

Duke

2002-03 Record: 26-7, 11-5 ACC, NCAA Sweet 16



Key Returners: Senior guard Chris Duhon, junior guard Daniel Ewing, sophomore guard J.J. Redick, sophomore forward Sheldon Williams and sophomore forward Shavlik Randolph.

Key Newcomers: Forward Luol Deng and guard Patrick Davidson.

Stunning Stats: The Blue Devils have made the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament for six consecutive seasons and have won a record five-straight ACC Tournaments.

Strengths: Duke will once again be loaded at the guard position. Both Duhon and Redick are Naismith Player of the Year candidates. Meanwhile, Ewing could be even better than both and Duke won't lose too much when sophomore point guard Sean Dockery spells Duhon at times.

Weaknesses: Although Duke has a bevy of talent at all the positions, the Blue Devils lack a truly dominant big man. Their reliance on the three point shot has also hurt them in the past.

Best Case Scenario: Duke will once again begin the season as the team to beat in the ACC. However, they will have to overcome many challengers if they want to continue their streak of consecutive ACC Tournament titles. They will need Deng, the second-rated high school player last year behind LeBron James, to come right in and be a top college player. If this team gets hot, it could definitely make a run at the NCAA title. More likely, their season will end in a Final Four appearance.

North Carolina

2002-03 Record: 19-16, 6-10 ACC, no NCAA bid



Key Returners: Junior forward Jawad Williams, junior guard Melvin Scott, sophomore guard Raymond Felton, sophomore guard/forward Rashad McCants and sophomore center Sean May.

Key Newcomers: Head Coach Roy Williams, forward Reyshawn Terry and forward Justin Bohlander.

Stunning Stats: The Tar Heels haven't been selected to play in the NCAA Tournament the past two years after making it a record 27 consecutive years from 1975-2001.

Strengths: North Carolina boasts one of the best starting fives in the country. The sophomore trio of Felton, McCants and May mixed with Jawad Williams gives UNC a ton of weapons. And Roy Williams is one of the best coaches around.

Weaknesses: While the starting five is stacked, UNC's bench is lacking. And they need to overcome the damage done by ex-Head Coach Matt Doherty. Most of the Heels have never been on a good college basketball team so experience and lack of a winning attitude could be a problem that Roy Williams will need to address.

Best Case Scenario: With Williams inheriting a very talented team, North Carolina could return to its glory days immediately by making a Final Four run. More likely, the Tar Heels will make it to the Sweet 16 if they stay healthy.

Maryland

2002-03 Record: 21-10, 11-5 ACC, NCAA Sweet 16



Key Returners: Senior forward Jamar Smith, junior guard Andre Collins, sophomore guard John Gilchrist, sophomore forward Nik Caner-Medley and sophomore forward Travis Garrison.

Key Newcomers: Guard Mike Jones, guard D.J. Strawberry, forward Ekene Ibekwe, center Will Bowers and center Hassan Fofana.

Stunning Stats: The Terps lone returning senior is Jamar Smith after losing a very strong class to graduation. Despite their losses, Maryland begins the season ranked in the Top-25 for a seventh consecutive year.

Strengths: The Terps will have a confident sophomore running the point in John Gilchrist, making the loss of Steve Blake less important than people think. They also have plenty of big men who can stroke it from the outside.

Weaknesses: Inexperience. Hardly any Terps coming back played significant minutes last year. This could show up when the team finds itself in close games and when they play on the road.

Best Case Scenario: If this young team can gel and mature quickly, they could make a repeat run to the Sweet 16 and stay near the top of the ACC standings. Realistically, they should be happy with a return trip to the NCAA Tournament and staying ahead of Florida State and N.C. State in the ACC.

Florida State

2002-03 Record: 14-15, 4-12 ACC, no NCAA bid



Key Returners: Senior forward Michael Joiner, senior guard Tim Pickett and junior forward Anthony Richardson.

Key Newcomers: Forward Alexander Johnson, forward Al Thornton, guard Von Wafer.

Stunning Stats: Nearly every major publication ranks the 'Noles' freshman class as the best in the nation. Pickett was fourth in the nation with 2.83 steals per game last year. He also averaged 17.1 points and 5.7 rebounds per game.

Strengths: Pickett is one of the ACC's top players on both sides of the ball, and Joiner is a solid and experienced inside scorer and rebounder. The few significant returning players have plenty of big-game experience, as Florida State has knocked off Duke in each of the past two years.

Weaknesses: The 'Noles are not deep and will most likely ask a lot of their freshmen.

Best Case Scenario: If the freshmen step in and contribute this season, and Pickett and Joiner are able to play as well as they did last year, this could be a dangerous team. Pickett can take over games. Even at the very worst, they should finish ahead of Clemson, Virginia and Georgia Tech, not bad for a perennial cellar-dweller. But watch out. With Head Coach Leonard Hamilton at the helm, this team will be very good soon. The question is just how soon.