

Backcourt Adjustments Key to Cavaliers' Success

By Will Small
Staff Writer

Without even playing a game, Virginia's 2001 season has already had a less-than-majestic beginning.

Virginia was one of the most dangerous teams in the ACC and the country last season, finishing fourth in the league with a 20-9 record, 9-7 in the ACC.

It ended the season ranked No. 16 before losing to upset-minded Gonzaga in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

The success was expected to continue this season, as the Cavaliers lost only one starter, point guard Donald Hand, a team captain for three seasons.

The blow of Hand's departure was to be softened by the return of redshirt-sophomore Majestic Mapp, who missed the 2000-01 season due to a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee.

However, Mapp decided to undergo surgery again on the knee, eliminating

any chance of him playing this season.

"It's scary anytime you have four surgeries (on the same knee)," Virginia coach Pete Gillen said. "Hopefully he'll be back next year."

The injury to Mapp will force Roger Mason Jr. to play the point, although he is better suited to play shooting guard.

"He's more comfortable at the two, but the question is, is (the team) better with him at the point, or with him moving back to two?" Gillen said.

Mason was a premier player for the Cavs last season, leading the team in scoring with 15.7 points per game. He also led the league in free-throw percentage, shooting 88.4 percent.

Beyond Mason, the rest of Virginia's backcourt will be tested with less seasoned players.

Freshman Keith Jenifer and sophomore J.C. Mathis will compete for the vacant starting position. Jenifer might even move to point before it's all over.

"Jenifer is very good," Gillen said.

"We think he may have a chance to win a point guard position, not at the start of the season, but maybe halfway through."

Depth will not be a problem for Virginia's frontcourt. Chris Williams, Adam Hall and Travis Watson make up one of the league's best front lines.

"We're going to be bigger; a little bit thicker on the low post, but we won't be as quick in certain spots," Gillen said.

Anything less than quick will be a strong contrast to Virginia's style of play last season.

Hand led a high-power, fast-break-oriented offense that helped guide the Cavaliers to a 14-1 record at home.

Mason's adjustment at the point and the transition of four freshmen might be the deciding factor in Virginia's ability to continue that style.

"You've got to pick a style, and that's our style," Gillen said. "The way we play, chuck and duck, quick, we're going to need these young guys."

Clemson to Score by Committee

By Chris Gilfillan
Staff Writer

With its first exhibition game on Halloween, the ghost of Will Solomon continues to haunt Clemson's basketball team.

Any time the upcoming Tiger season is mentioned, the absence of Solomon is referred to constantly.

Without the 19.7 points a game from Solomon, Clemson (12-19, 2-14 in the ACC last season) will look to sophomore guard Tony Stockman to handle more of the scoring load.

Last season, Stockman's 12 points per game led the ACC freshmen scoring.

Other than Stockman, Clemson boasts a recruiting class of eight freshmen that will likely be the crutch for the Tigers to lean on this year.

"Our freshmen and sophomore classes are effectively as talented as any in this conference," said Clemson coach Larry Shyatt. "I look forward to two, three, maybe four years from each of them."

Nevertheless, the starless Tigers will focus on a balanced team offense and a strong defense.

"Now I would be happy as a lark if we could get nine of them at eight or nine points per game," Shyatt said. "Sixty-five to 70 percent of our practices are devoted to defense."

Also adding to the hullabaloo for the offense is a new motion-oriented twist.

"We've got to find some more people, and that complements why we are running the motion offense," Shyatt said. "If we are balanced and we have no stars, then what other way to show that balance than to be unpredictable?"

With the motion offense, one would worry about the size of Clemson's forwards. To be exact, 6-foot-7, 250-pound Chris Hobbs and 6-8, 250-pound Ray

Henderson.

Both of these forwards were plagued with injuries throughout last season. Hobbs had a ACL injury, and Henderson has recovered from three surgeries on his knee and ankle.

"It's going to be tough for other teams because we have some big guys," said lone senior Jamar McKnight. "They're big guys, and they're bruised. A lot of teams, they really just want to push it, but us, we can slow it down."

To add to Shyatt's spooks, last week starting guard Dwon Clifton passed out before practice. Clifton, who averaged 3.9 points and 2.6 rebounds a year ago, was cleared to play last week.

Hewitt Tries to Sustain Success in Year 2

By David Andrukonis
Staff Writer

After half of his surprisingly successful 2000-01 squad graduated, Georgia Tech second-year coach Paul Hewitt went to the ends of the earth during the offseason to rebuild his team.

In his first year at Georgia Tech, Hewitt earned ACC Coach of the Year honors by leading the Yellow Jackets (17-13, 8-8 in the ACC) to a fifth-place finish in the conference and their first

NCAA Tournament berth since 1996. But five of those players are gone, including Alvin Jones, Jon Babul and Shaun Fein.

Hewitt grabbed four of the nation's top 100 high school recruits to fill those spots, but he'll count on his veterans to come back better and healthier.

Georgia Tech will be weakest in the front court positions, where it loses the 13.4 points and 10.4 rebounds per game of Jones. In order to strengthen his team near the basket, Hewitt reeled in Luke Schenscher, a 7-foot center from Australia.

"He's very skilled," Hewitt said. "He knows how to play the game. He's just got to get stronger. Once he gets up to speed from a physical standpoint, he's going to be a very good ACC player."

Schenscher not only will have to step up in the wake of Jones' departure but also for Jones' replacement-apparent Michael Isenhour, who was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia Oct. 23. Sophomore Robert Brooks, who measures only 6-7, and Ed Nelson, a 6-8, 245-pound freshman, will be

pressed into early action.

Hewitt repeatedly stressed rebounding as a major determining factor of his team's success this season.

As expected, Georgia Tech's strength will be its back court, where it returns point guard Tony Akins, a senior who received an all-ACC honorable mention last year and is gunning for more. Akins led the team in points per game last season, averaging 18.1 points per game and 46.6 percent from 3-point range since Feb. 1.

Wake Features New Coach, New Style

By Ben DeSantis
Staff Writer

Wake Forest point guard Broderick Hicks is tired of his team just being ranked in the top half of the ACC.

The Demon Deacons, ranked No. 5 in last year's preseason ACC media poll, found themselves No. 5 in this year's preseason poll as well after finishing the 2000-01 campaign at 19-11, 8-8 in the ACC.

Hicks, one of five returning Demon Deacon seniors, said it's time he and his teammates step up and take Wake Forest back to the top of the conference, somewhere the Demon Deacons haven't been since the days of Tim Duncan.

"I can't say it's an honor to be in the top four because we want to win," Hicks said. "To consider us in the top four is fine, but we're working toward No. 1."

Leading the Deacons in their quest for No. 1 is first-year coach Skip Prosser, who comes to Winston-Salem from Xavier, where he led the Musketeers to 148 wins in seven years, five consecutive 20-win seasons and six postseason appearances.

Prosser takes over for Dave Odom, who left Wake Forest after 12 seasons and two ACC titles to coach South Carolina.

With him Prosser brings the up-tempo style of play that worked so well for his Xavier squads. He said his players are starting to catch on to his philosophy but still have a long way to go.

"We're still a real work in progress," Prosser said. "They're trying to play the way we'd like to play, but I'm not sure if they really understand at all how hard it is to play that way."

While his team learns the new system, Prosser will rely on Hicks and the other upperclassmen to lessen the learn-

ing curve for the freshmen.

Wake returns its top three scorers, Josh Howard, Darius Songaila and Craig Dawson, who combined to score nearly 40 points per game last season.

Songaila said he thinks the new system and more intense conditioning will

allow the Demon Deacons to surprise some of their ACC foes.

"We have a lot of athletic guys, and I think everybody on this team is able to play this kind of basketball," he said. "I don't think it is going to be detrimental to our team."



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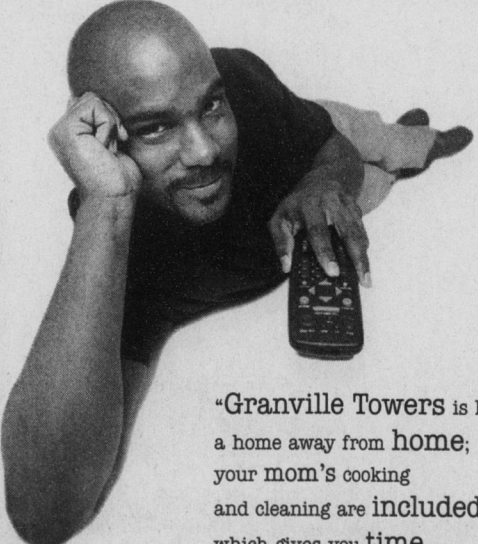


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