

Atlantic Coast Conference

Operation Basketball

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Danny Manning

Wake Forest Demon Deacons



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Wake Forest coach Danny Manning.

Q. You've got a ton of guards coming back, not so much experience in the front court. How are you expecting the guys like Bryant Crawford and Mitchell Wilbekin to be dominant for you?

COACH MANNING: We'll be a very guard-dominated team just in terms of the locomotive, engine for us this year. Those guys have to go out and they have to perform at a high level for us. We feel very confident about our front court players. We just don't have a lot of guys that have played big minutes or established themselves.

But we have a lot of guys who are ready to make contributions. And for us, it's going to be big guy by committee. Whoever has it going well that particular night will be the guy that hits the court for us.

Q. Between Keyshawn, Mitchell and Bryant, what have you seen as they've transitioned to captains, as well as what are your expectations of them in terms of mentoring the younger players?

COACH MANNING: Well, I think those three guys have got a great taste of what it's like to play basketball at Wake, what it's like to play basketball in the ACC. And those three guys are three of the main voices on our team.

I'd even throw Brandon Childress in there as another person who has played quality minutes his freshman year.

So those four guys are the four guards that are going to be the driving force for our team. And they've all done a great job showing wonderful leadership capabilities and qualities, helping our young guys along, helping our guys in general along of, hey, this is what we need to do; this is how we should do certain things.

Attention to detail's very important for us. Understanding your role is important for us. And those guys have done a good job of communicating that to their teammates, and I look forward to all four of those guys having a really good years for us.

Q. A lot of that expectation comes from watching these kids mature over the years. This morning, Mitchell at the podium where you're standing -- very tall, very solid, very straightforward -- you can tell his progression over the years. He's matured quite well.

COACH MANNING: Absolutely. Mitch came to us -- this is year four for us. He's been there the whole time. And he's really evolved as a young man. He's on track to graduate.

And basketball-wise he stepped on the court known as a shooter. He's expanded his game. He's able to play the point for us. He's able to get into the paint off dribble penetration and make plays.

Defensively he's one of our better perimeter defenders because he's so solid, so sound defensively. So Mitch has grown a tremendous amount, and we're looking forward to a very good senior year from him.

Q. As you continue to put the pieces of the puzzle together, there have been a lot of bodies that have floated in and out, how tough is it for you, even though you're seasoned as a basketball professional, how tough is it for you to find the gel, to find the chemistry, to know that every year you're really dealing with a different group of guys?

COACH MANNING: For us, we've had some mainstays. We just talked about Mitch, but we have Bryant Crawford who is coming back, Keyshawn Woods, who is coming back. Those two guys were our starting back court last year. They provide a lot of stability for us. And they're able to communicate that with the rest of our team and help them understand what's expected of them.

And then we have some young players that are talented enough that can come in and help us out. Chaundee Brown, Melo Eggleston and Olivier Sarr are three freshmen who will have an opportunity to help us out this year. They bring us a lot more length, athletic ability and skill set being true freshmen. So we expect a lot of those guys, but we also understand that they are true freshmen.

Q. I talked to Keyshawn earlier about North Carolina's nickname being The Hoop State, and I

was curious to get your thoughts on that and then the talent that comes out of the state and the college programs represented here.

COACH MANNING: Well, I can concur with that. I'm okay with that assessment, that adjective. There is a lot of talent in this area and it's something that we're all proud of.

There are not too many places where you're going to get four schools in the same conference, in a major conference and the premier basketball conference in the country. So there's a lot of attention and energy placed on basketball in this area, and that's part of the reason that the ACC is so special.

Q. Keyshawn earlier today commended you on bringing in the right kind of guys in an effort to kind of change the culture of Wake Forest. With this past season being your best since leaving Tulsa, how pleased are you with the development of Wake Forest?

COACH MANNING: I'm happy with the direction that we're going. I'm pleased with our foundation. We have to continue to bring in the right type of young men that fit our profile. That's extremely important.

I think our assistant coaches they do a wonderful job of vetting and going through that process and making sure that we bring guys in that fit who we are not only as a basketball team but off the court as well. And we're trending in the right direction.

We have to continue to work and we will do that. But we like the direction that we're heading right now.

Q. What are you most confident with going into the season? And also what can you most improve upon and develop throughout the season to finish strong at the end of the year?

COACH MANNING: I'm excited about our guards. I think we've got four guards, like I said, that are experienced, talented, and they're going to be the leaders of our team this year. For us, we have to replace what John Collins and Dinos Mitoglou brought to the table, not only with their scoring ability but their rebounding ability.

So those guys almost got 50 percent of the rebounds for us last year. So we're going to have to be a team that gang rebounds -- everybody is going to have to go in there and get their share. And then we're going to have some big guys that night in and night out provide a presence for us defensively and offensively.

Q. Coach Williams spoke a moment ago about bringing the energy back to Cassell Coliseum. That energy is coming back to the Joel it seems

like every year. Are you excited about what the crowds are bringing you these days?

COACH MANNING: Absolutely. Last year we were top five in the league in attendance, and that's something that we're very thankful for. The Demon Deacon Tie Dye nation, they came out and supported us very well.

We've got some changes going on in the coliseum, where with the video board and the ribbon board and things of that nature. So it will be a completely different feel. But the support that we get from our faithful is something that we like, we enjoy. And they spoil us with that attention that they give us and it's very helpful.

Q. What you learned as a player, how has that transitioned to make you a better coach after winning a national championship? What do you teach your players from what you learned as a player yourself?

COACH MANNING: Well, I've been very fortunate. I've had some wonderful coaches and had some really good mentors. When it comes down to wanting to sacrifice for your team and understanding that that's the most important thing is helping the team be successful.

And I think if you had that mindset everything else falls into place. And being versatile and being unselfish in your actions and thoughts.

So those are things that we preach to our guys on a daily basis. They believe in those concepts and it's helped us thus far. It helped us last year, and it's always going to be a mainstay for us.

Q. We know stats mean a whole lot inside the season. How much do stats matter when comparing them to previous seasons?

COACH MANNING: It can give you somewhat of a barometer to a certain extent, like how many rebounds a game you need to average to fall into a certain category, a certain spot. So analytics is something that we depend on, that we use. It's not the end all be all, but it's definitely something that we look at.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.