

Forwards a model of versatility

Atkinson, McBee to see variety of roles

BY CHRIS GILFILLAN
ASSISTANT SPORTS SATURDAY EDITOR

Where have all the forwards gone?

This is the main question facing the North Carolina women's basketball team as it lays out its game plan for the rest of the season.

Adding to the ambiguity is the status of the ACC's second-leading rebounder, La'Tangela Atkinson, who, oddly enough, will probably play primarily shooting guard.

Atkinson, a sophomore, actually had the most overall rebounds in the conference, but her average was just below Georgia Tech's senior Sonja Mallory.

"You've got to have an attitude when you rebound," Atkinson said. "You can't go out there and be nonchalant — you've got to want the ball. When I'm in the game and the ball is shot, I'm always wanting the ball, so I go up and get that rebound."

That attitude, along with 9.7 points per game, helped her get voted ACC Rookie of the Year last season.

So with Atkinson as a guard, where are the other rebounds going to come from?

The Tar Heels also return junior forward Kenya McBee and defensive specialist Nikita Bell, who is likely to play at the small forward position.

Although she was third in the ACC in steals last year with 2.5 per game, Bell still lacks some of the height to play down low.

But despite only standing six feet tall, Bell used her strength to compete with opponents on the boards. She finished averaging 5.6 a game last year.

McBee, on the other hand, will be busy helping to back up center Candace Sutton.

McBee has the height, but still has yet to prove herself as a power forward.

Last year she came off the bench to play in all 34 games, but averaged only 4.2 rebounds per game.

Already a small and quick lineup, the Tar Heels have added freshman Camille Little, who could fill the missing forward position for the Tar Heels.

"UNC is usually an athletic and a quick team," said Duke coach Gail Goetsenkor. "This year though, they are more athletic and quicker as a team."

The concerns with Little are her experience and strength, though she has been lauded as one of the best rebounders on the team in practice.

"She needs to get stronger if she's going to play in the post," McBee said. "She has to be mentally tough because usually freshmen don't come out there mentally tough."

Although not as strong as the rest of the league's forwards, Little began the practices with consecutive impressive performances.

"Camille stands out in rebounding, she's just ferocious going for those rebounds," said UNC coach Sylvia Hatchell. "She's aggressive going to the boards, and she can get rebounds anywhere on the rim."

Still, the Tar Heels will run a very up-tempo offense to compensate for their lack of inside height, especially with Little and Bell at forwards.

"To me, forwards are old-time

basketball," Hatchell said. "We just have a lot of kids that can play a lot of positions."

This year, the Tar Heels return one of the most productive rebounding teams in the conference.

Last year, they finished third in the conference with a rebounding advantage of 3.9 per game.

Unfortunately for them, they will have to

improve on that to compete with ACC powerhouse and preseason national No. 2 Duke, which returns a team that will be led by senior forward Iciss Tillis and senior wing Alana Beard.

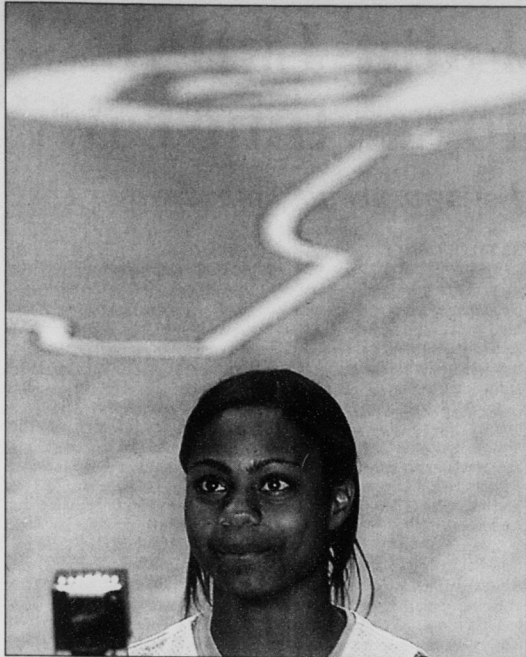
The Blue Devils topped the ACC in rebounding last year — Tillis was second in the ACC in rebounds per game with 8.6.

But the Tar Heels' versatility lends itself to unity as a team, which will give them a boost against preseason favorite Duke.

"I think (the team) molds together on and off the court," Little said. "We laugh and joke, but we definitely know how to be serious and work together on the floor. I think we will be something to watch and surprise people this year."

Junior forward Kenya McBee averaged 4.2 rebounds per game off the bench last year and will be counted upon to fill the void in the low post.

DTH/
BRIAN CASSELLA



DTH/GREG LOGAN

Point guard Ivory Latta holds numerous South Carolina high school records and was voted ACC Preseason Rookie of the Year by the media.

Latta's speed, skill a boost for offense

Bell one of ACC's best defensive players

BY BRANDON COWARD
STAFF WRITER

With the dawn of a new season, the North Carolina women's basketball team is stuck on one gear — full throttle.

This theme is characterized by the team's new point guard, lightning-quick freshman Ivory Latta.

Latta, who averaged 44.5 points a game for York Comprehensive High School in South Carolina, was voted as the hands-down favorite for ACC Preseason Rookie of the Year.

"They're gonna have their hands full trying to guard Ivory," said junior Nikita Bell.

That's high praise coming from Bell, who made the ACC All-Defensive team last year and says she sometimes has to grab Latta by her jersey to stop her from getting to the basket in practice.

As the season approaches, Latta seems to be the only fixture in the backcourt.

Bell, sophomore La'Tangela Atkinson, junior Leah Metcalf and sophomore Jessica Sell could all see time at the shooting guard position.

Sell sees the lack of a set lineup as an advantage.

"Our team is extremely versatile," Sell said. "If you put anybody at any position on the floor, they could run that spot."

"That's good because it makes us seem very unpredictable to opponents."

Sell looks to reprise her role as three-point specialist this year. Last season she shot a team-best 40.6 percent from behind the arc.

Atkinson is coming off of a stellar freshman year in which she was named ACC Rookie of the Year.

She dominated the boards for the Tar Heels, ranking second in the ACC in rebounding, averaging 8.3 per game.

Coach Sylvia Hatchell expects big things out of Atkinson.

"Tangie is better than ever," Hatchell said. "Even though she was ACC Freshman of the Year, I don't think she's really showed you what she can do."

Metcalf could also see some time in the backcourt and at point guard.

She ran the point at times last year, averaging 9.4 points and 4.3 assists. Metcalf could step in as a two-guard and combine with Latta for a backcourt that's hard to catch up with.

"With Ivory at point and Leah at two-guard, that's a pretty quick backcourt," Hatchell said. "I don't know if anybody's quicker."

Bell will probably split time as a forward and guard this year. She was an All-ACC Second Team selection last year and looks to take more of a leadership role in the backcourt.

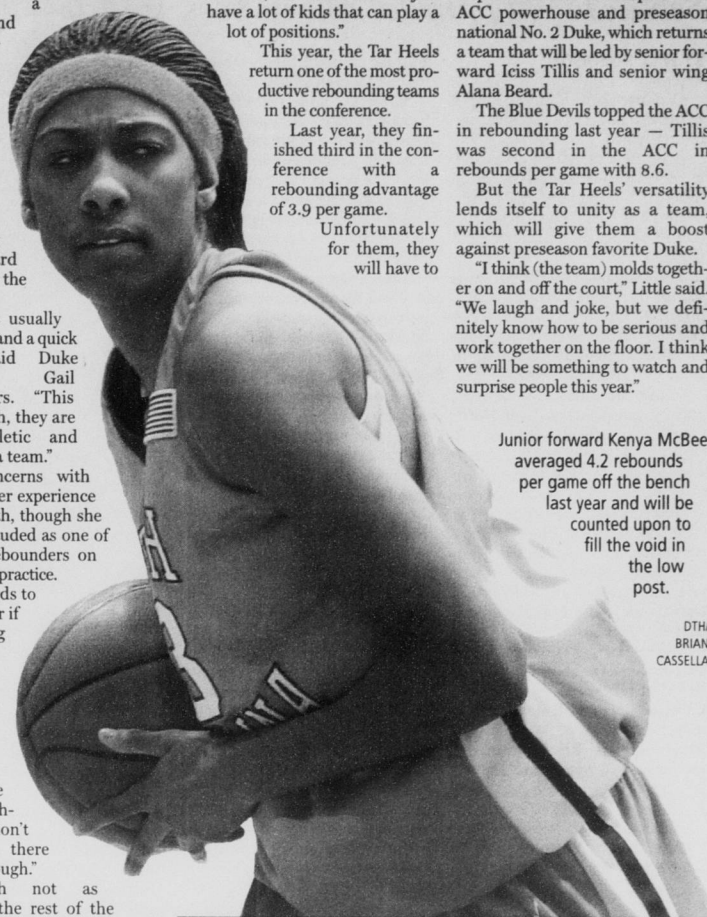
Bell will be expected to pick up much of the void left by the departure of the Tar Heels' leading scorer, Coretta Brown, who now plays with the WNBA's Indiana Fever.

Brown was a key part of North Carolina's attack last season, averaging 14.5 points a game.

Bell, though, was UNC's second-leading scorer last year, averaging 11.4 points as well as 5.6 rebounds per game.

She has also proven that she can put up big numbers, dropping 30 points against Maryland, the highest total by any player last year.

"With Coretta gone, I've tried to set up and lead by example," Bell said. "I try to lead by example and



Did you know...

...you could have a space of your own and live minutes from campus?

Brand-new singles now available!

Granville TOWERS

919.370.4500
info@granvilletowers.com
www.granvilletowers.com

WIPE OUT Duke Blue Devils

WIPE OUT Duke Blue Devils

www.wipeoutyoursportsrival.com

www.wipeoutyoursportsrival.com

Lacock's

Shoe Store and Repair Shop • Established in 1916

Mon-Fri 8am-5:30pm • Sat 9:30am-4pm • 919-942-4896

Located in Plaza Mall in the Village Shopping Center, Chapel Hill

Welcome Back Roy!

Good Luck Tar Heels!

GO HEELS! Katie's SOFT PRETZELS

125 E. FRANKLIN STREET ~ 929.3639

Katie's SOFT PRETZELS

Buy 100 Sticks, Get 50 FREE!

Perfect for the Game!

EXP 11/21/03
GOOD ONLY AT FRANKLIN STREET LOCATION

Barbour

Julian's

Purveyors to Tar Heel Royalty Since 1942

Downtown Chapel Hill
140 East Franklin Street
Monday-Saturday 10-6