

These 'Canes should be able Virginia Tech faces several big challenges

BY JOANNE CANNELL
STAFF WRITER

With a year in a new conference under its belt, the Miami men's basketball team has set its sight on a new goal: the NCAA Tournament.

"We talk differently to this team," says head coach Frank Haith. "Now we talk to this team about playing in the NCAA Tournament as an attainable goal. Those talks didn't start until midway through the ACC season last year."

Some ACC veterans realized they might have underestimated the new additions. N.C. State and Maryland should recognize Miami — all three teams finished last season tied for sixth in conference play.

"We definitely surprised some people and showed some people that we deserve to be in the ACC and could compete with anybody in this league," says senior guard Robert Hite.

Haith and his players spent last year adjusting to a new conference and the competitive nature for which the ACC is famous.

"Maybe our teams were unknown," he says. "They didn't know what type of team we had. I can't put my finger on one thing, but we were able to be competitive. I never once talked to my team about winning; I talked to my team about competing."

The competition paid off and only can make Miami more dangerous this season. Now that their foes know what the Hurricanes are capable of, the team must stay focused.

"We've got to understand that we've got to continue to work harder because now teams do know you," Haith says. "They're going to try to take things away."

Junior guard Guillermo Diaz was selected to the preseason All-ACC team and joined the ranks of players such as Duke's J.J. Redick and Shelden Williams. But Haith

THREE POINTERS

- ▶ 2004-05 Record: 16-13 (7-9 ACC)
- ▶ Coach: Frank Haith
- ▶ Players to Watch: Guillermo Diaz, Jr., guard; Robert Hite, Sr., guard; Anthony King, Jr., forward

knows Diaz won't let the expectations get to his head.

"He's one of those guys that doesn't like the limelight, likes to be in the background" Haith says. "He doesn't want that attention."

Diaz averaged 19 points per game last season, and along with Hite, they form a backcourt that is probably one of the best in the country.

"We've been playing together for two years now," Hite says. "If one of us is having a bad game, the other one definitely will pick us up."

Diaz and Hite aren't the only stars of the team. Junior post man Anthony King shows a lot of promise, especially for a team with such a strong backcourt.

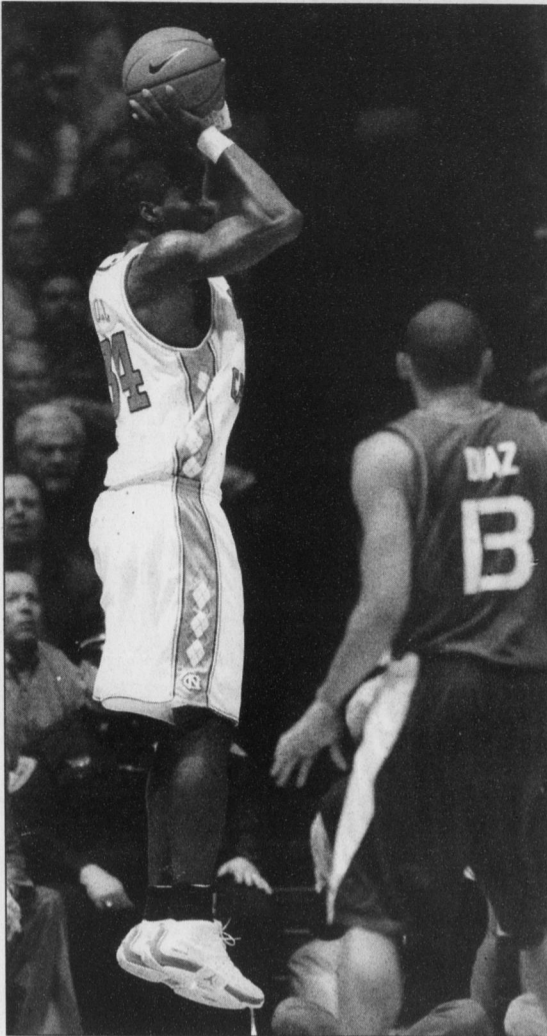
"Having a double-figure scorer that plays in the post will help our team, because the bulk of our scoring will continue to come from our perimeter guys," Haith says.

And King's teammates see his determination to improve.

"He's definitely worked really hard and gotten a lot better with his offensive game," Hite says. "You'll see when the season starts — the hard work is going to show."

After an early exit from the NIT last year, Miami isn't limiting itself to the goals it hopes to reach.

"(The NCAA Tournament) is our biggest focus this year — that's our main goal," Hite says. "We've been working extremely hard to be prepared for this season, and we're getting ready."



Miami star Guillermo Diaz (13), one of the best guards in the ACC, looks on as UNC's David Noel shoots in the Smith Center last year.

NCAA Tourney berth is possible

BY KRISTIN PRATT
STAFF WRITER

After leaving the Atlantic 10 and Big East conferences for greener pastures, the Virginia Tech men's basketball team has proven it has a home in the ACC.

The Hokies went 16-14 and finished fourth in the conference with a record of 8-8 last season. They defeated Temple but lost to Memphis in last year's postseason tournament.

There was just one problem. That tournament was the NIT, not the NCAA.

"Man, I couldn't be more proud of our team," says junior guard Zabian Dowdell. "We were glad to be in the postseason (last year), but we hope to be in the NCAA Tournament."

Despite losing swingman Carlos Dixon to graduation and sophomore swingman Wynton Witherspoon to a fractured left foot, the Hokies hope to build on the success of their inaugural ACC season this year.

"Carlos, you know, coming into games you knew you could count on him," Dowdell says. "A big question mark for us is how to overcome that. But after a few games, we'll learn to play without him."

Coach Seth Greenberg, the reigning ACC Coach of the Year, agrees that it will be hard to replace Dixon, but says that the Hokies will have an experienced backcourt this season nonetheless with Dowdell and junior guard Jamon Gordon running the show.

Dowdell was the team's star, averaging 14.4 points per game and earning honorable mention All-ACC honors. Gordon, though often overlooked because of Dowdell, quietly put together an excellent season. He started all 29 games he played in, compiling 10.9 points and 4.1 assists per game.

"The ACC is a guard league anyway, and we have great guards," says Dowdell, who shot better than 42 percent from 3-point range last season.

Although the frontcourt will suffer without Witherspoon, who was expected to play a much larger role this season after averaging just 10 minutes a game as a freshman, some of that loss will be offset by the presence of junior forward

"We were glad to be in the postseason (last year), but we hope to be in the NCAA Tournament."

ZABIAN DOWDELL, VA. TECH GUARD

THREE POINTERS

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- ▶ Coach: Seth Greenberg
- ▶ Players to Watch: Zabian Dowdell, Jr., guard; Jamon Gordon, Jr., guard; Coleman Collins, Jr., forward

Coleman Collins. Last season Collins averaged seven rebounds a game and had a .452 field goal percentage.

Aiding Collins on the inside is sophomore Deron Washington, a returning starter who will see time on both the wing and the interior this season.

Virginia Tech also welcomes three freshmen this season, including A.D. Vassallo, who played on the Puerto Rican National Team this summer in the FIBA Under-21 World Championship.

Greenberg says Vassallo's international experience is a positive, and both Dowdell and Greenberg have gushed about his shooting ability. But like all freshmen, Dowdell says, Vassallo will have to learn the ins and outs of Hokie basketball first before he can be a star.

"A lot of them came in talking about their high-school days," Dowdell says. "I told them to forget them. I told them they're in college now."

But the Hokies already have lost a freshman, Hyman Taylor, who will transfer after violating undisclosed team rules.

Plus, they face yet another hardship, as one of their leaders, senior forward Allen Calloway, has been diagnosed with cancer.

And speaking of hardships, Virginia Tech's biggest might be a grueling ACC schedule that includes away games against Duke, Boston College and Wake Forest — the top three teams in the ACC.

"Our first ACC game is at Duke in December," Collins says. "We'll definitely find out early on what we're made of."

New-look Yellow Jackets feeling green

Ga. Tech returns 1 senior, no starters

BY JONATHAN CARL
STAFF WRITER

If you called Georgia Tech's 2005-06 season a rebuilding year, you would be 75 percent right.

Suffering the second-largest exodus of starters in the ACC behind North Carolina, the Yellow Jackets must field a team of players who spent more than three-quarters of last season on the bench.

The only returning player with starting experience is senior center Theodis Tarver, who started three games as a freshman in Georgia Tech's 2003 NIT bid.

After playing an average of nine minutes a game last season, Tarver is now the team's most experienced player and its only senior.

"I was always one of the youngest guys," he says. "And now, to be the oldest guy of the group, it feels kind of weird."

Despite the vacancies, head coach Paul Hewitt says that he is optimistic and that he thinks the Yellow Jackets will be better in rebounding and more consistent in scoring this season.

Sophomores likely will see the

most playing time, with 6-foot-5 guard Anthony Morrow, 6-9 center Ra'Sean Dickey, 6-6 forward Jeremis Smith and 6-0 guard Zam Fredrick expected to fill starting roles.

Morrow is the team's top returning scorer, with an average of 5.7 points a game.

"I don't worry about him," Hewitt says. "He's such a competitor, and obviously he understands (the game)."

Hewitt is concerned, however, about the inexperience of Fredrick and Dickey, who will shoulder much of the team's leadership responsibilities. Still, the coach says he is optimistic about the improvement of both since last year.

Fredrick saw the least amount of game time of the four last year, playing an average of seven minutes a game — but he will be counted on to be the team's point guard. And after losing 25 pounds since last season, Fredrick can play longer without needing a breather.

"I'm the hardest at the end of practice, because that is the time that most of the games in this

THREE POINTERS

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- ▶ Coach: Paul Hewitt
- ▶ Players to Watch: Ra'Sean Dickey, So., center; Anthony Morrow, So., guard; Jeremis Smith, So., forward

league are decided," Hewitt says. "Now, (Fredrick) can push through a lot of that stuff."

Expectations are also high for Dickey, who had key performances in late-season ACC games against Miami and Virginia last year.

"He is talented," Hewitt says. "He can really score. I think he's capable, other than Chris Bosh, of being the best low-post scorer we've had."

Tarver says that Dickey had trouble last year adjusting to ACC play but that fitness training and practice have helped him with his confidence.

"He's been working on his game the whole offseason," Tarver says. "He is going to be really good."

The Yellow Jackets also added four freshmen: 6-9 center Alade Aminu, 6-5 guard D'Andre Bell, 6-

"I was always one of the youngest guys. And now, to be the oldest ... it feels kind of weird."

THEODIS TARVER, GA. TECH FORWARD

3 guard Lewis Clinch and 6-6 guard Paco Diaw, who redshirted last year but is eligible to play this season.

And with less than one-quarter of last year's game time to share between them, this year's starters will have to rely on ability rather than wisdom to win games.

"My primary concern is experience," Hewitt says. "Talent is not my primary concern. I think we're talented."

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