

Deacons' unique lineup among nation's strongest

Men's squad returns four starters from last year's ACC Championship team, adds 7-1 freshman Woods to mix

By **MICKEY KRAYNYAK**
SPORTS EDITOR

Forget, for a moment, that last season witnessed senior Sean Allen develop into one of the most defensively talented power forwards in the ACC. Forget that in the ACC, power forwards are supposed to be only torrid scoring, matador-defense-playing guys who tend to surrender their defensive position prematurely so as to get a head start on a possible fast break.

Put out of your mind the fact that Allen and his defensive savvy are gearing up for a season in which his frontcourt counterparts during last year's campaign will both return alongside him.

Forget all of these things, and imagine this. At some point in the Deacons' season, Head Coach Dave Odom elects to give Allen a breather, and substitutes in 7-1 freshman Loren Woods to take the senior's place.

The task now for opposing coaches: figure out a way to stop senior Tim Duncan, the greatest center in college basketball (on both ends of the floor), and while doing so, beware the taller (by three inches) man-child who has just entered the game as a second-string power forward.

Also, lest you (the opposing coach) be tempted to collapse your team in around the lane in an attempt to neutralize the two giants, be mindful of the fact that in some combination of juniors Tony Rutland, Jerry Braswell, and Steven Goolsby, the Deacon backcourt will be comprised of a pair of guards who can each hit three or four straight threes and completely alter the tone of a game.

Oh yeah, and do not forget about the 6-10 forward, senior Ricky Peral, who is now free to roam at will about the court, and who spent



Courtesy of Sports Information

Dave Odom has been named ACC Coach of the Year three of the past six seasons.

much of last season as the nation's leader in three-point field goal shooting percentage.

Sound difficult? Difficult enough, evidently, for the 1996-97 Demon Deacon men's basketball team to enter their season under perhaps the greatest load of expectations ever experienced by any team in the history of the university. The Deacons will likely begin the season ranked among the top five teams in the country, and if a host of publications across the nation are anywhere near accurate, the squad will make its second-ever appearance in a Final Four this spring.

"If we are that good, then great, that's fine," Odom said. "We're excited about the prospects of going someplace else."

The Deacons and their other-worldly lineup combinations are favored to win a third consecutive ACC Championship, a feat accomplished only twice before in the history of the conference.

Odom has assembled a starting five which has Deacon fans swooning, and opposing coaches talking about the race for second place in the ACC.

Without Woods in the game, the Deacons will display a frontcourt which compares favorably with every frontcourt in the country.

With Woods in the game, the Deacon frontcourt will average an inch under seven feet tall.

The picture is only slightly less rosy in the starting backcourt, where the Deacons boast two third-year guards who have both seen their share of ACC action.

Re-assuming the role of fountainhead for the Deacons will once again be center Tim Duncan, who emerged two years ago as the best center in Deacon history, spent last season proving that he was the best post-up center in college basketball, and who this season is aiming to, well, enjoy himself.

Duncan, who passed up the NBA draft to enjoy a fourth year of college, returns this season aiming to guide the Deacons to a possible showing in this year's Final Four.

Flanking Duncan up front will again be the combination of Peral and Allen. Peral, a 6-10 forward, will provide the Deacons with a potent scoring threat on the wing, and has proven able to severely limit opponents' selection of mid-range jump shots.

"I think he's the most underrated player on our team," Odom said. "I think he's had a tremendous influence on a number of games,

and he's not gotten credit for that."

Allen, meanwhile, tends to spend much of his time closer to the hoop, and proved last season that he is a solid defensive addition to the Deacon squad. The power forward's defensive and rebounding abilities free up Peral to play a few feet further from the basket, which enhances the Deacons' offensive and defensive options.

Sophomore William Stringfellow, who saw only limited playing time last season, will be a key forward reserve for the Deacons.

In the backcourt the Deacons' fortunes look to hinge on the rehabilitated limbs of their two projected starting guards. Rutland and Braswell are both currently mending leg injuries, and the speed with which they fully recover will determine just how dominant the Deacons will be in the early part of the season.

Rutland tore a ligament in his right knee in last season's ACC Championship, and is currently operating at about 80 percent of his maximum ability, according to Odom.

Braswell broke his foot in a pickup game at the end of September, and promptly underwent a surgical procedure which included the insertion of screw into the broken bone. The likely starting two guard is anticipated to be back at full strength in time for the Deacons' Dec. 1 game in Richmond.


Helping to spell Rutland and Braswell (and occasionally assuming a place in the forward rotation) will be Goolsby, who emerged last year as one of the most accurate three-point shooters on a team which was full of them.

The stigma surrounding Goolsby continues to be that his defense is as suspect as his shooting touch is deadly, and the Deacons will need him to step up his defensive intensity if they are to challenge for a spot among the nation's elite teams.

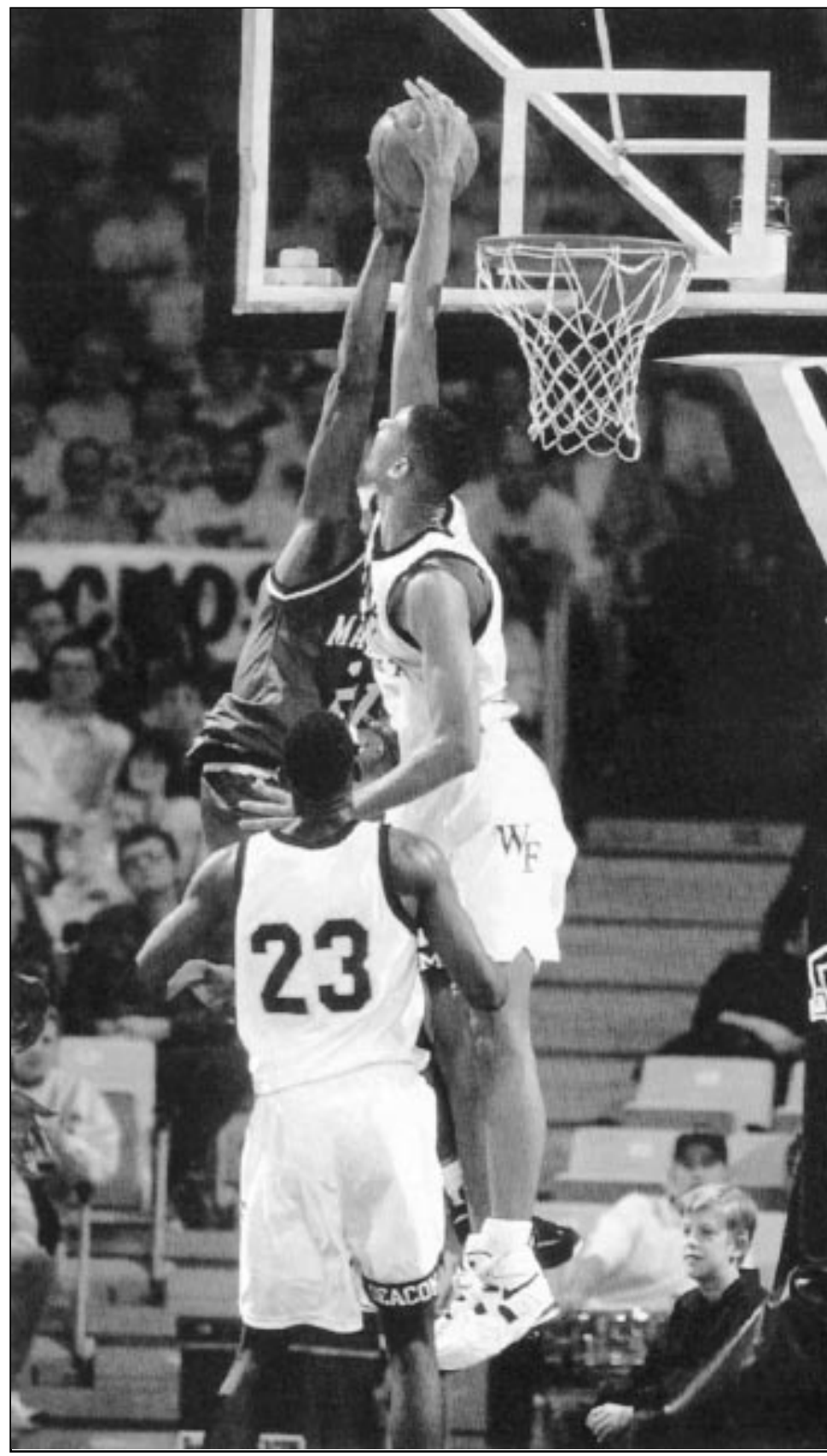
The Deacons will have a difficult row to hoe this season. The ACC has recovered from an off year last season to resume its perennial position as the toughest conference in college basketball. The Deacons, Carolina, Clemson, and perhaps even Duke should all carve out niches in the national rankings as the season progresses.

"I think you can make a case that seven teams in this league will be better than they were last season," Odom said.

The coach's exceptions? Georgia Tech, and your 1996-97 Demon Deacons.



Head Coach: Dave Odom
Record at Wake Forest: 142-72
Career Record: 180-114
1995-96 Record: 26-6 (12-4 ACC, 2nd place)



Courtesy of Sports Information

Senior Tim Duncan, last year's ACC Player of the Year, will again lead the Deacons.

Freeman aiming to establish women's squad among ACC's elite

Tracy Connor's chronic knee injuries will once again be a major concern for squad which lost only one of last season's starters to graduation

By **ANDY SISK**
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REPORTER

The four senior co-captains on the women's basketball team are on a mission this season, a mission that they hope will lead to the realization of a winning season and the respect of their conference rivals.

Head coach Karen Freeman thinks she has the team which can do exactly that. With four seniors led by first-team All ACC Tracy Connor, Freeman said her team's greatest strength is its maturity. All four seniors have seen significant playing time over their careers, and, most importantly, they have developed the team chemistry Freeman feels is necessary to win basketball games.

In recent years the Deacons have floundered near the bottom of the Atlantic Coast Conference. They have suffered through various major injuries that have prevented the team from performing at a high level. Most notable has been the well-publicized plight of Connor. Last year she was diagnosed with a rare defect in her right knee. Doctors told Connor that she would never again be able to play pain free. Despite routine swelling, the 6-3 center persevered and averaged just under 18 points and over 10 rebounds a game for the season.

After undergoing surgery this summer, doctors determined that Connor now had that same rare defect in both knees. According to Freeman, Connor is slowly recovering and is expected to be ready for the season-opener.

"She's been going through some



Courtesy of Sports Information

Karen Freeman will again prowls the coach's box for the Deacons.

light workouts, nothing physical though," she said. "I look at Tracy as a bonus. If we can get a solid, high level of play from her for 25 minutes a game, that's great. If we can't, then we can still win basketball games."

Connor was recently pegged as one of the top players in the country when she was named in the "Best of the Rest" category as a finalist for the Naismith Award, the highest individual award in collegiate basketball. "She has the potential to play at a high level, but she's been unable to sustain it," Freeman said. "Keeping the swelling down will be a major challenge for her."

Aside from the center of attention, only reserve junior Nancy Helms has had any major injury problems. Helms had foot surgery over the summer and Freeman is hoping she will be back at full steam in the next three weeks. According to Freeman, the Deacons

are simply not in a position to cope with the loss of key players because of injury.

"The difference between being a legitimate contender is depth. We're not at a point where we can survive even one or two injuries," she said. "Although we have better depth this year, it's still not where we want it."

One player who has a lock on a starting position is sophomore Heidi Coleman. Coleman red-shirted her freshman year after blowing out her ACL. Now healthy and with some experience as a starter in 13 contests last year, Freeman is confident in Coleman's ability to run the show.

"Everyone knows that Heidi will be running the team, and that enhances communication and confidence for everybody," she said. "She's motivated to a level that really rubs off on the whole team. She's a coach on the floor."

Doing battle for the off guard starting nod will be senior Stacey Hawes and sophomore Cynthia Kelley. Freeman said the two have different styles.

"Stacey is a long-range bomber. She's got a shooter's mentality, either in transition or off a screen. Cynthia is Stacey's perfect complement," Freeman said. "She's a scorer rather than a shooter and is a great leaper and a great rebounder for a two-guard."

At this early stage of the season, Freeman said her frontline needs to work on consistency because of the lack of depth. Who will be able to step up and consistently drain the three pointers is not clear at this point for Freeman.

"We have people who can penetrate and drive, but shooting is a mentality," she said. "I'm not sure we have that yet. I'd like Heidi and Stacey to develop that."

If healthy, expect to see Connor plugging up the middle. Flanking her in the lane will be the familiar duo of power forward senior RaeAnna Mulholland and small forward senior Lindsay Seawright.

Mulholland is second on the team in rebounding and scoring, and Freeman knows she must produce those same numbers if her team is to be successful.

"Rae is the mainstay of what goes on for us offensively. She's the go-to person on the floor, and this year, she's stronger, faster and more confident, in addition to being extremely talented," she said. "She's probably our best all-around player."

Freeman singled out the speed and the defense of Seawright as critical for the up-coming season.

"She's very, very fast and really shines in the transition game. She's our best defensive rebounder, and also our best defensive player."

Other players to look for include sophomore Jenn Miklic backing up Connor and freshman Alisha Moseley spelling Coleman. Freeman singled out the improvement of Miklic's play from last season.

In an effort to prepare for the season the team took a road trip across the Atlantic to Scandinavia to gain experience against international competition. In August the squad went 4-2 against opponents from Sweden

and Finland. The Finnish national team dealt them both of their losses. Freeman said the trip provided her team with the perfect chance to pick up where they left off last season.

"We were making some real progress at the end of last season, and we worked on perfecting that," she said of the European trip. "I think they learned that they could be a good team."

Despite finishing seventh in the conference, the Deacons knocked off four ranked teams, including eventual Final Eight participant Auburn. This year's schedule is equally as tough, as the Deacons will face the grueling teams of the ACC along

with NCAA Tournament teams James Madison, Tennessee Tech and Appalachian State. The Deacons open their season against California at the Old Dominion Classic Nov. 23.

Freeman predicts the ACC race to be wide open, although she expects Virginia to be the class of the league once again.

"I don't think it will be a clear cut race. I think it'll be a year where it will be February before we see who wins it," she said.


As for her team, Freeman said the goal is to finish in the top half of the conference.

"One through six is a possibility. Three, four or five is probable."



Courtesy of Sports Information

The Deacon's chances for success depend largely on Connor's knees.



Head Coach: Karen Freeman
Record at Wake Forest: 46-63
Career Record: same
1995-96 Record: 13-14 (6-10 ACC, 7th place)