

# Duncan-led men's team looking to repeat in conference

By KAREN HILLENBRAND  
SPORTS EDITOR

After winning an ACC Championship last season and earning a final ranking of three in the Associated Press poll, fans might think that the Demon Deacon men's basketball team had reached its full potential. With the extraordinary loss of Randolph Childress, '95, to the NBA, the Deacons have some big shoes to fill.

However, the expectations of the Demon Deacons this year are bigger. The preseason AP poll has the Deacons ranked No. 8 in the country. Why? Simply put, junior Tim Duncan. He is the player who is expected to take the Deacons to another ACC title; he is the player expected to lead the team further in the NCAA Tournament than last year's Sweet 16 appearance. The Deacons finished at 26-6 overall, 12-4 in the ACC last year, and this record will be tough to repeat.

The Demon Deacons' out-of-conference schedule is much more demanding, with big road tests coming early in the season against Oklahoma State (in the Great 8 Tournament in Auburn Hills, Mich.), Massachusetts and Florida. The Deacons will have home matchups with Utah and St. Louis as well.

Duncan, 6-10, has been named the preseason national player of the year by virtually every publication. He is also the consensus ACC Player of the Year pick. Last year, the All-American was the National Association of Basketball Coaches' National Defensive Player of the Year, particularly due to his shot blocking abilities. He tallied 4.2 swats per game last year, as well as tallying 12.5 rebounds a game, which marked him fifth in the nation.

Offensively, Duncan shot 59.1 percent from the floor while averaging 16.8 points per game.

This year it is almost guaranteed that Duncan will be even more dominant. Besides a year of maturity and growth, Duncan will no longer have to deal with ACC big men such as Joe Smith and Rasheed Wallace. The only legitimate experienced center that Duncan will match up with is N.C. State's Todd Fuller.

"In the frontcourt, Duncan is a fixture," Head Coach Dave Odom said.

Odom also said that there are several facets of Duncan's game that have improved, and he is bigger.

"If you think of Duncan compared to what he was a year ago today, he's a whole level better," Odom said. "He's a little bit better than he was at the end of the season. He's bigger. Since practice has started he's put on four pounds."

At the end of last year, Duncan weighed 226 pounds, and at the beginning of this year he weighed in at 238. Since then, Duncan has put on the four pounds and weighs 242.

While the phenomenal talent of Duncan is a given, the real success of the Demon Deacons this season will hinge on the supporting cast around him.

While there is little doubt that Duncan will not be shut down by anyone in the nation, when he is double and even triple-teamed, the players around him will have to step up to put the ball in the basket.

Traditionally, Odom has run a defense-oriented team with a strong inside man and a strong outside man. Obviously, Duncan is the inside force, but with the loss of Childress, the gray area is who will fill the dominant outside role.

"We have developed a style of play over the last five or six years that I'm comfortable with, and I think our job right now is to try to find a player or players that can fit into that style at that position," Odom said. "If that particular approach doesn't work, then we're going to reverse it."



Courtesy of Sports Information

The 1995-96 Demon Deacons, seated left to right: Managers Bill Old and junior Drew Davis, freshman Armond Wilson, senior Rusty LaRue, sophomore Jerry Braswell, Head Coach Dave Odom, sophomore Tony Rutland, sophomore Steven Goolsby, junior Marc Scott, manager Graham Gould, senior Carole Faircloth; standing left to right: Assistant Coaches Ricky Stokes and Russell Turner, junior Sean Allen, sophomore Antonio Jackson, juniors Ricardo Peral and Tim Duncan, freshmen Rodney West, William Stringfellow and Joseph Amonett, Brendan Brown, Assistant Coach Ernie Nestor, trainer Scott Street.

Nevertheless, Odom would rather not have to change his style of play to fit the players he has around him. He sees sophomore Tony Rutland filling the point guard position vacated by Childress.

"I'm very comfortable with Tony Rutland," Odom said. "I think he's got the inroad to that spot. It's his to lose. I think he's developing nicely."

The major weakness to Rutland's game at this point is his penchant for turnovers. This is something that can be corrected, though.

Also a part of the Deacon style of play, besides a strong point guard, is the three guard rotation.

"I like three guard rotations," Odom said. "Rutland certainly is going to be a part of that, (sophomore) Jerry Braswell eventually will be part of that, and (senior) Rusty LaRue eventually will be part of that."

However, with the recent revelation that Braswell is academically ineligible for the semester and possibly the entire year, and the fact that LaRue still has an obligation to the football team until after this

Saturday, Odom will be forced to rely on several freshmen to step in at guard.

The likely starter in place of Braswell will be freshman Joseph Amonett. His offensive skills will be his asset. The other freshman contributor in the backcourt will be Armond

Wilson, who is a pure point guard.

LaRue is the only senior on the squad since the retirement of Barry Canty. His three-point bombs and leadership will be relied on more heavily this season with such a youthful backcourt. Although he saw most of his action as a sixth man last season, he will be expected to play more this year. Odom would like to see LaRue spend more time at the guard position, instead of wing forward.

"I'd like for him to spend 75 percent of his time in the backcourt this year (instead of behind junior Ricky Peral at small forward)," Odom said. "That's his natural position. He earned that."

Do not be surprised if LaRue makes a quick transition to basketball from football. LaRue's dedication and hard work are no surprise to Odom.

"In an era when college athletes are saying, 'There's too much pressure on me,' and they're looking for less to do, (LaRue) is always looking around to see if he can do more," Odom said. At small forward, Peral, 6-10, will be expected to step up his game. A player with outside shooting prowess and solid defensive skills, Peral will outmatch most opposing players simply because of his size advantage.

"Peral is a fixture," Odom said. "He'll be better. He's more comfortable. I want him to rebound a little bit better. He doesn't think rebound, and that bothers me."

At power forward, things begin to get a little fuzzier. The spot vacated by Scooter Banks will most likely be filled by junior Sean Allen.

Allen, 6-8, is a junior college transfer who was redshirted last season after a bout with mononucleosis. "Sean Allen

is a terrific defender, a very good rebounder and a good ball handler. He doesn't score a lot," Odom said. "On the other hand you've got (sophomore) Antonio Jackson, who thinks the way into any lineup is through a shot."

Jackson, 6-8, saw limited action last season but has the offensive skills to do the job. However, he will probably see action in a reserve role for now, because his defense needs to be improved.

Other players who will see reserve action are sophomore swingman Steven Goolsby, who will back up Peral, and highly-touted freshman William Stringfellow. Freshman Rodney West will most likely be red-shirted this season.

As usual, Odom expects that his team will be one of balance. He has his strong inside player in Duncan, but the dominant outside player is yet to be determined.

We're hoping that guys like Rutland, LaRue, Goolsby and Braswell can shoot the ball well enough to give us that balance," Odom said. "We hope that Peral can do it inside and outside."

Most importantly for the Demon Deacons, though, is not to look back at last season. Odom said, "I talked to our team the first day of practice, and I said, 'The first step in replacing Randolph is not to talk about it.' We're not going to continue to refer back. We're going to look forward."

The future does look bright for the Deacons. A repeat conference title is certainly a possibility. An NCAA Tournament berth is expected. If that balance can be achieved, they will go further than the Sweet 16.

**WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY**

**Head Coach: Dave Odom**  
**Record at Wake Forest: 116-66**  
**Overall Record: 154-108**  
**1994-95 Record: 26-6 (12-4, 1st ACC)**



Courtesy of Sports Information

Head Coach Dave Odom was last season's ACC Coach of the Year.

# Women's team injury-free, aiming to finish in top half of ACC

By ANDY SISK  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REPORTER

Healthy female basketball players in Demon Deacon uniforms? Are you sure?

A bum finger, a blown anterior cruciate ligament, a stress fracture and a pesky osteochondral defect of the femoral condyle of the knee are not the ingredients of a winning women's basketball team, but knock on wood, things will be different for the 1995-96 version of the team.

Head Coach Karen Freeman said that her team is ready to challenge in the tough ACC. One of the major reasons for her optimism stems from the fact that when she scans her team roster, she sees nothing but fit players. The last two years, the Demon Deacons have not had the chance to maximize their talent because of major injuries to key players. Freeman said that most of those injuries were a product of being very young, noting that many underclassmen were injured because their bodies were not ready for the physical nature of college basketball at the top level.

If everyone stays healthy, Freeman said that she expects to use 10 players in her rotation. Of those 10 players, most of the attention will be on junior Tracy Connor.

As a freshman in 1992-93, the 6-3 center broke through as one of the best post players in the league, earning honors such as ACC Freshman of the Year and the Wake Forest University Outstanding Female Athlete. A stress fracture in her foot caused her to redshirt the 1993-94 season. Poised to make her comeback last season, Connor missed 14 games because of an unusual knee injury that will never let her be at full strength. Even when not at her best, Connor is still a feared opponent, as she averaged 16.4 points and nine rebounds in the 14 games she played in last sea-

son. Freeman said that Connor's stats could improve this year, provided the knee does not swell.

"She'll never play pain free. The swelling is our enemy," Freeman said. "You have to remember, when we asked her to play last season, she was out of shape, rusty and basically playing on one good leg. The difference this year is she'll give us quality minutes, and that will give us a dominant post player."

Freeman is quick to point out that with or without Connor, the team will improve on last season's 11-16 record. She said that in the past it has been the attitude of the team that the Deacons' success rests with Connor.

"The toughest thing about turning around this program is getting the players to believe they could win," she said. "The success of our program does not rest on Tracy's shoulders. If we've got Tracy, we can vie for the ACC Championship. Without her, we can still be in the top five of the conference."

Freeman said that in Connor's absence the team has developed some other quality players such as sophomores Carri Walker and Nancy Helms. An improved defense holds

the key to a better season, according to Freeman. Last season the Deacons threw a combination of junk defenses that more often than not failed to impede opponents.

"The key to winning in this league is defense," she said. "Defense has not been a strength for us, and that's going to be emphasized. We are building a defensive system that will be more up-tempo and create easy buckets. I can count on one hand the number of easy baskets we had last year."

With an experienced group of starters, Freeman said that she sees no reason why the team cannot move into the upper half of the conference. "My least expectation is a fifth place finish in the conference," she said.

Freeman said that all of the returning players figure to have a chance to start. Senior co-captain Gretchen Hollifield, who Freeman said is the only lock to start, will run the offense at the point. A 5-5 guard, Hollifield figures to be a three-point threat, as she shot 42 percent last season.

Another likely starter will be the other senior co-captain, Val Hodge. The 6-0 forward started every game the last two seasons, and her experience and consistency will be crucial if the team is to improve. One of the team's better offensive players last season, Hodge led the team in field goal percentage by hitting 46 percent.

The starting center will undoubtedly be Connor.

"If she's healthy, she's a starter," Freeman said. Junior RaeAnna Mulholland will



Courtesy of Sports Information

Head Coach Karen Freeman expects a healthy squad this season.

two highly-touted freshmen gives the team depth. Freeman also has junior Stacey Hawes and sophomore Crystal Carpenter battling to see playing time. The combination of a deep bench and an abundance of talent should give the Deacons new weapons.

"In the past, we've always been limited with our weapons, but that's not the case this year. We've got experience, talent, depth, some speed and some outside shooting," Freeman said, adding this is the brightest outlook the team has had since she arrived as Deacon Head Coach in 1992.

Unfortunately, though, the Deacons have to compete in arguably the toughest league in the nation from top to bottom. Perennial powerhouse Virginia is everyone's favorite to be the class of the league, followed by N.C. State, Duke and North Carolina. Freeman's team is predicted to finish where it wound up last year, seventh. Though Freeman is not surprised by such predictions, she is not ready to concede anything.

"For me, (places) two to nine are wide open," she said. "We never have had an opportunity to showcase what we've got because of the injuries. This year we've got a key dominant post-player in Tracy. If we can improve our defense, I see no reason why we can't finish in the top half and accomplish our goal of going to the NCAA Championships."

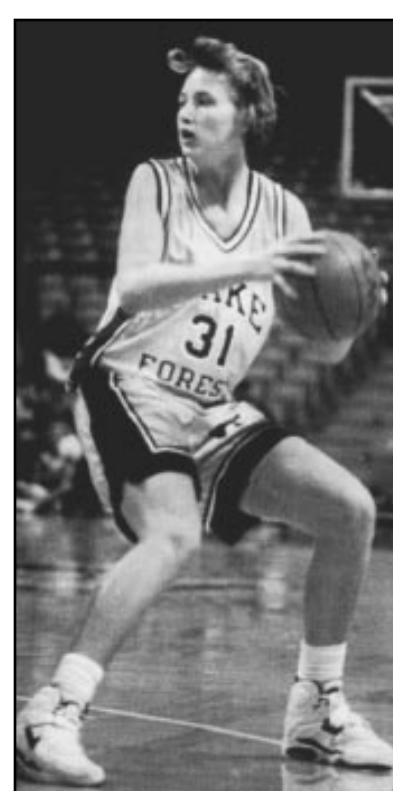
The Deacons open their season with some tough non-conference opponents with the likes of Auburn, Washington and Northwestern. In December, the team will travel to Tucson, Ariz., to face Arizona and San Francisco. Freeman said that the tough competition in these games is needed if the Deacons are to be prepared for ACC competition.

Another change this year involves where the Deacons will play home games. This year, all home games

will be played at Joel Coliseum. Freeman said that the move was necessary.

"In order to recruit you need to have a quality facility. Reynolds Gym is not symbolic of the prestige of the ACC," she said. "The little gym also became a psychological crutch for our team. When we went to the Coliseum, it felt more like a neutral site. The players and the fans need to get used to the Coliseum as our home court."

The Deacons are poised to make headway in the ACC. With fit, injury-free players and a talented group of veteran players and newcomers, this could be a breakthrough year for Freeman's team.



Courtesy of Sports Information

Mulholland will be looked to for potent offense this year.