

Healthy Connor ready for ACC

By MICKEY KRAYNYAK
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

The words "osteochondral defect of the femoral condyle" may not mean much to most members of the university community, but to junior center Tracy Connor and the rest of the Demon Deacon women's basketball squad last season, they meant a great deal.

The term describes a lack of cushioning experienced by one of the bones in Connor's right knee, and thus the main reason why the center's phenomenal play for the Deacons was limited to only 14 games last season.

The knee ailment, first noticed last season when a minor injury took an abnormally long time to mend, will likely continue to exert some negative effects on Connor's performance. However, Connor's probable reduced effectiveness will not present much of a loss for the Deacons if she can continue to perform at the level she did after returning last season.

Connor's absence was especially important because of what she was able to accomplish for the Deacons

on the court as a freshman three seasons ago, when she was the ACC Freshman of the Year and earned Rookie of the Week honors nine times.

In her debut season, Connor averaged 20.6 points a game and 11.3 rebounds per contest. She also broke team records during her freshman season for points and rebounds in a season (576 and 316 respectively) and most rebounds in a game (22).

Then, after redshirting the 1993-94 season with a stress fracture in her foot, Connor arrived back on the scene in 1995 and transformed the Deacons from a team that was just shy of mediocre into one that was highly respectable.

When the 6-3 center played with the Deacons last season, the team went 7-7 overall, and 4-3 in the ACC. Overall, the team finished at 11-15 on the season and 4-12 within the conference. These numbers alone are enough to solidify Connor's importance to Demon Deacon hoops.

However, in her limited playing time the junior provided a multitude of other statistical demonstrations of her worth. Foremost among the proof

of her offensive and defensive contributions to the team are her scoring and rebounding averages. In her 14 games last season, Connor averaged 16.4 points and nine rebounds a game.

Though the numbers last year were a slight drop-off from her freshman season, they were nonetheless the highest averages on the team in both categories.

During the stretch after her return, Connor led the team in scoring eight times and rebounds 10 times.

Although enough scar tissue has formed in Connor's knee to provide it with some degree of cushioning, it is likely that the junior will not be able to play to the level she established in the 1992-93 season. However, there seems little question that Connor is a remarkably valuable asset to the Demon Deacons, whether or not she plays at 100 percent.

Clearly, a good deal of the team's potential success this season hinges on Connor's right knee. If the junior can avoid the injury problems that have plagued her the past two years, the 1995-96 season could be a promising one for Deacon basketball.

Hollifield a fiesty leader, distributor at point guard

By KAREN HILLENBRAND
SPORTS EDITOR

Toughness and durability. These are two words that describe Gretchen Hollifield, one of only two seniors on this year's rebuilding women's basketball squad. She, along with senior Val Hodge, are the veteran players expected to provide the leadership to move a team full of expected healthy players into the next level of ACC play.

Hollifield, 5-5, will run the point once again. Hopefully this season she will not have to put up with the demands of not having a backup and playing every minute but three in the games in which she played. Last season she bore the burden of being one of the few consistently healthy players on the team.

What makes this impressive is that Hollifield missed the first six games of the season due to finger surgery, but did not miss another contest the rest of the year. Her 40.3 minutes per game average was more than a game a game. Hollifield did this by playing in two overtime games during the season. In addition, she did not miss one moment of conference play.

The scrappy player's forte is her playmaking abilities. She averaged a school-record 7.0 assists per game last season, which put her first in the ACC and sixth in the nation. Hollifield will be the key to getting the ball inside to the leading scorers, juniors Tracy Connor and RaeAnna Mulholland.

In a game against Canisius last season, Hollifield dished out 16 assists, breaking the Deacon record by four and tying for the highest number of assists in the NCAA all season.

The reason that Hollifield was last year's team's most valuable player was that she does more than just dish out assists. She averaged 10.0 points per game as well. Most of these points came from behind the three point arc, where she hit 42 percent of her attempted shots.

Against N.C. State last season, she recorded a career-high 23 points, plus added five rebounds, 10 assists and two steals.

Hollifield is known as a hustler, and she justified this reputation last year, when despite her small stature she pulled down 3.5 rebounds per game and had 28 steals on the season.

Ironically, the key to Hollifield's success this season is rest. She will be even more productive if she is not going into every game tired and knowing that she will not get a rest during the contest.



Hollifield will be relied on to shoot from long range.

Forward Seawright spearheads Demon Deacon defensive effort

By MICKEY KRAYNYAK
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

If, as conventional wisdom suggests, defense wins games, then junior forward Lindsay Seawright should be a big factor in how many wins the Deacons can accumulate in the course of their 1995-96 season.

Last year, the 6-1 Seawright proved to be the Demon Deacons' best answer to opposing scorers, as she was able to defend both close to the basket and on the perimeter. In ACC contests Seawright was especially valuable. In two successive games last season, the junior shut down Clemson guard Tara Saunooke and Florida State guard Allison Peercy, both accomplished scorers.

Thus, Seawright will be an important key to Deacon success this season. Her defensive contributions, as well as her intensity, will be relied upon throughout the season as the Deacons look to improve on their 11-16 record last year.

Two years ago, Seawright assumed a place in the women's team's storied history of injury problems, missing most of the preseason her freshman year and all but one game of the out-of-conference season.

She arrived on the scene for the Deacons in the thick of

ACC action that season and promptly went about establishing the high level of performance she has maintained since then.

In the 17 games she played her freshman season, Seawright put up an average of 6.8 points and 2.4 rebounds per game.

Last season, she continued to develop for the Deacons and began to emerge as the premier defensive talent. Seawright finished the 1994-95 season averaging 8.7 points per game and, perhaps more importantly, boosted her rebounding average to an impressive 6.3 boards per game.

In addition, the forward also finished the season as the Deacon's leading shot blocker — yet another indication of the profound development she has undergone to become the top defender.

With the Deacons now largely free of the injury problems that have plagued them in recent years, they are looking to rise to new heights in the ACC.

If Seawright can continue to hone the defensive and rebounding prowess she has developed over the past two seasons, while still pumping in eight or nine points per game, the Deacons will be well on their way to going toe-to-toe with the best the ACC has to offer.

Hodge's senior leadership needed for Demon Deacon success

By KAREN HILLENBRAND
SPORTS EDITOR

While the rest of the players on the Demon Deacon women's basketball team have had the injury curse over the past two years, one player who has escaped unscathed has been senior Val Hodge.

A 6-0 forward, Hodge has been a part of the starting lineup since her sophomore year. She has played almost every position along the way, but no matter where she plays, she is

always counted on to score. Last season Hodge averaged 11.7 points per game while pulling down an average of 5.5 rebounds.

Hodge's strengths lie in her athletic ability and in her consistency, as well as in her veteran experience.

Playing in the front court, Hodge has a very accurate shot from within 16 feet. She is a converted wing player who has started in every Demon Deacon game over the past two years.

Last season, she set career highs in two

areas. Both came when she scored 24 points and tallied 17 rebounds in a winning effort against Florida Atlantic.

Hodge is also the type of player who is constantly improving and is able to mold into the role that she needs to play. Her freshman year she earned the Demon Deacons' Most Improved Award.

While she is most comfortable shooting mid-range jumpers and playing outside the paint, Hodge has had to fill in for other injured Demon Deacons at the center, power forward

and small forward positions.

Some of Hodge's previous accomplishments include an all-tournament honor in the 1993 ODU-Dial Classic and a 70-point performance in a high school game.

Before becoming a Demon Deacon, Hodge averaged 42.5 points per game in high school, was a *USA Today* All-American for being West Virginia's Player of the Year, was named Gatorade Circle of Champions state Player of the Year and named a *Street and Smith* and *Parade* honorable mention All-American.

What Hodge needs to contribute to this year's team is more scoring punch combined with a continuing ability to stay healthy. Her previous credentials prove that she has the scoring touch and the accuracy to dominate from outside. She led the Deacons and was eighth in the ACC last year in field goal percentage, at 46 percent.

If she can average a few more points per game, she will help the Demon Deacons to achieve their potential breakthrough season in the ACC.

Mulholland's offense a key for Deacons

By LISA MARTIN
NEWS EDITOR

In the Deacons' rather uninspiring, injury-plagued season last year, junior RaeAnna Mulholland was one of the bright spots. Picking up the slack left by injured junior Tracy Connor and starting every game last season, Mulholland was the top scorer, averaging 13.3 points per game, and the top rebounder with 8.1 per game.

As last year's top offensive threat at power forward, Mulholland needs only to find consistency to become an All-ACC caliber player. She gained confidence and experience playing on a gold-medal team at the 1995 Olympic Sports Festival and promises to be a big contributor from the outside this year.

As a freshman, Mulholland was an outstanding contributor. In her first game, she scored 16 points and had 13 rebounds. Her dynamic play continued when she was named Most Valuable Player of her first collegiate tournament, the ODU-Dial Classic. Although she missed six games due to a stress fracture her freshman year, she still averaged 12.4 points and 6.2 rebounds in 21 games. She was also the top Demon Deacon rebounder seven times over the course of her debut season.

A highlight of Mulholland's play last season was a 30-point, 20-rebound effort at Georgia Tech. She contributed statistically at North Carolina with 18 points, a team-high eight rebounds, four steals and three assists. For all games combined last season, she was ranked 13th in scoring and sixth in rebounding in the ACC. She led the Deacons in scoring seven times last season, and she was the top rebounder 11 times.

Shooting 38 percent from the floor and 32 percent from three-point range last season, Mulholland is likely to be more of a factor from the outside this season since the Deacons will be stronger in the paint.

A tough competitor since her years at Pine Forest High School, the Linden native Mulholland was named to the first team all-state by the *Greensboro News and Record*, and the second team all-state by the Associated Press. She was a three-year MVP of her high school squad, and she set her school's single-game scoring record with 42 points against Cape Fear during her sophomore season.

Redshirted Coleman recovers from injury

By MICKEY KRAYNYAK
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Last year freshman Heidi Coleman paid her dues Demon Deacon style: upon entering the women's basketball program as a highly-anticipated freshman point guard recruit, Coleman tore her anterior cruciate ligament after playing in only five games and missed the remainder of the season.

Coleman underwent surgery for the injury in January and qualified for red-shirt status.

Now, after rehabilitating her leg, she will return to aid in the position of floor captain for the Demon Deacons this season and will attempt to help the team in its quest for a quality conference showing this season.

Coleman entered the program as one of the top guard prospects in the country. The Blue Star Index had her pegged as one of the top-10 guards in the nation her senior year in high school, and Coleman was named a Parade All-American.

Competing in a Kentucky prep school league, Coleman set school records for assists, points and rebounds and finished as the fourth-leading scorer in school history. She was named state and region player of the year during her senior year as well.

In her limited playing time last season,

Coleman ably assumed the leadership position on the floor. In the Auburn Classic held at the beginning of last season, Coleman averaged 11.8 points, 3.8 rebounds and four assists before going down with her ACL injury.

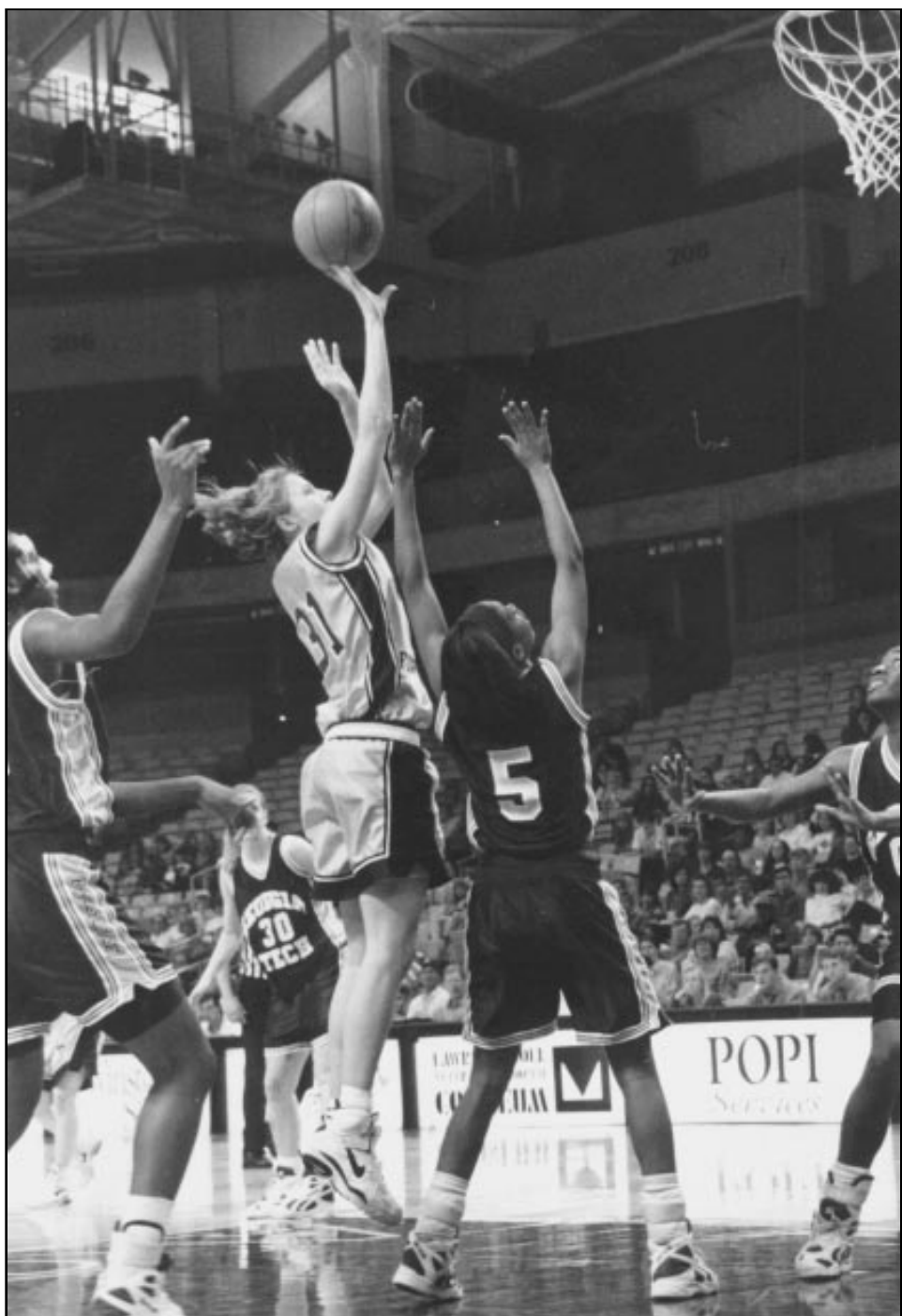
Now the Demon Deacons, as healthy as they have been as a team the past several years, will look to Coleman to

build on the limited experience she has at the NCAA level and hopefully to demonstrate the talent her high school record shows she possesses.

Coleman will be joined in the backcourt by junior guard Stacey Hawes and sophomore Crystal Carpenter. The Demon Deacons hope Coleman's ball-handling skills and all-around presence on the basketball court will mesh well with the torrid shooting of Carpenter, who emerged last year as one of the Demon Deacons' best long-range shooters.

Although Coleman has been a part of the Demon Deacon program for over a year now, her on-court presence is still something of an unknown quantity.

If she can return from her knee injury to recapture the form she showed in high school and the early part of last season, Coleman will be a welcome addition to the Demon Deacon drive toward a finish in the upper half of the ACC.



Mulholland demonstrates her soft shooting touch against Georgia Tech last season.