

Young Wolfpack to rely on veteran backcourt

Sixth-year Head Coach Herb Sendek lures yet another highly-touted recruiting class to Raleigh

By Mike Hendee
Old Gold and Black Reporter

There might not be a harder team in the ACC this year to gauge than the North Carolina State Wolfpack. This will be a pivotal year for sixth-year Head Coach Herb Sendek, who has proven to be a superb recruiter whose teams have not lived up to their hype on the court.

The 'Pack loses its entire frontcourt this season from a team that went 5-11 in the ACC and 13-16 overall last year, but fear not, State fans. Raleigh will again be home to one of the top recruiting classes in the nation, minimizing the loss of Ron Kelley, Damon Thornton, Kenny Inge, and Damien Wilkins, who transferred to the University of Georgia after proving to be a bust.

What the team will return is its entire backcourt, a talented, veteran group led by junior shooting guard Anthony Grundy. Grundy averaged 14.6 points per game last season, and that figure should only improve with the return of senior point guard Archie Miller, who missed most of last season with a stress fracture in his left fibula.

"I want to do whatever I need to help the team," Grundy said.

"I need to increase my shooting percentage and improve defensively. You can always get better defensively."



Courtesy of N.C. State Media Relations

Senior guard Archie Miller will provide leadership and stability off the bench.

Miller, one of the most dangerous three-point shooters in the nation, shot .575 last season from deep, and led the nation in three-point field goal percentage at .620 prior to his injury.

Miller's return will benefit Grundy by enabling him to return to shooting guard, his natural position. Grundy had filled in at the point last season during Miller's absence.

"I think all things being equal," Sendek said of Grundy and Miller, "you always would prefer to have experienced backcourt players. Experience everywhere never hurts, but if given the chance, I'd rather have it in the backcourt."

Also returning at guard are junior Clifford Crawford, a Winston-Salem native who averaged 7.7 points per game last year could challenge Miller to start, and sophomore Scooter Sherrill, a former high school McDonald's All-American. Freshman Dovonte Edwards should also contribute.

Highly-touted freshman Julius Hodge, a 2001 McDonald's All-American and the ACC's preseason rookie of the year, headlined Sendek's latest impressive recruiting class. Although listed as a guard, Hodge could see significant time at small forward given his 6-foot-6 frame and the Wolfpack's already loaded backcourt. However, he is able to play any position on the court from point guard to small forward.

"I think Julius is an engaging personality, and I think he is a winner as a person," said Sendek. "I think he's the kind of person that, when you have a pickup game, you're hoping you get to be on his team, and so I think he brings a lot to the table in terms of his leadership and his magnetism. He does it in a very unassuming way, although he has been a heralded young player."

"He's eager to learn. He just has a very refreshing way about him."

Forward and center are both big question marks for the Wolfpack. It will be critical for some of the younger players to step up and take the places of departed bruisers Thornton and Inge.

So far, 6-foot-8 sophomore Marcus Melvin and 6-foot-9 redshirt freshman Mike Bell, who missed most of last season after requiring surgery on both of his knees, have been the most impressive at the forward position. Bell's health will likely be a major factor in the success of the team.

Josh Powell, a 6-foot-9 forward, and fellow freshmen Levi Watkins and Ilian Evtimov, along with redshirt freshman Josh Powell, should also compete for playing time.

At the center position, 6-foot-10 freshman Jordan Collins, a product of DeMatha High School and coaching by the legendary Morgan Wooten, appears the likely starter, although Melvin may also play at center. Kristian Jensen, a 7-foot-1 center, may also contribute.



Courtesy of N.C. State Media Relations

Senior guard Anthony Grundy will lead this Herb Sendek's squad on the floor.

There is no denying the fresh talent of the Wolfpack squad, but the team lacks critical experience. The team should struggle early on, but could be dangerous as the season progresses.

"We only have three upperclassmen, so just about everybody that garners any time will be a young player," Sendek said. "We'll certainly rely heavily on the experience of a couple of our guards, Miller, Grundy and Crawford, but beyond that it's going to be a young basketball team."

"(The freshmen) are guys who love basketball ... that should help the process along.

"I want our guys this year to have a lot of fun," he said. "I want them to play with a fearless abandon, if you will. I don't want them to be afraid of making mistakes. I want them to have a real focused, firm resolve and determination. We're going to make our share of mistakes, but as the year goes on we're going to get better."

This season will also be a make-or-break season for Sendek. The Wolfpack have yet to make the NCAA Tournament in his five-year tenure, and it was widely speculated that he would be fired following last season's 13-16 debacle. 'Pack fans will expect to see some of this team's vast potential realized, and Sendek's job will likely hang in the balance.

N.C. State Wolfpack



Head Coach: Herb Sendek
Career Record: 149-100
Record at N.C. State: 86-74
2000-01 Record: 13-16
2000-01 ACC Finish: 5-11, Seventh
Returning Starters: 2

2001-2002 Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Cl.	No.	Name	Pos.	Cl.
0	Michael Bell	F	r-Fr.	23	Scooter Sherrill	G	So.
2	Anthony Grundy	G	Sr.	24	Julius Hodge	G	Fr.
3	Ilian Evtimov	F	Fr.	30	Clifford Crawford	G	Jr.
5	Brian Keeter	G	Sr.	32	Jordan Collins	C	Fr.
11	Archie Miller	G	Sr.	33	Josh Powell	F	Fr.
21	Levi Watkins	F	Fr.	50	Kristian Jensen	C	Jr.
22	Will Roach	F	r-Fr.	54	Marcus Melvin	F	So.