

1974 - 1975 OUTLOOK LIONS LONG ON TALENT . . . SHORT ON EXPERIENCE

Special to News Record
by Jim Hamer

Three of Mars Hill College's best basketball players graduated last spring.

All-time scorer and rebounder Jerry Hayes is teaching and coaching at T.C. Roberson High School in Asheville. All-star Lion center Joe Bridges is trying to find a niche in pro basketball at home or abroad. Versatile guard Kenny Ward is seeking success in the business world.

And, Coach Jack Lytton is preparing his fifth edition of the Lions for the 1974-75 basketball season with the four-year school's best, record-wise, year behind him.

"Our seniors (Hayes, Bridges and Ward) took most of the responsibility on the court last year," said Lytton of the team that posted a 21-16 overall mark and reached the finals of the Carolinas Conference Tournament and made the NAIA District Six playoffs.

"This year, we're short on experience," admits the personable, 32-year-old mentor. "When we look past Derek Thomas, we don't really have anyone deep in experience in four-year college basketball."

But Lytton had a good recruiting year and is looking ahead with anticipation to the coming season which opens with a Nov. 18 game against Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tenn.

"With the talent we have on the squad, we-potentially-should be as good as any team I've had at Mars Hill."

Mars Hill will start three returning lettermen along with two prized recruits, one the Lions' first legitimate big man in several years and one an all-state guard who has been waiting in the wings after being red-shirted last season.

Jimmy Graves, a 6-6 sophomore from Cherrysville, is the most talented of the returning lettermen and will start at one forward position.

"Graves had an outstanding freshman year," said Lytton of his cager's 13.2 scoring average and 7.2 rebounding. "We're expecting an even better sophomore season."

"Jimmy has an outstanding shooting touch. He has a good move inside and a good jump shot outside. Graves could be stronger on the boards but he is the best defensive player on the team," the coach continued.

"With the pace he set last year he could become the school's all-time leading scorer and rebounder."

Graves' 489 points and 270 rebounds gave him a good start toward Hayes' four-year standards of 1845 markers and 954 caroms.

"Jimmy also could become Mars Hill's first player to score a career high of over 2,000 points and 1,000 rebounds in four years, barring injury or something unforeseen," his coach noted. "We are expecting great things from him."

Teaming with Graves in the frontcourt will be 6-4 1/2 senior Mike Earwood of Asheville. Earwood transferred to Mars Hill last year after playing junior college ball in Florida. The A.C. Reynolds High product was a periodic starter, averaging 7.3 points his first season.

"Mike's play in practice has been consistent this year," Lytton evaluated, "which is something he lacked last year. He seems to be back playing well."

"In preseason shooting in scrimmages, Mike is hitting over 60 per cent from the floor. He has good strength and jumping ability. He can go to the boards and be a strong rebounder, but sometimes he doesn't have the tendency to crash as much as he should."

Carlos Showers, a 6-11 sophomore from Mobile, Ala., is the starting center and his height alone brings a grin to Lytton's boyish face. Showers transferred to Mars Hill

after an injury-plagued career at an Arkansas junior college.

"I have never had a man that big," he smiles, "but Carlos needs to be more consistent in his overall play including rebounding, passing and shooting."

"At times, he is real strong off the boards and is showing improvement almost daily in his overall play. Carlos has the potential to become an outstanding big man."

At one guard position is the other big-catch junior college transfer, Eddie Taylor of Cullowhee. The 6-2 junior led Cullowhee High to a state championship along with his all-state honors. After a year at Western Carolina University, he transferred to Brevard Junior College where he had an outstanding career.

With Ward, Thomas and a strong cast of guards, Lytton red-shirted Taylor last season. "Eddie is ready to play now and the layoff hasn't hurt in that respect," Lytton noted. "He is in good form and is working hard on his defense."

"He has a good outside shot and takes the ball to the basket well."

The other guard is 5-6 Derek Thomas out of Pisgah

High in Canton. The senior crowd-pleaser was forced into limited action last year, missing the first half of the season due to a stint of military reserve duty and then suffered a broken hand upon his return.

Thomas did key the Lions' drive in late season with sparkling play-making, aggressive defense and 71 timely points and 37 assists. "His greatest assets are his quickness and speed," adds Lytton. "He also has the ability to hit the outside shot and to find the open man with passes. "He's the key to our team at the guard position and is the only player with a lot of senior college playing experience."

So Lytton feels "that coming up short on experience could hurt us some until we get real experience under fire with responsibility."

Lytton also will return to a "true two guard" offensive system after running a point guard or one-four alignment last year.

"We ran the big guard system with Graves or Ward running the offense. This season will have a two guard front and run a 2-1-2 set."

He feels Showers can take up the rebounding slack, which Bridges, left, by getting as many rebounds or more than Bridges did. "But in scoring, we don't have a player to take up the slack," added Lytton. "Bridges, Hayes and Ward dominated the scoring together."

"Hopefully, the whole crew can spread out the points and take up the scoring slack."

Offensively, Lytton indicated the Lions will not take the ball inside as much until Showers becomes more adept in scoring. "We will not be going inside as much as we did last year to Bridges, but we will continue to run. We may change our offensive strategy if we can't get the ball off the board consistently."

Defensively, the Lions' forte is undetermined before the opening tipoff. "We have been working with zones more than in past and until we settle on our best defense our opponents will see more defenses from us this year."

In the reserve ranks, 6-9 junior Don Cole from Hampton, Va., will spell Showers. "Don is vastly improved and should see a lot of action, Lytton says, "but he still needs weight and stamina."

Jimmy Dalton, a 6-5 freshman out of Roberson High in Asheville, is the first-line forward sub. "Jimmy is a fine outside shooter with good quickness and handles the ball well for a man his size," the coach says.

Pat Lanning, a 6-1 junior from Hendersonville, gives the Lions good depth at guard. "Pat has good hustle and quickness on defense," Lytton said. "He helped in situations last year when we were behind and had to have the ball. He is playing more under control in preseason drills, which was his weakness last year."

Bruce Murray, a 6-0 senior guard from Mars Hill, gives the Lions steadiness and consistency and more depth in the backcourt. Other guards that could see playing time are Harry Marsh a 5-9 junior from Miami, Fla.; Larry Steppleton, a 6-2 sophomore from Canton; and Ben Wax, a 5-10 freshman from Franklin.

John Byrd, a 6-4 1/2 junior transfer from Chowan Junior College via Durham, and Buford Cole, a 6-7 1/2 freshman from Mountain City, Tenn., add good potential depth at forward.



(L/R) Carlos Showers and Derek Thomas



(l/r) Derek Thomas, Mike Earwood, Jimmy Graves, Carlos Showers, Eddie Taylor, and (kneeling center) Coach Jack Lytton.

THE LIONS DEN

MARS HILL COLLEGE
1974-75 Basketball Roster

| NAME | POS | NO | HEIGHT | WEIGHT | CLASS | YRS LETTERED | AGE | HOME TOWN | HIGH SCHOOL |
|------------------|-----|----|----------|--------|-------|--------------|-----|--------------------|-----------------------|
| *Derek Thomas | G | 10 | 5'6" | 150 | SR | 2 | 21 | Canton, NC | Pisgah High |
| Larry Steppleton | G | 14 | 6'2" | 160 | SO | 0 | 30 | Canton, NC | Bethel High |
| Harry Marsh | F | 21 | 5'9" | 165 | JR | 0 | 20 | Miami, FL | Miami Springs Sr High |
| *Jimmy Graves | F | 22 | 6'6" | 164 | SO | 0 | 19 | Cherrysville, NC | Cherrysville High |
| *Pat Lanning | G | 24 | 6'1" | 155 | JR | 0 | 21 | Hendersonville, NC | Hendersonville High |
| *Don Cole | C | 30 | 6'9" | 180 | JR | 1 | 20 | Hampton, VA | Kecoughtan High |
| Ben Wax | G | 32 | 5'10" | 150 | FR | 0 | 19 | Franklin, NC | Franklin High |
| Buford Cole | F | 34 | 6'7 1/2" | 200 | FR | 0 | 19 | Mountain City, TN | Johnson County High |
| *Bruce Murray | G | 40 | 6'0" | 167 | SR | 1 | 21 | Mars Hill, NC | Mars Hill High |
| Jimmy Dalton | F | 42 | 6'5" | 195 | FR | 0 | 19 | Asheville, NC | T.C. Roberson High |
| Eddie Taylor | G | 44 | 6'2" | 180 | JR | 0 | 22 | Cullowhee, NC | Cullowhee High |
| *Mike Earwood | F | 50 | 6'4 1/2" | 202 | SR | 0 | 22 | Asheville, NC | A.C. Reynolds High |
| Carlos Showers | C | 52 | 6'11" | 210 | SO | 0 | 19 | Mobile, AL | Davidson High |
| John Byrd | F | 54 | 6'4 1/2" | 225 | JR | 0 | 21 | Durham, NC | Durham High |

*Returning Lettermen

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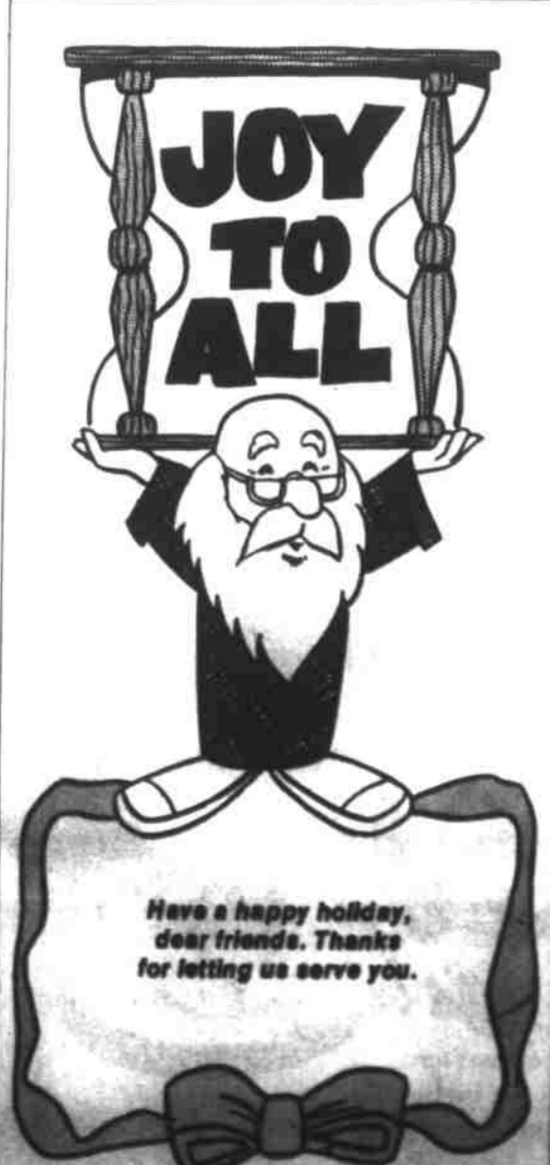
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