

Sports

Women's tennis notches 6-3 win against William & Mary Tribe
 Sports/B2

Deacs crowned NIT champs in win over Irish

By Paul Gaeta
 Senior Reporter

In the end, the men's basketball team went out as winners, and Robert O'Kelley went out as a star.

Two months ago, that might have sounded hard to believe for a team and an offensive star plagued by inconsistency.

But the Deacs have been a radically different team since then, and in the finals of the National Invitation Tournament, it showed.

O'Kelley scored 19 points and junior Rafael Vidaurreta's defense slowed down Big East Player of the Year Troy Murphy

as the Deacons won their first ever national championship in basketball with a 71-61 victory over Notre Dame March 30 at Madison Square Garden.

It might not have been the type of championship Demon Deacon players pictured themselves celebrating when they started practicing in the fall, but it was a championship just the same.

And considering that only three Division I college basketball teams are able to end their season with wins, the victory was definitely reason to celebrate.

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"I told our team awhile ago that this was not the national championship, but it is a national championship."

Dave Odom
 Men's basketball Head Coach

championship, but it is a national championship," Demon Deacon Head Coach Dave Odom said. "What we did means as much to us as whatever happens out in Indianapolis.

"To end the season with a win is very, very special—very, very special for a basketball coach,"

Odom said. "A lot of football coaches do that. But with basketball coaches, that's unique for us."

For O'Kelley, who was named the tournament MVP, the win was especially gratifying.

His offensive numbers were less than stellar for a player who led the team in scoring each of his first two seasons. Odom even replaced him at the point guard position midway through league play with sophomore Ervin Murray.

Redemption, however, struck for O'Kelley on the team's biggest night of the year.

"I've been through a lot this year," O'Kelley said. "I know I

haven't played up to my capabilities and could have played better. But to finish the season with a championship is really a special feeling.

"I knew I could make shots. I know it's been a long year for me. I've been up and down. But I can make shots. I know that. I just kept that confidence and when you have players and coaches behind you, that really kept my motivation going."

After starting the year 8-1 but then dropping 13 of their next 19 games, the Deacs entered the NIT hot, winning three straight games before falling to Duke in



Rick Van Veen/Old Gold and Black

Darius Songaila had 12 points in the win.

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O'Kelley's heart earned him MVP

By Jared Klose
 Sports Editor

If there was one Demon Deacon athlete that students, faculty, coaches and other players were all pulling for during the past four months, that person was junior Robert O'Kelley.

In the team's media guide, the 6-foot-1 guard from Memphis, Tenn., says that if he lost all of his possessions except one he would keep his Bible. That would have certainly been a good item for O'Kelley to bring to some of his games too, as he often seemed to be praying (along with the rest of us) that his shots would fall.

The season he endured was one that must have tested his faith on the court, and perhaps off of it as well, but the impeccable manner in which he conducted himself through the good, the bad and the ugly of it all, meant that I, for one, was all the more happy for him when he found his jumper in time to be named the MVP of the National Invitational Tournament.

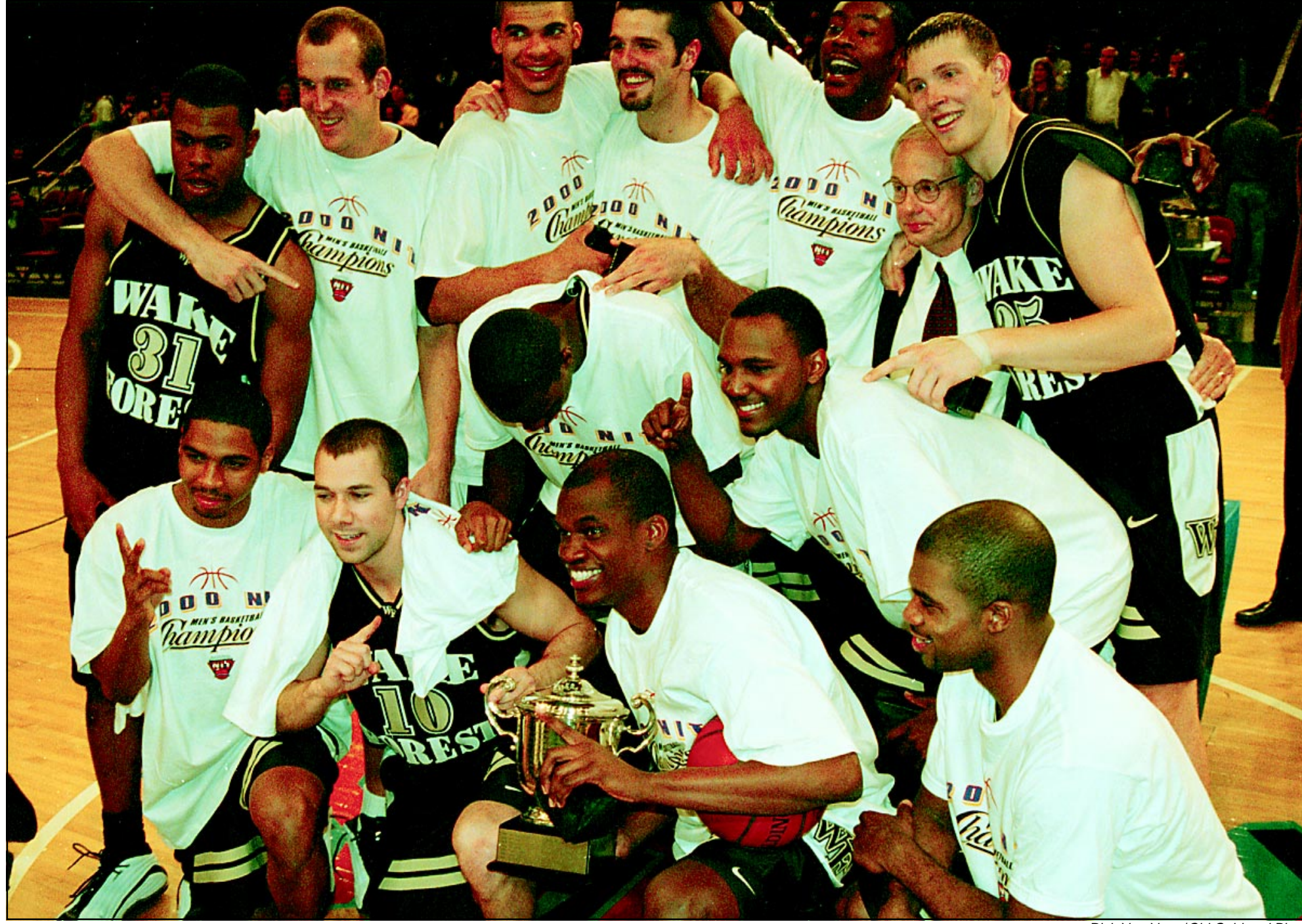
O'Kelley had enjoyed a nearly storybook career as a Demon Deacon before this year as an individual performer, but the road he went down to achieve the team-championship ending that his endeavors had fallen short of in the past, would more than likely not have been one he would have chosen himself.

After last season, the guard's résumé was about as distinguished as they come for a player with two years of experience: He was named the ACC Rookie of the Year, a Freshman All-American and a second-team All-ACC selection in 1998. And it didn't stop there either, as O'Kelley managed to avoid the perilous pit of "sophomore slump" the next season, boosting his scoring average and presence.

He assumed the role of team leader when the senior-laden class that he played with his freshman year departed, and after finishing the 1998-1999 season as the league's third-leading scorer with 17.5 ppg, O'Kelley returned under heavy scrutiny and before play even got underway he

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Community turns out at celebration



Rick Van Veen/Old Gold and Black

The basketball team capped a successful postseason run by winning 10 of its last 11 games. The Deacs triumphed 71-61 over Notre Dame in the championship game of the National Invitational Tournament March 30 at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Junior Robert O'Kelley was named tournament MVP.

Head Coach Dave Odom thanked the fans who stayed behind the team throughout the season.

By Paul Gaeta
 Senior Reporter

About 75 students showed up at Reynolds Gymnasium April 4 to celebrate the basketball team's NIT championship with players and Head Coach Dave Odom.

The Demon Deacons defeated Notre Dame 71-61 March 30 at Madison Square Garden to win their first-ever national championship in basketball.

"In order to appreciate winning, you must first accept despair and disappointment—things less than winning," Odom said of a 1999-2000 season trademarked by peaks and valleys. "That was this team for two weeks in January and one very difficult week in February. But it makes this season better. I think our players understand that you learn a lesson when a lesson is given to you."

Although there was a disappointing turnout by students, many local fans and their children, University President Thomas K. Hearn Jr., the university marching band, cheerleaders and even Randy "The Deacon Nut" Haney were there to root the Deacs on for the final time this season.

Odom thanked the "true" fans who stuck with the Deacons during difficult times throughout the year for their support.

"Our players learned something," he said. "They learned who their friends

were—in classes, in fraternities, on the Quad, downtown. To those of you who fall into that category, I can't tell you how much that meant to our guys and how much motivation that gave to our staff. It pushed them through the door that seemed to be barring the way to success."

After the pep band played several songs to start the celebration, each player on the Deacon squad was introduced one-by-one as fans rose to their feet in applause.

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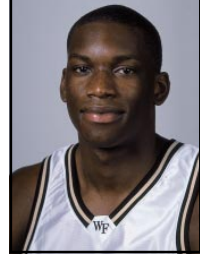
Arinze to transfer after two years with Deacs

By Daniel Ogle
 Old Gold and Black Reporter

Sophomore Niki Arinze's brief career as a Demon Deacon came to an end today as Head Coach Dave Odom announced that the forward will transfer at the end of the semester.

"I am disappointed that things did not work out for Niki at Wake Forest," Odom said. "He is a hard worker, a good student and a talented player."

The 6-foot-9 forward originally signed with the Deacons out of Martin Luther King High School in Nashville, Tenn., in



Arinze

miss the entire season.

After rehabilitating all summer to be in shape for his third season in Winston-Salem, Arinze suffered yet another setback as he injured his foot in mid-January

and never rejoined the Deacon lineup. Before his injury, Arinze averaged 5.4 points per game.

"I have had a good experience at Wake and have learned a lot, but in my judgment, transferring will help my development as a basketball player," Arinze said. "It is in my best interest to make a fresh start at another university."

After he was forced out of the lineup due to injury, several incidents surrounding Arinze brought about speculation that he might be leaving the basketball

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Deac of the Week



Janelle Kraus

Senior Janelle Kraus is finishing out the season even stronger than when she started. Kraus, who was one of only three Deacs to compete in the 2000 Rice University Bayou Classic April 2, took home the first-place individual title in the 3,000-meter event as she torched the track and the rest of the field with her time of 9 minutes, 39.19 seconds.

Kraus was named an All-American for her outstanding showing in the 5,000-meter indoors this past season and will look to defend her title at the distance in the coming weeks.