

Class of the league ...again

Maryland and N.C. State should once again have the best women's basketball teams in the ACC—perhaps the best in the nation.

Once again this year, when it comes to ACC women's basketball, Maryland and N.C. State are almost untouchable.

With 12 scholarship players, big-time national schedules and strong winning traditions, the Wolfpack and Terps should place well nationally as well as dominate the ACC.

Maryland was the national runner-up last season with a 27-4 record while State advanced to the finals of the sectional tournament. Each is rated in the top five in the country this season.

Where does that leave the rest of the conference? Carolina and Clemson feel they're right on the heels of the front-runners.

The Tar Heels are stressing offense in Jennifer Alley's second year as coach. And with people like Cathy Shoemaker, Bernie McGlade and Kelly Roche, the Tar Heels think they're ready to take a step up to the big leagues and join State and Maryland. Alley's team went 16-13 last season.

But Kay Yow's Wolfpack returns all five starters from last year's team, including 6-foot-2 Genia Beasley, a 19-point, 11-rebound performer a year ago. Christy Earnhardt returns at one forward, but Yow has so much talent on her hands she doesn't know where to go from there.

The Terrapins are similarly loaded. After losing to UCLA in the national finals last year, Maryland returns 6-3 Kris Kirchner, good for 13.5 points a game as a freshman and 10 rebounds. Betsy Bailey, a 5-9 guard, and seniors Debbie Stewart and Jane Zivalich. The Terps lost point guard Tara Heiss, last year's leading scorer, to graduation.

Clemson feels it has made strides to narrow the gap between the two powers and itself. Last season the Tigers lost to the Terps just 91-86 and to State, 84-82. Clemson went 21-11 overall.

Leading scorer Donna Forester has graduated so the Tigers are going to have to make up those 20 points a game from somewhere. Cousin Janet Forester missed all of last year with an injury but averaged 15 points a game as a sophomore.

Cissy Bristol (5-9) will play one forward and walk-on Gretchen Becker, 6-0 with 12.7 points and 7.5 rebounds a game last year, will start at center. The tallest player on the team is 6-2 freshman Michelle McMillan, so the Tigers will have to rely on their speed and ballhandling abilities.

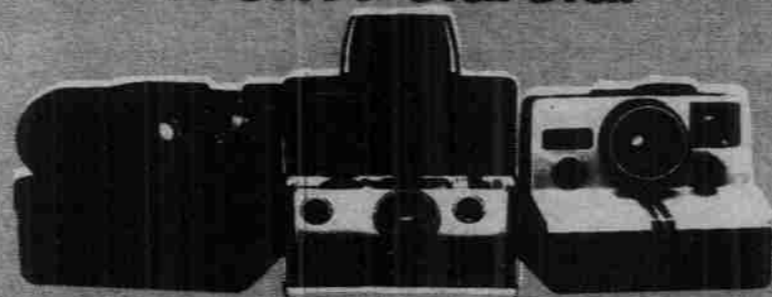
Virginia has improved the last few years and could improve on last year's 8-17 record. Wake Forest had a good recruiting year to help recover from last year's 4-19 season. Duke, with no one on scholarship, can expect another year like the 1-17 one it had last year.

In the end, however, it will come down to Red on Red — the powerful Terps against the experienced Wolfpack, maybe even for the national title.

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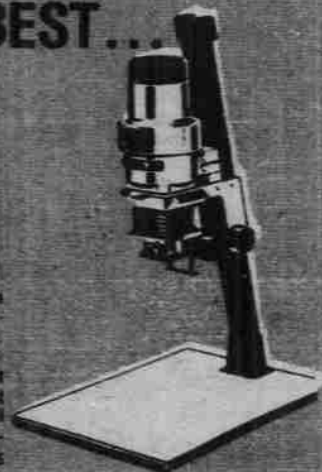
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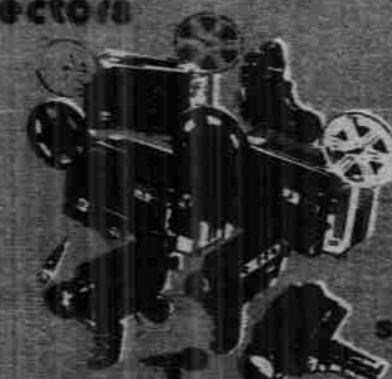


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