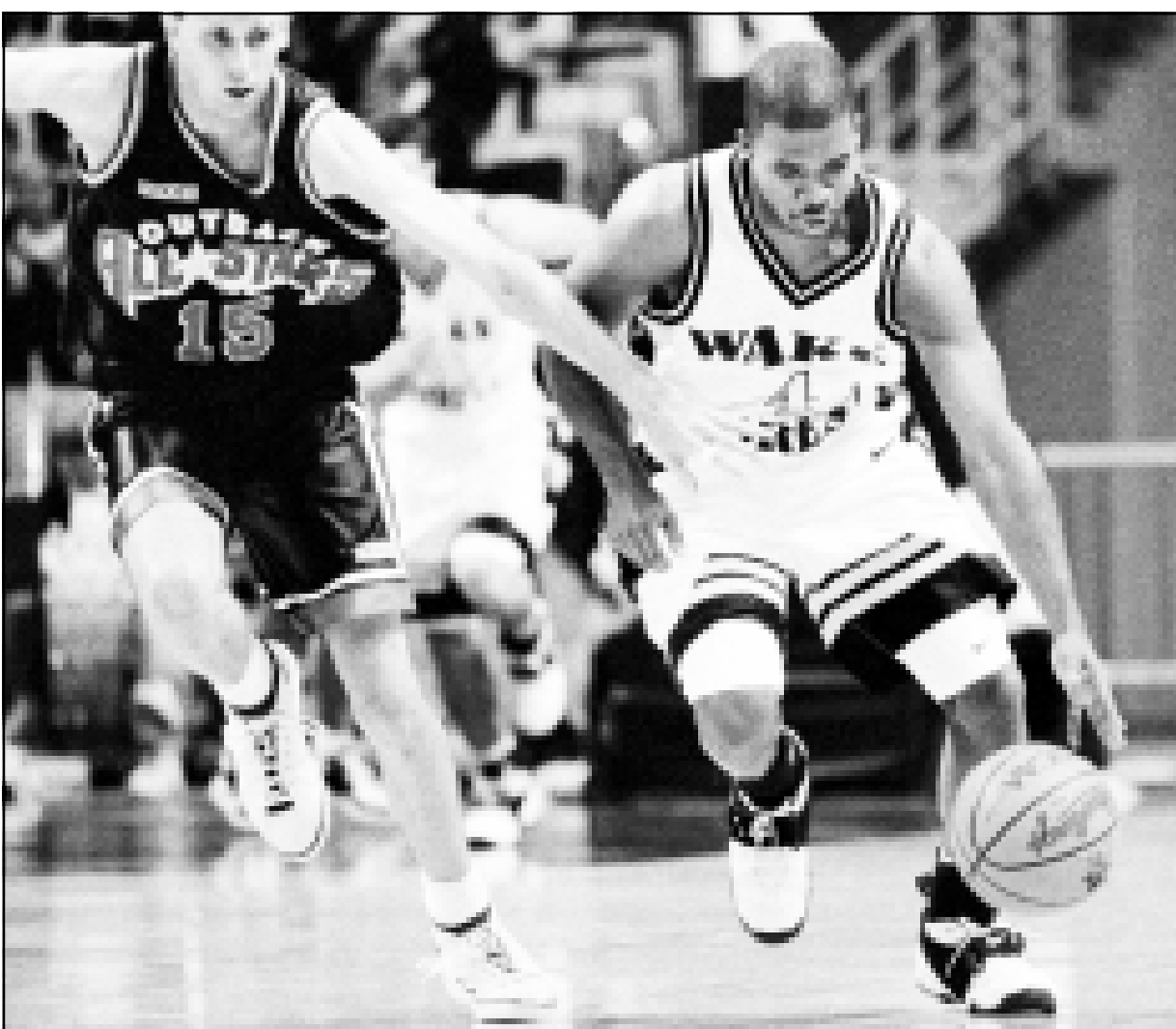


Newest Deacons hoping to make immediate impact

The Class of 2001 has a major role on the 1997 Demon Deacon squad as six freshmen fight for playing time



Photos by Carlton Ward/Old Gold and Black

Freshmen Robert O'Kelley (top) and Rafael Vidaurreta (bottom) in their first collegiate action against the Outback All-Stars from Australia on Nov. 8. O'Kelley and Vidaurreta are two of six total freshmen.

By Jeremy Noel
Contributing Reporter

"We have so many freshman you can't help but have a couple of them out there at a time," senior point guard Tony Rutland said of his newest teammates.

With only five players remaining from last season's squad, the Deacons will be looking to the class of 2001 for some help in contributing serious playing time.

Experts who follow recruiting closely, such as *Athlon Sports* magazine, believe that this group of six Deacon newcomers could have a greater impact than Duke's acclaimed bunch, which features the nation's prep player of the year, Shane Battier of Birmingham, Mich.

The size and depth that will be needed in the front court is certainly available, as freshmen Josh Shoemaker, Rafael Vidaurreta and Aron McMillian, who are all 6-9, will likely battle for playing time at power forward.

Freshman 6-5 swing man Niki Arinze started both of the Deacons' exhibition games and was an effective rebounder, grabbing 13 boards in the two contests.

In the backcourt, the Deacs will have a duo of prep standouts battling for playing time since freshmen Robert O'Kelley and James Griffin were both among the top guards in the nation last season.

Arinze has shown promise early, as evidenced by insertion into the starting lineup of both exhibition games against the Outback All-Stars and CSKA of Bulgaria.

A native of Nashville, Tenn. and

Martin Luther King High School, Arinze was named Class AA "Mr. Basketball" in Tennessee his senior year.

He averaged 21.7 points, 11.3 rebounds, and 3.3 blocks per game last season as he led his team to a 31-4 record and a regional championship.

As a newcomer to the team, Arinze knows that it will take time before he can make an real impact.

"Right now I'm trying to fit in the system and just play Wake Forest basketball," Arinze said. "I'm just trying to fit in."

Even though it is going to be tough at first, Arinze is more than ready to get his first season underway.

"I think we're going to have a great season this year. We have a lot of work to do, but as the season comes around we're going to get together and be more like a team, get out there and play really well," said Arinze.

Shoemaker's 6-9, 225 pound frame will certainly be a valuable asset to the Deacon front court. Shoemaker averaged double-figures in both points (20.4) and rebounds (12.1) during his senior season at Gate City (VA) High School.

He was selected to the all-state first team and named regional player of the year.

Another newcomer who will get a long look at the forward spot will be Vidaurreta. The Zaragoza, Spain, native has played the last two seasons in the United States at the New Hampton School in New Hampshire.

Vidaurreta averaged 16 points and

seven rebounds in his senior season as his team finished 1996-97 with an 18-7 record.

McMillian will be another physical presence in the front court for the Deacs with his 6-9 size.

"I thought Aron McMillian played pretty well," Head Coach Dave Odom said of McMillian's performance in the exhibition game against CSKA Bulgaria. "He stayed in there and played all but the fourth quarter. He did some good things and rebounded the ball well."

McMillian averaged 15.2 points and 8.8 rebounds as he led Greensboro Day School to the state finals last season and was a member of back-to-back state championship teams during his sophomore and junior years.

His older sister Emon is a junior on the Demon Deacon women's basketball team.

James Griffin was a prolific scorer in high school and will look to continue that in the Deacon backcourt. Griffin averaged 32.4 points per game during the 1996-97 season as he led the state of South Carolina in scoring and was named the state player of the year.

A four-year starter in Greenville, Griffin was named to the All-State team three times and finished his career with 2,577 points. When asked about his fellow first-year teammates, Griffin said, "We're playing well together, we get along well as a group and we play hard."

The other player who will be looking to make an impact on the perimeter for the Deacons will be Robert O'Kelley. O'Kelley emerged as one of the nation's best guards last season as he scored an average of 29.6 points per game.

"I think we've got a great freshman class coming in here," Arinze said. "We've got guys like Rob O'Kelley, Aron McMillian, Josh Shoemaker and James Griffin who can really contribute in their first year, and I think as we get more experience we can come out and play really well."

Early season victories over exhibition teams are great for the morale of a young team like the Deacons, but the bulk of their schedule is the always tough ACC.

This year, the conference is especially tough with nationally-ranked powers Duke, North Carolina, and Clemson all looking to vie for the national title.

This does not, however, diminish the excitement of the freshman class as they are all eager to compete on Tobacco Road.

"It's going to be definitely exciting for me," Arinze said. "It's been a longtime dream of mine."



Carlton Ward/Old Gold and Black

Freshman Niki Arinze races toward the basket in the exhibition game against the Outback All-Stars Nov. 8. In his first game Arinze impressed the crowd with his acrobatic dunking ability.

Sharpshooting Braswell is ready to surprise the ACC

By Paul Gaeta
Assistant Sports Editor

The loss of All-American center Tim Duncan, '97, to the NBA as the first overall pick in the draft, might cause many to think that this year's squad will not be able reach last year's level of play.

Senior guard Jerry Braswell, however, thinks otherwise.

"It's much easier than last year," Braswell said. "Last year we had a lot of expectations. We were predicted to win the ACC title and make it to the Final Four. This year it makes it a lot easier because we don't have those expectations. I think this year we will be more focused on what we want to do rather than what everybody else wants us to do."

Braswell, who started all but one game at guard for the Deacs last year, will be the leader of one of the most talented and experienced backcourts in the ACC.

The native of Cuthbert, Ga., led last year's squad in free-throw percentage (80.4 percent) and three-point percentage (42.3 percent) while averaging 9.3 points per game, good for third best on the team.

Braswell sees his experience and leadership as important ingredients in making the '97-'98 Demon Deacons one of the nation's biggest surprises.

"I know in the off-season, I worked hard in being more of a leader," Braswell said. "I want to lead the freshmen by example the same way I was my freshman year."

"Right now we have the largest freshman class since I've been here, and it's going to be hard for them to learn the system Wake Forest goes

"I want to lead the freshman by example the same way I was my freshman year."

Jerry Braswell
Senior Guard

by," Braswell said. "It's going to take a little more time for the team to get that chemistry. Right now, we (Braswell and senior guard Tony Rutland) just want to concentrate on being good leaders and have patience, realizing that they are going to make some mistakes."

The combination of Rutland and Braswell, who have been playing together since their freshman year, gives the Demon Deacon backcourt a lethal one-two punch.

"It's been a real good experience for me and Tony to play together," Braswell said. "We never have competed against each other, we always competed with each other, helping each other with our games."

"It's been a real honor playing with him. I think right now we're not looking at it as one of the best backcourts in the nation because of the fall we had last year."

"This year we have something to prove as a backcourt. We have the experience, we have the mindset, it's just a matter of us going out every night and proving that we are a good backcourt."

With Duncan as last year's leader, leading the team in points and rebounding, the team played a slow-paced, half-court style game.

This year's squad, however, will rely on a much more fast-paced offense,

one that Braswell will lead. The senior looks forward to this new style.

"I feel the tempo is going to change a lot," Braswell said. "For the past three years, the tempo has been a sort of walk-the-ball-up, half-court kind of game. Even though we don't have that inside presence with Tim, we do have Loren Woods, who has the potential to be a good player."

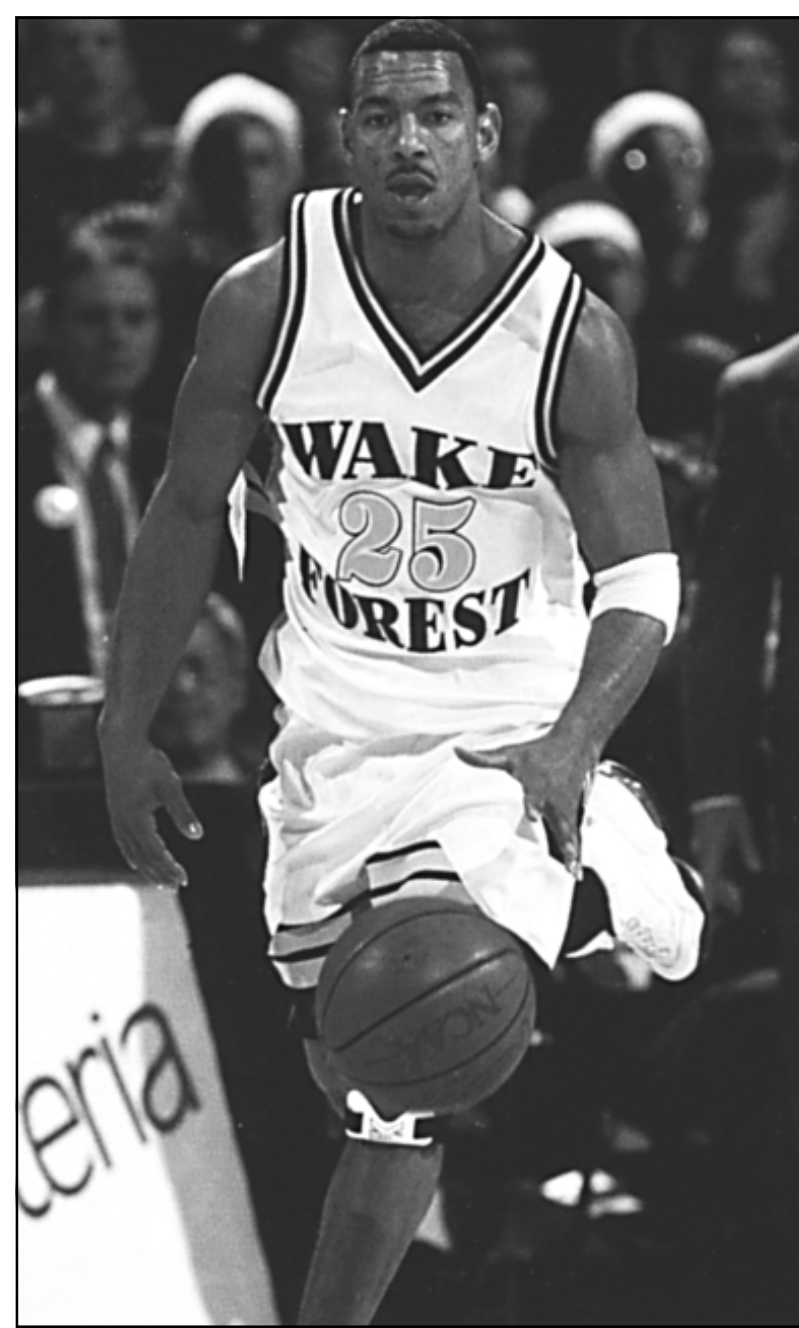
"We don't want to get away from that inside game we had last year," Braswell continued. "But as far as running the ball up-court and attacking the defense, we want to start that. We want to attack the defense as best as possible and if that means getting the ball inside to Loren, we'll do that. It's going to be real tough trying to defend our inside-outsides game, something we had last year."

With the ACC as powerful as ever (Duke, North Carolina and Clemson are all ranked in the top ten nationally in the pre-season) the road ahead for the Deacs seems as difficult as ever.

Braswell, however, believes the Demon Deacons are right up there, and tells skeptics of the squad's potential to watch out.

"I see Wake Forest, even though we're not ranked, still at the top," Braswell said. "We are going to surprise some of the teams like Duke and North Carolina. Not only do we want to prove to everybody that we're a good team, but we want to prove to ourselves that we can play with some of the top teams in the ACC and in the nation."

"We don't want Wake Forest to be the type of team people look over just because we don't have the All-American in the middle. We're still going to play hard and be a good team."



Senior Jerry Braswell pushes the ball down the floor on a Deacon fast break. Braswell will see a lot of action in the open floor this season as the Deacs have now gone to a more up-tempo style of offense that features a great deal of fast break opportunities.

Carlton Ward/
Old Gold and Black