

Deacon guards: gunning for victory

Rehabilitated Rutland reaches for improved season as Deacs' starting point guard

By ADAM ROTHSCHILD
SPORTS COPY EDITOR

Things were supposed to be different for Tony Rutland.

This was supposed to have been the summer which the 6-2 junior point guard was to spend on the basketball court, transforming himself from a darn good point guard into a great one. Instead, it was a summer of frustration and hard work just to become the player that he once was.

On March 10, during the second half of the ACC Tournament's championship game, Rutland landed awkwardly on his right leg after a breakaway layup.

The result: a torn anterior cruciate ligament, minimal playing time in the NCAA Tournament, reconstructive surgery, and a summer of rehabilitation.

"It was pretty hard," Rutland said. "I did the best I could, working on my ball handling and shooting. It was frustrating, looking at the guys playing basketball and not being able to play."

The rehab apparently has worked. Rutland opened practice with the team at Midnight Madness Oct. 15, and his quickness and leaping ability looked to be nearly, but not completely, as it was before his injury. However, it is anticipated that he will be back to normal in the early part of the season.

If so, the Demon Deacons are in for a treat. Rutland had a breakthrough season last year. He showed considerable improvement in his point guard skills from his freshman year, and continued to improve throughout the season.

Rutland also excelled at the foul line, shooting 75.6 percent during the course of the season, including a phenomenal 86.8 percent

over the last 15 games. His 11.9 points per contest ranked second on the team, and his 40.1 three-point percentage ranked seventh in the ACC.

At times, Rutland looked invincible from the perimeter, as he did against Georgia Tech at home Jan. 17, when his 20 second-half points and his six-of-nine three-point shooting led the Deacons to a 66-63 victory. Rutland's spectacular performance last year was rewarded when he was named to the ACC All-Tournament Team.

With his remarkable shooting touch and his relatively low assist numbers (his 3.9 per game only ranked him ninth in the league), Rutland is not your typical point guard. However, the Deacons do not run your typical offense, either.

With three or four three-point threats on the floor at once, and with perhaps the nation's

best pivotman passing/scoring threat in senior Tim Duncan, the assists, and the shots, tend to be spread around.

"There are a lot of shots," Rutland said. "Anyone would be happy if they scored zero points if the team won. We're not selfish. We pass the ball around. We're concerned about victory, not shots."

But Rutland does see that his role as point guard is special.

"You've got to be the vocal leader — the coach on the floor," Rutland said.

After an impressive 1995-96 season, and after a summer of adversity, Rutland, along with the rest of the Deacons, is finally ready to play some basketball.

"Everybody's focused on the season and thinking as a team," Rutland said. "We still have a long way to go ... but we'll be ready when the season comes."



The Deacon squad will look to junior Tony Rutland to carry the floor this season.

Injury challenges Braswell at season's start

By GREG WILSON
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REPORTER

For the second straight year, the Demon Deacon men's basketball team will enter its season without a clear idea of just what to expect from junior Jerry Braswell.

Last season Braswell was placed on academic suspension for the first part of the season, and the Deacons were forced to struggle through several early games (including a debacle at Massachusetts where their ineffective backcourt rendered the team offensively inept) before Braswell returned to the squad.

This season, Braswell's status is likewise questionable for the Deacons' first several games, though this time an injury, not an academic suspension, is the culprit.

In a pickup game several weeks ago, Braswell fractured a bone in his foot and subsequently underwent surgery to repair the break.

Now, with a screw in his foot and a hitch in his step, the Deacons' likely starting two guard is expected to be at full strength in time for the team's Dec. 1 game at Richmond.

If the Demon Deacons are going to challenge for the national championship in March, they are going to need strong guard play: a weakness that was exploited in last year's NCAA tournament when Tony Rutland went down with an injury.

Likely to fill the off guard spot is Braswell, a six foot one inch junior from Cuthbert, Ga. After starting 21 games as a freshman, his playing time was reduced by the emergence of Rutland last year. However, after the graduation of Rusty LaRue, look for the duo of Rutland and Braswell to be bringing the ball up court.

A bench somewhat lacking in depth at the guard position places pressure on Braswell to remain healthy.

Braswell's main responsibilities this season will be defensive, as he will be expected to guard the opposition's best guard.

"Mainly this year I'll be responsible for defense," Braswell said. "I'll take the other team's toughest man and then I'll also look to score when I have to."

Deacon fans may recall last year's ACC and NCAA tournaments, during which Braswell often bore the brunt of the backcourt's defensive responsibility. Braswell was almost exclusively responsible for slowing down Georgia Tech's whirlwind guard Stephon Marbury in the ACC title game, and the squad subsequently leaned heavily on his defensive prowess in the national tournament.

With Rutland ineffective after blowing out his knee against Tech in the ACC championship and center Tim Duncan slowed by the flu, Braswell was a major reason the Deacons limped their way into the round of eight before falling to Kentucky.

However, this season the guard's practice time has been limited because of the aforementioned broken foot. He returned to practice on Oct. 30 and ran some drills with the team.

The sooner Braswell can come back, the sooner the Deacons can get



Junior Jerry Braswell, here shooting against Georgia Tech last season, has been a defensive standout.

back on the road to the Final Four.

Admittedly, expectations on the Deacons are tremendous and the team has acknowledged the pressures and expectations of the supporters. However, part of the team's plan is to play each game as they come and to try to improve with each game.

"This year a lot of people are expecting us to go far, maybe even win it all," Braswell said. "But we can't afford to look into the future towards the ACC (tournament) or NCAA's. We just have to work on accomplishing what we know we can and coming together as a team."

Goolsby aiming to fill basket from either guard or forward positions this season

By ZACH EVERSON
ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

When we last saw junior Steven Goolsby, he was having the best game of his collegiate career in the Demon Deacons' season-ending 83-63 loss to Kentucky in the NCAA Tournament. Deacon fans, however, would have to stay tuned until next season to see if Goolsby could keep his level of play at the same lofty plateau.

Well, next season is about to turn into this season and Goolsby will be given the chance to prove that he can continue to be a major player in the team's attempt to win a third consecutive ACC Championship.

Goolsby's impact on the team this year depends on several factors, the most significant of which is whether he will be used as a guard or a forward. Last year he saw most of his playing time as the back-up small forward to senior Ricky Peral, although he did play some time at shooting guard as well.

This season, Goolsby's teammates will have a lot to do with determining at what position he spends his time. In seniors Peral, Tim Duncan and Sean Allen and freshman Loren Woods, the Deacons have three players who are at least four inches taller than the 6-4 Goolsby.

Goolsby said that he will probably swing back and forth between both positions this year. "Right now I've been playing both of them," he said.

With the graduation of shooting guard and three-point marksman Rusty LaRue, Goolsby will be expected to provide the long range shooting off the bench.

Goolsby, however, does not see the shoes of LaRue as too difficult to fill. "We have a good three-point shooting team, it shouldn't bother us all that much," he said.

Goolsby said that the key for him this season is to stay focused and play hard. "My role this year is to be more aggressive," he said.

Raising the level of his defensive play is another goal of Goolsby's. It is something that he will have to do in order to spend more time on the floor.

He said that he wants to make sure that he gets back on defense.

Goolsby also emphasized the importance of defense for the team as a whole.

"I want us to be the best defensive team," Goolsby said.

If he is unable to be effective defensively, he wants to make sure that he can help out with the team's scoring.

This season, Goolsby hopes to have the opportunity to play up to his best ability.

Last year, Goolsby's playing time almost doubled from the first half of the season, in which he averaged 9.5 minutes per game, to the second portion where he spent 18 minutes per game on the floor.

According to Goolsby, this year's high expectations should not have a negative impact on the team. "I definitely think we can live up to the billing," Goolsby said.

Goolsby's ideal script to the season is very much as one would expect it to be.

The Deacons would reach the championship game, which would be well played by both sides, but with the Deacons emerging as the victors, of course.

"We definitely have the talent. All it takes is working together and learning to play with each other," he said.

"Hopefully we'll have everybody there this year," he said, referring to the injuries that plagued the team in the NCAA Tournament last year.

Goolsby's playing ability reached a higher level during the final stages of last season.

In the ACC Tournament semi-final game against Clemson, he poured in 11 points in the Deacon victory.

His outstanding play continued in the NCAA Tournament.

In the Deacons' second round victory over Texas, Goolsby hit two clutch free throws with 16 seconds left on the clock to help the Deacons hold on for a three point win.

In the loss to the Wildcats, Goolsby tied his personal best in scoring, with 14 points, and set a new personal standard in rebounds by pulling down seven boards.

To prepare for the upcoming season, Goolsby played in a church league this summer, as well as participating in frequent pick-up games.

Stringfellow hopes to contribute to strong front court

By SCOTT PLUMRIDGE
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REPORTER

Being a freshman can present many interesting challenges. Being a freshman on a returning ACC Champion squad can be even more of a challenge. Such was the case for William Stringfellow in his first year with the Demon Deacon basketball squad.

The 1995-1996 Demon Deacon squad was laden with talent, as evidenced by their repeat performance as ACC champions.

In particular, the team was literally front-loaded with a host of talent in the massive frontcourt. Stringfellow, a 6-8 then-freshman power forward, became an unsuspecting victim of the squad's depth.

Stringfellow spent most of his first year on the Demon Deacon bench as an observer. Looking back, however, Stringfellow said he realized that this was not an entirely fruitless situation.

"I got to watch other people play in the game situations which was really beneficial," Stringfellow said.

On top of learning primarily from the bench, Stringfellow gained invaluable experience on the Demon Deacon practice courts during his freshman season.

Routinely matched up against All-World center Tim Duncan and powerful forward Sean Allen, Stringfellow got to experience some of the best practice opposition in the country.

"Playing against them has been the best thing about college for me so far," said Stringfellow.

Stringfellow's observation of the game and practice experience would pay dividends when he finally got his chance to play.

With solid defensive play and relentless rebounding, Stringfellow was an impact player each time he entered a game.

His efforts were rewarded by Head Coach Dave Odom, who included Stringfellow in the starting lineup during a stretch of three early January games, including a key matchup at Duke.

"It's good experience to start, and I appreciated Coach Odom doing that for me," Stringfellow said.

Despite the continued wealth of front-court talent from the Deacons' 1995-1996 campaign, Stringfellow's sophomore season should include an increased amount of playing time.

Regardless, Stringfellow appears to be largely indifferent to the amount of time that he plays.

"I think that whoever earns the playing time should be out there — whether it's me or someone else," Stringfellow said.

Stringfellow's hard work and dedication should help him earn some of this playing time.

During the off-season, Stringfellow worked on all aspects of his game to make him a more complete player.

Most notably, he has added 25 pounds to his playing weight of last season through an intensive weight training program.

This extra strength and size, in addition to a 38-inch vertical leap, should have significant impact on Stringfellow's role as a rebounder — the aspect of the game that he treasures most.

Currently, Stringfellow is able to rebound with only one hand. Due to a broken bone in his right hand, he has been forced to the sidelines.

Undaunted, Stringfellow is working on his left-hand skills while his shooting hand recuperates.

"I should be back in time for the first game," Stringfellow said.

Deacons look to Amonett, West at reserve

By VINTON BRUTON
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REPORTER

Though the Demon Deacons' starting five measures up to that of any other team in the NCAA, the team will need significant contributions from its reserves this season if it is to maintain a spot among the top teams in the national rankings.

Both sophomore Joseph Amonett and redshirt freshman Rodney West will need to give the Deacons quality minutes in the upcoming campaign.

Amonett returns for his second season a stronger, more confident player. The 6-5 Byrdstown, Tenn., native is prepared to contribute steady play to offset the loss of Rusty LaRue, '96, to graduation.

"We lost Rusty, we need guard play, and that's where I need to fit in," Amonett said.

Amonett came to the Deacons with a reputation as a good perimeter shooter and prolific scorer. His 33.5 points-per-game average as a high school senior led the state of Tennessee and earned him recognition as 1995 state player of the year by USA Today.

As a freshman, most of Amonett's playing time was recorded in the early portion of the season. He saw double-digit minutes on six occasions, including a start

against Utah, while Rusty LaRue made the transition from the gridiron to the court.

As the competition stiffened and conference play began, Amonett's playing time was reduced. He averaged only 5.9 minutes per game in 1995-96.

"I just sat back and watched Rusty and JB (junior Jerry Braswell)," Amonett said. "I got to go to all the places before I played there, and I learned a lot from Rusty and Jerry."

Amonett struggled shooting the ball last season, hitting only 14 percent of his field goal attempts for 0.8 points per game, but feels his off-season training regimen will remedy his shooting woes.

"The game is just played at a different speed in college," Amonett said. "I was not as strong, but that's better this year."

Amonett stayed on campus this summer to work on his game.

"(Head) Coach (Dave) Odom had me running four days a week; distance to work on my endurance," Amonett said.

This year Amonett will be counted on to spell junior guards Tony Rutland, Braswell, and Steven Goolsby. If Goolsby continues to back up senior Ricardo Peral at small forward, Amonett may carve a niche as a key

reserve in Odom's rotation this season.

When people discuss the newcomers on this year's men's basketball team, one name dominates the discussion: heralded freshman center Loren Woods. But the Demon Deacons will enjoy the services of another towering freshman this year as well.

Rodney West, who spent last season as a redshirt, adds height to an already gargantuan Deacon frontcourt. The 6-10 West will be counted on as a frontcourt reserve this season.

"I'm a three (small forward) and four (power forward) player, I can play either position — definitely not a center," West said.

West said that the move from high school center to college forward has been a big adjustment. He averaged 18 points and 12 rebounds at the center position as a high school senior, helping his Oneida, Tenn., team advance to the "Sweet Sixteen" in the state playoffs.

West runs the court well for a big man, and his offensive arsenal includes a mid-range

jumpshot.

Last season he added strength and gained experience in practice, and his work ethic foretells a bright future as a Demon Deacon.

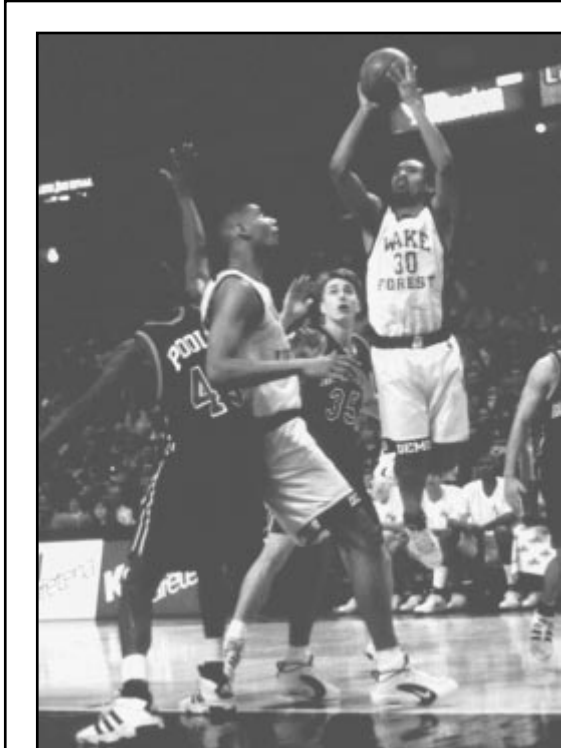
Of his redshirt season, West said "It definitely helped, it was definitely a plus."



Amonett



West



Bombs Away

Junior guard Tony Rutland pulls up to shoot.