ACC Preview
2003 - 2004

Rising Stars
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 forward 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.

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 challenges if they want to continue their streak of consecutive ACC Tournament titles. They will need Deng, the second-routed 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.
**Clemson**

**2002-03 Record:** 15-13, 5-11 ACC, no NCAA bid

**Key Returners:** Junior forward Olu Babalola, senior forward Chris Hobbs, junior forward/center Sharrod Ford, junior guard Chey Christie.

**Key Newcomers:** Head Coach Oliver Purnell, guard Vernon Hamilton, guard Jimmy Hudson, forward Lamar Rice (JC transfer).

**Stunning Stats:** The Tigers were 13-4 at home last season, but they were 2-9 away from Death Valley.

**Strengths:** Hobbs and Ford provide strong inside presence, Babalola is a gritty player and at the very least, Purnell will inject some new life into a team that has gotten used to losing in the ACC. The Tigers also have a strong home court advantage in Death Valley.

**Weaknesses:** The Tigers do not have a proven three-point threat. The only bright spot on a terrible squad the past two years was star guard Edward Scott, who graduated.

**Best Case Scenario:** If Hobbs and Ford can become formidable scorers and someone steps in to replace Scott as the point guard and sparkplug of this team, and if Georgia Tech and Virginia have poor seasons, then the Tigers could finish as high as seventh. But that’s a lot of things that are not very likely to happen. The smart money says the Tigers will be lucky to win just a few games in the conference, and they will probably finish last.

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**Virginia**

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

**Key Returners:** Senior guard Todd Billet, junior forward/center Elton Brown, senior guard Majestic Mapp, junior forward Devin Smith.

**Key Newcomers:** Guard Engin Atsur and guard Mike O’Donnell.

**Stunning Stats:** The Cavs were one of just three ACC teams to beat Wake Forest in the regular season, winning 85-75 Jan. 23. Billet made 54-of-119 three-pointers in ACC play (45.5 percent).

**Strengths:** Billet is one of the ACC’s most dangerous scorers, especially from the perimeter, and fifth-year senior Mapp, who returned to action last year after missing two seasons due to injury, provides veteran leadership.

**Weaknesses:** The Cavs lost their best inside scoring threat and rebounder, Travis Watson, to graduation, and arguably their best playmaker, Keith Jenifer, who left the team.

**Best Case Scenario:** If Mapp and Billet establish themselves as a top backcourt duo and Brown and Smith step up to fill Watson’s shoes in the paint, the Cavs could crack the top six in the conference. But the ACC is stacked, and unfortunately for Virginia fans, their team is one of the three teams that will most likely take a beating this season. They can look forward to the games against Clemson and Georgia Tech.

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**Georgia Tech**

**2002-03 Record:** 16-15, 7-9 ACC, no NCAA bid

**Key Returners:** Junior guard/forward B.J. Elder, sophomore guard Jarrett Jack, senior guard Marvin Lewis, junior center Luke Schenscher.

**Key Newcomers:** No significant additions.

**Stunning Stats:** The Yellow Jackets were 13-2 on their home court last year, but 3-13 away from home. Elder shot 39.6 percent from three-point range.

**Strengths:** Elder, Jack and Lewis provide clutch outside shooting. Schenscher, if nothing else, provides size as a seven-footer.

**Weaknesses:** Schenscher is the definition of soft. Tech will miss forwards Chris Bosh, who left for the NBA after one year of college, and Ed Nelson, who transferred. Not to mention the fact that with those departures, Tech has no proven go-to guy.

**Best Case Scenario:** If Schenscher suddenly learns to take advantage of his height and becomes a dominating inside player, the Yellow Jackets could finish as high as sixth in the conference. Even then it is a stretch to put them ahead of any of the ACC’s top six teams this year. And if the Jackets can not find an inside scorer, then teams can focus their defense on the perimeter, especially shutting down Elder, and the Jackets will struggle mightily.
Curtis’ crew sets sights on the postseason

By Trey Kalny
Old Gold and Black Reporter

In Head Coach Charlene Curtis’ office, she has a motivational book that the coach has given to each of her incoming freshman to prepare them for their first season of Division I college basketball.

In essence the book is a parallel to the 2003-04 Wake Forest women’s basketball team: it foretells good times, misfortunes and it has colorful illustrations. The book is Dr. Seuss’ Oh, the Places You’ll Go!

This year’s Deacons look to improve on a mediocre showing last year in which they finished 13-15. After winning several games in the early part of the season, last year’s squad had some problems down the stretch but still managed to give Duke, the eventual ACC Champs, a run for its money in two out of three games.

However, simply improving on last year’s record will not be enough for this squad – the team has set its sights on postseason play.

“We are working hard to try and finish in the top half of the conference,” junior Jennifer Johnson said. “We know that this would give us a better opportunity for post-season play and that’s something that the women’s program hasn’t done in a while. We feel that’s definitely a goal we can reach.”

This team will be very different from years past in which talented backcourts were the key to the Deacons’ fortunes. The talent at the post positions has added another aspect to Wake Forest’s game. With the graduation of forward Tiffani Listene, junior Erin Ferrell and sophomore Liz Strunk and Keila Evans will be expected to contribute immediately.

“Our post players must find a way to contribute in order to provide the inside aspect of our game,” Curtis said. “They will give us size, rebounds, and an inside presence that has been missing in years past.”

Unlike the finesse game that Listene possessed, Ferrell, Strunk and Evans are aggressive players who will give the team true inside post play.

Despite the importance of the frontcourt game, seniors Tracy Altson, Bianca Brown and Tonia Brown will play a large role in the team’s success this year.

“Expect the seniors to set the tone both on and off the floor this year,” she said. “These girls want to be the class that gets the school back to post-season play, and they have to be the ones to make it happen.”

The Deacs will also look for the continued development of sophomore guard Cotelia Bond-Young, who averaged 9.9 points per game as a freshman last year, making her the team’s second-leading returning scorer.

One intangible advantage the Deacs feel they have this year is solid team chemistry.

“We all are very close,” junior Meredith Bell said. “As a junior, I have to say that it is by far the closest I have ever seen our team come together. The key is, though, remaining together throughout the season – that is the true test of our chemistry and desire to win.”

Unlike the ACC does present a major challenge for the Deacons, as it is one of the toughest conferences in women’s college basketball. Featuring defending ACC champion Duke as well as North Carolina and Virginia, who have preseason national rankings of 14th and 24th respectively, the ACC is tough. Curtis has focused primarily on the mental aspect of the game during this off-season and hopes that it will pay off when pressure situations arise.

“This team has said that it wants to make the post-season, but to do that we must play every game like it matters and not let wins get away from us like we did last year,” Curtis said.

When playing in a tough conference like the ACC, Curtis stresses that the team cannot afford to pay attention to everything that is going on around the conference, but instead must focus on themselves.

“As a team we have to remember to take things one game at a time and must concentrate on the fine points of the game: making free throws, rebounding and playing defense and taking care of the basketball,” Curtis said. “This year we have to make things happen as opposed to letting things happen.”

Making matters worse is the strength of schedule that the Deacons face. Wake Forest plays preseason No. 9 Purdue Nov. 29 as well as Marshall, Hampton and Holy Cross, all teams that were in the NCAA tournament a season ago.

In order to secure a post-season berth, the team must have a winning record. Wake Forest has not gone to a postseason tournament in women’s basketball since 1989.

Nevertheless, the players remain optimistic about their chances. “I have a great feeling about this year and this team, and once we get everything together and focus on us, we can’t be broken,” Alston said.

As the women’s basketball team hopes to add a new chapter to the history of Wake Forest athletics, Dr. Seuss’ book seems to be a roadmap to the season ahead.

With new talent, veteran leadership and improved coaching, a trip to the postseason could very likely be one of the many places the Deacons will go to in 2003-04.
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, who finished last year with a different role with the Deacons this year. Are they misplaced? I think that has really heightened expectations this year. As I hear people make predictions about who will do what this year, I get excited. But this is definitely in everyone’s face. But this is definitely something I’m willing to work on.”

Paul said. “This brings us 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.” With many players 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 Jamiai Levy, Vytsas Danielius 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 Stickland, 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 still I 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 differences and turnovers 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 season.

“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 of 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 and I get tired. 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 Boston College.

“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 in Prosser’s scheme, he is willing 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 up in 50 seconds, I’m going to go out all because what I do may determine how the game goes along.”

Scary 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 ability 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.

“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 as a junior 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.”
In the absence of the departed Josh Howard, the biggest question mark for the Demon Deacons this season is not at any individual position—the Deacs are solid at every position. The question is who will fill the role of the “go-to guy.” If you ask many experts, that guy will be junior Vytais Danelius, who was chosen to the preseason first team All-ACC.

Danelius is coming off a breakout sophomore season. Scoring 15 points and bringing down 10 rebounds in the season finale against N.C. State, he literally had a hand in helping the Deacons capture the ACC regular season title. He was also a second team All-ACC selection.

“Last season was great, but nobody’s happy with the way it ended,” Danelius said. “We thought we had a chance to advance to the Sweet 16 (in the NCAA tournament), but I personally am hungry to prove how good we are and to go deeper into the tournament.”

Danelius will play a significant role in ensuring that the Deacons do not suffer a similar fate to last year’s NCAA Tournament upset. Scoring just six points in two games, Danelius’ slump was just one of the causes of the poor tournament showing by the Deacs.

Danelius, an inch taller this year at 6’9”, comes into his junior season as a preseason first team All-ACC selection.

“The preseason All-ACC selection is going to motivate me to work harder and to get better,” he said.

Already, he ranks among the ACC’s toughest inside players. His field goal percentage ranked ninth college career thus far. Seven double-doubles in his five double-doubles. He has sophomore season he had in 2003. During Danelius’ sophomore season he had five double-doubles. He has seven double-doubles in his college career thus far. Danelius’ free throw shooting percentage ranked ninth in the ACC. He made 98 foul shots out of 125 attempts, giving him a .784 average.

Danelius is also the Deacs’ best returning player in terms of field goal percentage. His field goal percentage of .510 would have ranked third in the ACC, but he did not have enough attempts to qualify.

Danelius’ sophomore season revealed a new facet to his game: a successful three-point shot. He said that after his freshman year, during which he went 0-of-3 behind the arc, Head Coach Skip Prosser encouraged him to add the ability to make the three-point shot. Danelius did this successfully, making 18-of-48 attempts during his sophomore campaign.

This season, spectators will see more skills that Danelius improved during the offseason, including his improved ability to create a shot of the dribble. “This year, I want to add some perimeter skills like guarding, playing defense on the perimeter against the small forward, taking more jump shots and working on my dribbling,” Danelius said.

Danelius is a native of Kaunas, Lithuania, and he went back there this past summer. During his time there, Danelius tried out for the Lithuanian National team, the team for which current Sacramento King, former Demon Deacon and close friend of Danelius Darius Songaila plays. Danelius made it to the third round of tryouts, but cut his tryout short to attend summer school and summer workouts back in Winston Salem. Prior to trying out for the National Team he played for the Junior National Team in the Euro Cup and helped lead the team to the finals. Not only does Danelius put up All-Conference numbers on the basketball court, he performs well in the classroom as well. He has frequently been on the Dean’s List. One reason he chose to attend Wake Forest was for the quality academic environment of the university.

“I really enjoy the academics and the low student-to-faculty ratio, and I really feel like I belong here,” Danelius said.

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So when you see Vytais Danelius on campus, say ‘labas,’ which is the Lithuanian equivalent to hello. He will be a key to the Deacs’ success this season.
By Allison Soule
Old Gold and Black Reporter

Sophomore Eric Williams began the 2003-2004 season under the appropriate parental supervision: that of his mother, Debra.

“She couldn’t wait to wear that hat,” Eric Williams said of his mother. For each home game, Debra makes her two-hour commute from the town of Wake Forest, a trip that is well worth the effort when her own flesh and blood (all 270 pounds of him) is the starting center for the regular season ACC Champs.

Williams began his second year under Head Coach Skip Prosser as the five-man on a new and improved Wake Forest squad, a team that has gained five players and lost only one – correction, the one. In spite of losing superstar Josh Howard, Williams now has to step up, with the rest of his teammates, to fill the void.

“The loss of Josh Howard was a big loss, but Coach has just told us we can’t dwell on that as much,” Williams said. “We’ve got to pick up where he left off. I think we’re doing a good job.”

Williams and his counterparts proved that ability to bounce back in their first scrimmage, Nov. 3, when they defeated EA Sports 100-80. Williams had 14 points, two blocks, six rebounds and – get this – absolutely no fouls.

After accumulating a team-high 96 fouls in his rookie season, Williams has made it a primary objective to reduce that statistic, an issue that Prosser addresses as one “we’ve worked mightily to correct.”

Williams says, “Last year, it was more ‘you’re the post player, you get to get all the rebounds, and demand the ball in the post.’”

This year, it didn’t change much. I think that now that Josh is gone, and the points now are widespread, Coach expects everybody to score.”

Additionally, Williams has formulated his own aims for the upcoming season and is determined not to repeat his mistakes from last season.

“My individual goals are just to be a more dominant post player than I am, show people the physicality I can play at instead of being so timid like I was last year to make a move and to just be a force for Wake Forest,” Williams says.

With an attitude like that, Williams will certainly excel even more so than last year. He is confident, but not cocky; anticipatory, but not nervous and his jubilant attitude says it all. “I think we’re going to surprise a lot of people this year,” Williams said with a smile.

Graphic by Elliot Nickles

Eric Williams

Hometown: Wake Forest
Year: Sophomore
Height: 6’9”
Weight: 270 lbs.
Position: Center
2002-03 PPG: 8.7

Despite consorting with the enemy, Williams has not been distracted from knowing his niche on the team. He still understands his role and the ways in which that role has morphed since last season. He is no longer a rookie who is permitted to commit petty fouls. Rather, he is being shaped into the most formidable center in the ACC.

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Jamaal Levy

By Graham Hall
Old Gold and Black Reporter

With the departure of Josh Howard to the Dallas Mavericks, a key position for the Deacs this season will be small forward, a position at which Howard was arguably the best in the nation last season.

Levy is one of the most versatile players in the nation. His athletic ability and ball-handling skills allow him to play guard, while his height and rebounding ability allow him to play forward.

Of height and athleticism, he is able to defend players bigger than him as well as those who are smaller. His ball-handling is good enough that he can play guard, while his height and inside ability make him a formidable forward.

As a starter this season, Levy under- stance the importance of being well-prepared for every game, as all games are important in the highly-competitive ACC. "Every team in the ACC has a chance to win," Levy said. "There are no automatic wins."

During the off-season, Levy worked extensively in preparation for the season. "I worked on a little bit of everything," he says. "Specifically, I worked on learning the game so I can be a leader."

Levy is one of only three returning scholarship players with two or more varsity letters won for the Deacs. Because of this, he will be looked at as a team leader by the younger players.

Not only are the Deacons returning one of the ACC's most improved classes from last season, but Head Coach Skip Prosser also brought in one of the top recruiting classes in the conference this year as well, which includes McDonald's All-American Chris Paul. "The freshmen have played very well," Levy says. "They are good guys who are willing to listen and work hard."

A key to the Deacs chances of winning the ACC Regular Season Championship was their dominance at home, winning all 16 games — in part because of the fans. "The Screamin' Demons) are great," Levy says. "They have been getting better every year, and they take the time to come to the games."

If Levy is able to continue to improve and the rest of the team plays up to its potential, the Deacs' chances of capturing another ACC Championship look good. Some experts are predicting that Levy could establish himself as one of the ACC's top players and come close to filling the huge shoes vacated by Howard. "Our expectations for this season are not lower than they were last year," Levy says. "We expect to be a good team."

To fill part of that void, the Deacs will look to talented six-foot-nine-inch junior Jamaal Levy. Levy, one of the ACC's most improved players last season, seems poised for a breakout year this season.

"One of my goals is to improve my season, hopefully my numbers will go up in every category," Levy said. Levy only averaged 2.7 points and 2.0 rebounds per game during his freshman season in 2001-2002. However, he nearly tripled his numbers last season, averaging 7.2 points and 6.8 rebounds per game.

Levy's 6.8 rebounds per game were third-best on the team and sixth-best in the ACC. After the loss of sophomore power forward Chris Ellis to a fractured foot for the first part of this season and the departure of Howard, one of the best in the business at rebounding from the small forward position, the Deacs are in need of players who can compete in the paint for rebounds, and Levy seems to fit the bill.

Even though Levy may not have the weight of most forwards — he weighs just 180 pounds — his ability to get position and his long arms allow him to thrive on the boards. "Since I started playing I have been skinny, but being a good player does not always depend on size," Levy said.

Levy is an extremely versatile player who can play almost any position. Because of his unique combination of height and athleticism, he is able to defend players bigger than him as well as those who are smaller. His ball-handling is good enough that he can play guard, while his height and inside ability make him a formidable forward.

Last season, after then-starting guard Justin Gray broke his jaw in January, Levy stepped in to fill Gray's position and dominated, even though it was not his natural position. With his long arms and strong court presence, Levy asserted himself as one of the best shot-blockers on the team, forcing opposing players to pass the ball instead of risking having their shot blocked.

He was arguably the best rebounder and shot-blocker from the guard position in the conference.

As a starter this season, Levy understands the importance of being well-prepared for every game, as all games are important in the highly-competitive ACC. "Every team in the ACC has a chance to win," Levy said. "There are no automatic wins."

During the off-season, Levy worked extensively in preparation for the season. "I worked on a little bit of everything," he says. "Specifically, I worked on learning the game so I can be a leader."

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Hometown:
Panama City, Panama

Year: Junior
Height: 6'9"
Weight: 180 lbs.
Position: Forward
2001-02 PPG: 7.2

2001-02 PPG:

Year:
6.8
3.9
7.2
10.3
14.3

BPI

Weight:
180 lbs.

Height:
6'9"

Year:
Junior

Position:
Forward

2001-02 PPG:
7.2

[named entity]
Justin Gray

By Alex Myers
Assistant Sports Editor

Justin Gray almost had a brilliant freshman season when it was cut short. Near the end of the Deacs' first loss of the season, at Duke, the guard was laid out by Dave Oshay Jones. The shot broke Gray's jaw and left some with doubts about what he would return.

For the season, Gray was tasked with missing a large portion of the season, especially after already establishing himself as a scoring threat with performances such as the Deacs' big road win over Wisconsin, in which he scored 20 points. However, the then-freshman used his time on the bench to his benefit as well.

"I think it was a great experience, but it was also a learning experience for me," Gray said. "Every moment I was out counting on more such moments."

The first few games after returning from a broken jaw, Gray sported a protective mask that became legendary among Deacon fans.

Unfortunately, for the Charlotte native, it came back earlier than expected, wearing a protective mask. This was his first year under this circumstance, and Gray made an immediate impact in his comeback game - against Duke of all teams - when he scored 15 points, 10 of which were in the paint. He showed hustle and determination, and his intensity carried the team to another victory.

Gray's return to the court was a significant moment for both himself and the team. He proved that he could step up to the challenge, and his presence on the court was felt immediately.

Gray listed that game and the N.C. State game in which the Deacs clinched the ACC regular season title as two of his highlights of the season. It was a testament to his ability to bring out the best in his teammates and the team as a whole.

He doesn't want to be flashy or popular -- it's just not his style. However, if you look at the daily grind, the hard work and the constant determination to help Deacon Basketball succeed, no player better embodies such a role than junior point guard Taron Downey.

"I think I am a leader in whatever I do, whether I lead with my vocalism or by example," Downey said. "I just want to be a leader in any kind of way and I want to lead the team wherever we need to go."

Hopefully, they can go deep into the post-season. Except for the loss of the previously described Josh Howard, the Deacs return the rest of the lineup from last season. With a strong core and a highly-touted freshman class sitting on the court, there is no question the Deacs can't be successful this season. However, responsibilities will be spread wider and everyone will have to step up to fill Howard's void.

"We don't have a real go-to guy on our team like we did with Josh Howard last year," Downey said. "We don't have everybody going to have to come prepared to play, because nobody is a go-to guy. But they are going to have to get to big shots from everybody."

And more points could come from more than one person. The previous freshman class is highlighted by the arrival of highly-touted McDonald's All-American guard Chris Paul, to which many experts have asked questions surrounding Downey's future.

However, Downey doesn't see it that way. "I just keep working to get better," Downey said. "That means everybody is going to have to do things a little bit differently."

"I have had a lot of turnovers and I need to get them down, but do not try to ask for too much," Downey added. "We have to work on every aspect of it this summer."

Part of Downey's success season could come from the added depth in the backcourt keeping him rested through the games. Especially after last season when Gray went down with a jaw injury, he had to carry the weight of more minutes and responsibilities. However, Downey's not worried about fatigue or responsibilities, as he wants to keep this team for 60 minutes every game.

"If you are a good player you want to be out there anyway no matter what. With the depth we have I still want to be on the court, but I just can't be like that -- other guys have to play," Downey said.

"I am just looking forward to getting out there on the court and playing with all these other guys.

Moreover, Downey and the rest of the teammates are looking forward to returning to the stage of prominence and preparing their accomplishments last season were not a fluke. Last season the team played with a sense of purpose, and they were not wrong.

As for the rest of his team, Gray is also optimistic. "We lost to EA Sports last year and we beat them pretty good (this year)," Gray said. "If this game is any kind of tip to what we're going to be, I think we'll be pretty good."

For the season, Gray averaged 12.7 points, was named to the ACC All-Freshman Team, and was sixth in the ACC in assists per game. He was also named to the ACC All-Freshman Team by College Basketball News.

Gray’s spark off the bench was a major factor in the Deacs’ 94-80 upset over the Blue Devils in overtime.
By Jason Mazda
Assistant Sports Editor

With a smile the size of North Carolina on his face, then-freshman forward Trent Strickland was lifted into the air by his classmates as players and fans alike basked in the euphoria of the Demon Deacons’ first win over Duke in 15 meetings, a double-overtime thriller.

It is the most lasting image from the memorable 2002-2003 season. The picture made it into many national publications, including Sports Illustrated, and now is on posters and the 2003-2004 pocket schedules. Nothing represents that Deacon team more than that picture.

The thing about last year’s team was that they had a special relationship with the fans. The players and the fans bonded, and the result was an undefeated record at the Joel Coliseum.

And no player embodies that bond more than Strickland.

Now a sophomore, Strickland is a fan favorite. One of the nicest and most polite people you will ever meet, Strickland always has a smile on his face. As for his play on the court, whether it is by way of an amazing dunk or an in-your-face block, Strickland never fails to get the Joel Coliseum crowd on its feet.

“I just love going out there playing the game and whatever I do I always thank the fans for being there and supporting me,” Strickland said. “I like the dunks, because I like to dunk on people, and it gets the crowd hyped. I like getting the fans into it because if you can get them into it, you play better and the team plays better. I just think we feed off them, so that’s all we’re going out there and doing—just playing hard, trying to get them into the game.”

It was evident that the 6-foot-5-inch Strickland was a solid player from the second he put on a Wake Forest jersey. He was exceptionally athletic, a solid defender and he could take it to the basket and hit the runner with ease. But the win over Duke was the game when he really broke out.

With Josh Howard having fouled out relatively early in the game and three other Deacs joining him as the game wore on, Strickland was the difference in the game. In the decisive second overtime period, he scored 10 points and had a big block and a rebound.

After the game, ecstatic Deacon fans rushed the court and picked Strickland up, producing the image that would become famous.

“I can’t explain how much joy and how much fun it was, with the crowd rushing the court and picking me up and everything,” Strickland said.

Now, Strickland will be counted on to help junior Jamaal Levy replace Howard at the small forward spot. Levy is the starter, but both players are extremely versatile, so there will be plenty of playing time for both at the small forward position as well as other spots on the floor.

“We need to hit the boards hard (Howard) did and probably pick up our game on offense as well,” Strickland said.

After showing last year that he can drive to the basket, play defense and rebound well, Strickland worked over the summer at improving other aspects of his game.

“I improved my jump shot a little bit,” Strickland says. “I worked a lot on that over the summer, and I worked a lot on my ball handling.”

Strickland also said he and the other returning players hope to reap the benefits of having gotten a lot of playing time so early in their careers last year.

He played in all 31 games last season, averaging 4.3 points in 12.1 minutes per game. On multiple occasions, he was a difference-maker off the bench for the Deacons, scoring at least 10 points in a game four times.

“I think that experience is going to help a lot,” Strickland says. “Because now when we’re in big games, we know what to do.”

This season, Strickland has written a saying on his shoe that he intends to keep in mind all season.

“(It is) a saying that my mother told me over the summer,” Strickland says. “It says, ‘The man who walks with God always gets to his destination.’ So I wrote that on my shoe so I can remember that at all times.”

As for what that destination is, time will tell. But with Strickland in the fold as one of the ACC’s best sixth men, you have to like the Deacs’ chances of another ACC Championship.
By Peter Bergman  
Old Gold and Black Reporter

The 2003-2004 basketball season began ominously for sophomore forward Chris Ellis, with a fluke injury in the Demon Deacons’ first practice of the season. Ellis broke the fifth metatarsal in his right foot during one of Head Coach Skip Prosser’s famous rebounding drills and will be out six to 12 weeks, depending on how well the bone heals.

Ellis, a 6-foot-9-inch power forward from Marietta, Ga., came in last season and surprised many with his low-post defense and his shooting percentage, which was above 50 percent. He was set to log serious minutes in the Deacon frontcourt this season, until the setback due to injury.

Don’t count him out just yet, though, because Ellis knows what it is going to take to be ready to contribute when he rejoins the team in mid-season.

The biggest thing I am going to have to focus on is getting in shape, being in top physical condition,” Ellis said. “I have been off for so long, I haven’t played in a month, so when this heals I have to have myself in top condition to be ready.”

Ellis finished his freshman year with averages of 2.8 points and 2.5 rebounds per game, but he was an extremely unselfish player who excelled at playing tough interior defense and nearly-mistake-free offense (only 17 turnovers in 31 games).

“I got in and played some defense, hustled a lot and did what I had to do,” Ellis said. “I have to step it up this year, though, and take it to the next level.”

An early-season matchup with No. 23 Wisconsin was where Ellis first made his mark. Starting center Eric Williams got into foul trouble, and Prosser looked to Ellis to fill the gap. Ellis responded with outstanding defensive pressure that kept the stretch and six points on 3-of-4 shooting.

Other standout performances for Ellis included a career-high 14 points against Bethune-Cookman, and 10 rebounds in a win against Georgia Tech.

Despite these solid outings, the season made him hungrier to do more, and he looked forward to the summer to make himself better.

Ellis is no stranger to hard work and dedication and he worked hard to improve his game.

“I worked on my touch around the basket, my shooting and my dribbling a little bit, and my ability to run the court well,” Ellis said.

With such a young team again this season – the Deacs have no scholarship seniors – Ellis has also been forced to take on a leadership role. This became even more important when he was injured and two freshmen on the front line, forwards Kyle Visser and Todd Hendley, were thrust into more important roles.

“I try to coach (Hendley and Visser) a little on the sidelines,” Ellis said. “Everybody puts their part in, when someone is down we all try to lift them up. We’re just a big family.”

It is this team-first attitude that could make Ellis and the Deacs special this year.

However, Ellis also believes that it is the team’s diversity and depth that could make them dangerous.

“I think we are going to have a good chance at doing some big things this year,” he said.

“We’ve got a lot of young talent, a lot of old blood with people coming off the bench and people starting, so we are going to come at you in a lot of different ways.”

The Deacs will always have a talented team on the floor, but as last year’s undefeated home record will tell you, the fans can have a big influence on the game. Last season the Joel Coliseum became one of the hardest places to play in the ACC, a far cry from years past. The players appreciate the fan support, and Ellis is no exception.

“Our fans, they love us,” he says. “I like those crazy, die-hard fans. They have been there through thick and thin, camping out and missing class for tickets. That’s the kind of people we need coming to the games.”

By Don Fogoda  
Old Gold and Black Reporter

After experiencing tendonitis in his knee his junior year in high school, sophomore Richard Joyce has had to develop his physical toughness in addition to honing his basketball skills.

Joyce has played with many basketball stars including Carmelo Anthony of the Denver Nuggets, Chadd Moore of Cincinnati and Eric Willins of Miami. Playing at Mount Airy High School in North Carolina helped him mature as a basketball player, and having his senior season at Oak Hill Academy in Virginia gave him even more experience while improving his skills.

These opportunities have aided Joyce with his transition to Division I competition.

“It’s a lot more intense and physical because the guys are bigger, stronger and faster,” Joyce said. “The intensity picks up, you have to run, run, run and play defense.”

Joyce is appreciative to be playing at Wake Forest and is excited every time he steps on the floor.

“It’s a great feeling when your name is called or when you make a shot,” Joyce said. “When everybody starts cheering, you can’t describe the feeling.”

Now a sophomore, Joyce had the chance to play on last year’s ACC Regular Season Championship squad as a freshman.

He observed All-American Josh Howard and learned a great deal from his experience.

“Hearing him talk about how to be a leader and how to help out the younger guys this year, along with developing a stronger work ethic,” Joyce said. “We are a family and without a family bond we aren’t able to achieve our goals; we have to stick together and work hard.”

Joyce saw action in 19 of the 31 games last season and is looking to increase his playing time after a productive off-season.

“I worked on so many aspects of my game, including dropping my weight from 215 to 200 pounds to increase my athleticism,” Joyce said. “I got into shape and worked on my shot everyday along with my ball handling; I just did everything possible to get more playing time this year.”

Joyce is optimistic about the season because of the number of guys returning from last year’s team.

“We have a bunch of guys back and that helps our bond,” he said. “Everybody here wants to make everybody else better, and that is only going to help the team improve and allow us to achieve our goals.”

Joyce is also impressed with the amount of school spirit at Wake Forest and hopes for it to continue throughout the season.

“(The) fans are great and I appreciate everything (they) do for everybody,” Joyce said. “I can’t describe that feeling when everybody is screaming our names and jumping up and down. (They) give us the energy when we get tired and I just want to thank (them).”

Motivation is a key in basketball, and Joyce remembers what it took to get through his tendinitis.

He keeps himself motivated intrinsically but is also inspired by Head Coach Skip Prosser.

“Prosser always has words of wisdom and goes out of his way to pick us up when we are down,” Joyce said. “He always has a little speech or something to fire us up for each game, but all the coaches do a great job as well to get us ready.”

Getting fired up is important for each game and that motivation is key, especially when coming off the bench. Joyce has a strong mindset about his role on the team. Preparing for each game and each moment of playing time that he gets, especially in the ACC, is extremely important.

“I love to take a hot shower to relax myself before the game,” Joyce said. “When my name is called I try to go in there and do the little things to help the team. I try to see who is doing what and help the team to the best of my ability.”


