

# Prosser's posse set to defend ACC title

By Mike Scott  
Senior Reporter

Expectations and predictions don't seem to mean a lot to Skip Prosser. Of course, that shouldn't be surprising, considering his Deacons are coming off a season in which they went 25-5 and won an ACC regular season championship after most pundits had picked them to finish in the bottom third of the conference. And as useful as Prosser's ambivalence to prognostication was to his team last year, it may prove to be even more valuable this year.

That's because the Deacons, thanks in large part to the performances turned in during Prosser's first two campaigns, enter this season weighted down with the high hopes of their fans and the high opinions of the experts. The boys in Black and Gold enjoy a pre-season No. 21 ranking nationally, as well as being picked by most to finish in the top three in the ACC. And all this comes despite the fact that freshmen

and sophomores comprise nine of the team's top 12 players.

Has Prosser's success in his first two years created added pressure for this team? If so, the coach doesn't seem to be feeling it.



Skip Prosser

"We may have in some ways sort of over-achieved last year," Prosser said. "Obviously Josh (Howard, '03) had a superlative year, and we had so many freshmen and sophomores, and I think that has really heightened expectations this year. Are they misplaced? I have no idea. I hate to sound trite, but time will tell."

This brings up the most pressing question surrounding this team – how will the Deacons replace Howard, last year's ACC Player of the Year and the team leader in scoring and

rebounding? With Howard at the reigns last year, everyone knew and accepted that he was the team leader – "The Man." While many players are capable of picking up the statistical slack left by Howard's departure, just as much in question is whether the order his presence and play brought to the locker room will be missed more than his contributions on the court.

In short, will the process of finding a new Alpha Deacon cause unrest among the players? While Prosser foresees a significant change from last year, he does not seem concerned with its effects.

"Number one, there's a quality of person on our team – we really have great kids," he said. "I don't think they care who gets the credit as long as they play well."

With returning juniors Jamaal Levy, Vytas Danelius and Taron Downey as well as sophomores Justin Gray and Eric Williams, all of whom started at least 10 games last

year, Prosser's squad will not lack for experience despite its relative youth. Add in sophomores Trent Strickland, Chris Ellis and Richard Joyce and a stellar recruiting class headlined by point guard Chris Paul and forward Todd Hendley and there's no shortage of talent either.

The considerable depth of this team may very well mean Prosser will finally be able to implement his preferred high-speed, pressing style of play, though much progress is still to be made before the Pittsburgh native will be satisfied.

"We still don't understand how fast I want to play," he said. "I don't know if they (the players) don't believe me, but I still don't think we're rushing the ball like we need to rush the ball up the court. We're still not aggressive – it becomes a state of mind, you don't have to talk about it, you just expect it, and I don't think we're near there yet."

But while he stresses a speed of play that seems rather modern,

Prosser is also a stickler on fundamentals, as evidenced by the fact that last year's team led the nation in rebounding differential and was among the leaders in free throw percentage. His focus on the basics has shown up in his preparation for this season.

"From a defensive standpoint my concern is we don't have an edge," Prosser said. "Josh gave us a little bit of an edge, that's a concern, we try to do that in practice. Offensively, we can't be so perimeter-oriented, we need to be more inside, have more of a balance."

So, while life without Howard has definitely raised some questions for this Deacon team, Prosser does not seem interested in mourning the loss – it appears the past, just like expectations, is not something he tends to dwell on.

"It was time for him (Howard) to go, he had an unbelievable year and a terrific four years," Prosser said.

"Now we have to try and remake this team."

## Talented freshman class provides depth

By Gerard McMahon  
Old Gold and Black Reporter

A year ago, five freshmen played key roles en route to the Deacons' 25 win season and regular season ACC Championship.

This year's highly regarded recruiting class, which features McDonald's All-American point guard Chris Paul, shooting guard Jeremy Ingram, forward Todd Hendley and power forward Kyle Visser, aspire to do more of the same.

"The team's coming along really good and really gelling together," Paul said.

Paul, who chose Wake Forest over Boston College, Connecticut and North Carolina, among others, cited the "family atmosphere" as one of his biggest reasons for choosing to be a Demon Deacon.

"(I loved the) family atmosphere, the teammates, everybody gets along just fine, and I love being close to home," Paul said.

Paul, rated as the top point guard recruit in the nation by many publications, averaged 25 points per game last year, but he figures he should have a different role with the Deacons this year.

"I'm hoping to contribute leadership and a spark off the bench," Paul said. "Whenever I get in, I just try to push the ball up the court and make something happen. Coach has been getting on me

about me not shooting the ball as much, because a lot of times I look to pass."

While Paul may need to shoot more on the court, fellow freshman Ingram says he just needs to get meaner on the court.

"ARGHH!" the outgoing guard exclaimed as he showed what kind of game face Head Coach Skip Prosser wants him to have on the court.

"Coach Prosser knows I have a nice personality and all off the court," Ingram said. "But he wants me to get an edge when I'm on the court. It's something I'm working on because I go every day trying to be humble and then I get on the court and he wants me to get all up in everyone's face. But this is definitely something I'm willing to work on."

The 6-foot-3-inch guard, who averaged 17 points per game last year, chose Wake Forest over N.C. State, Virginia, Georgia Tech and his first love, Maryland.

"I chose Wake first of all because of the academics," Ingram said. "I know that after I graduate I'll be in a place where I can get a good job. I love the small campus, cool people and the basketball program is just outstanding – great coaches, great advisors. I made the right choice and wouldn't take my decision back for the world."

While Ingram has admitted to wanting more practices so he can find his rhythm better in Prosser's scheme, he is willing



Todd Hendley



Jeremy Ingram



Chris Paul



Kyle Visser

to accept whatever role Prosser decides best fits the team.

"I just want to fit in where I fit in," Ingram said. "There's a whole lot of good players on this ball club, so whatever I can do to help this team win I'll do ... even if Coach just puts me in for 50 seconds, I'm going to go all out because what I do may determine how the game goes along."

Scrappy forward Todd Hendley has been the surprise of the exhibition season thus far for Deacon fans. The 6-foot-9-inch forward has shown the abil-

ity to hit the outside jumper in addition to matching up well on defense.

"Hopefully I can do whatever I can to help the team," Hendley said. "Coach has been telling me to hit the glass and rebound as hard as I can."

Hendley, who was also recruited by Clemson and N.C. State, chose Wake Forest for its academics, teammates and the coaching staff, which he brags is the "best in the country."

6-foot-9-inch Kyle Visser, the only Deacon recruit who hails from outside North Carolina (Michigan), decided to come east to Wake Forest because of the great people, the fans and the great academics.

"I just came down here and fell in love with the school," Visser said. "The ACC is obviously the best basketball conference there is."

Visser, who averaged 12 points per game his senior year in high school, has seen an increased role on the team since the injury to returning sophomore Chris Ellis. With the season fast approaching after so few practices, the freshmen know their immediate impact may be limited.

"I just want the freshmen to go out there and not play tentatively," Prosser said.

"As long as they're aggressive and attacking – right now they're still playing much more tentatively. We don't want that."