a diag-



Florida State guard Delvon Arrington led the Seminoles in scoring, assists, steals and minutes played last year.

nosed mental handicap held him back from the grade point average and college entrance exam scores he needed to play. Some doubted he would survive academically at the college level.

Arrington should prove all his doubters wrong. He's scheduled to graduate on time while shining on the court for the Seminoles.

"It's almost like with Delvon it is a reason to celebrate," Robinson said. "Here's a guy that since he's been at Florida State, every time he comes on television they say 'Delvon Arrington, a partial qualifier.' He's shown the initiative, and he's proven some people wrong."

Arrington is not the only Seminole who has had to overcome obstacles. Six-foot-10, 350-pound Nigel Dixon has lopped off significant pounds in preparation for a larger role on the court.

"He's improved so much. He's lost weight; he's lost like 80-90 pounds," Arrington said. "He's been moving great laterally. He's very light on his feet, and I think he's going to be able to help us by getting up and down the court and producing more minutes for us and really

putting a lot of pressure on the big men."

Playing around Dixon this year will likely be juniors Mike Matthews and Trevor Harvey. Both players will have to step up and make their presences felt in the middle for Florida State to be successful.

Another key for the Seminoles will be the development of freshmen Adrian McPherson — a two-sport star in the mold of former FSU star Charlie Ward — and Anthony Richardson.

"I just tell (FSU football) to keep him healthy, and Adrian's going to have an opportunity to be a two-sport player," Robinson said. "And that's something we have to wait and see when he will make the transition back to college basketball."

As for Richardson, Robinson hopes he will come in and make an impact but wants to give him some time to adapt to college basketball without too much pressure.

"I expect him to come in and be typical of your freshman," Robinson said. "I think we have to be patient with him and understand that he's not going to be the guy that has to shoulder all of it by himself."

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