

Atlantic Coast Conference

Operation Basketball

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Q. Your team gave us a thrilling game on opening day of the ACC Tournament, but I know you'd like to start play a little later in the week. What's it going to take to get a first day bye or even maybe a double bye?

COACH CHRISTIAN: Well, it starts with our two fifth year seniors. They're going to have to play like fifth year seniors, and I think a lot of times people talk about experience in basketball, and I think if there was two positions you could pick to be experienced, it would be (inaudible), and for us we have a lot of youth on our team that I'm excited about, but really we're (inaudible).

You know, when I started this process I knew at the foundation of rebuilding this program, it had to be the right kind of guys, and I really believe that we have the right kind of guys. They're talented enough but we have the right work ethic. They have a great understanding of the games and they're growing as players, and they're going to play a lot of minutes for us right away. It's not necessarily a bad thing, it's really a good thing because their enthusiasm and their skill sets. It's all about what's replaced.

In preseason everybody talks about what you lost, but really you have to look at it. That doesn't unfold through the years. What did you replace it with? I think in our case, we've replaced the guys who were departing with really good players and guys who I think can grow and ceilings may be a little bit higher.

Q. You lost 52 points per game. Where do you find that?

COACH CHRISTIAN: Well, I always look at it the other way. It's always about who grows and what they can do. It's easy to find. You've got to find it through other ways. These guys have different skill sets than the guys we lost, and I always laugh and take the other side of it. We also had 100 percent of the guys giving up 52 points a game. They left, too. You can look at it any way you want to look at it. But I think it's all about what the skill sets, what talent level the guys you're replacing it with because everybody loses numbers and everybody has to replace them. Not one person can come in and replace them.

But as a group I think we have from top to bottom a more talented roster, top to bottom a more skilled

roster, and that's what excites me.

Q. With the excitement of the newness, is there heartburn that goes along with it?

COACH CHRISTIAN: Of course. I mean, because you always like proven things. You like to say, okay, this guy is definitely coming into the year and he's proven he can do this at this level and these guys have to prove themselves, and over the test of time they'll do that.

But, again, to me it's about the building and building things the way we want to did it. And at the foundation of it is -- again, I'm going to keep coming back to it, the core guys in this freshman class, they're going to be the guys that we can build this program from.

Q. Who do we hear about first, most often and maybe throughout the year?

COACH CHRISTIAN: Hopefully it will change as the year goes on, as well, but it all depends with freshmen right now who's picking things up the quickest. For right now, two young freshman for us, Jerome Robinson and A.J. Turner are really, really picking things up quickly.

And the other guys, J.C. Reyes, who's 6'10" and 7'2" wingspan, he's learning and getting better every day.

Sammy Thompkins is another guard on the team who is just learning and getting better every day. Matt Milon.

The beautiful part about our team, we had really no perimeter depth last year. We had two walk-ons in our eight-man rotation, and now we have -- every day at practice we have 11 guys competing, all scholarship players who I think can perform at this level. So it's exciting for me that we're able to do more things, and I think our team will take on a new shape as the year progresses because of that. We have more bodies that we can change and kind of recreate an identity that we want ourselves to be.

Q. You've had a couple go rounds in the league now. What are your impressions of the ACC and would you welcome the idea of playing a couple more conference games?

COACH CHRISTIAN: Obviously it's the best league in

college basketball, bar none, so to add a couple more games there, right now I would tell you no. But I think in general for our league, it might be a good thing as things progress.

Again, it's unbelievable competition every single night, and there was a lot of different things that I learned going through it my first time, and I think one of the things was that what made you good at other places may not make your team good where you're at. And I think that's really the thing that I came out of this year with is that for our team to be successful in this league, we're going to have to be a little different. We may have to do some things that I haven't done at other places I've been, because maybe at those places we had more or better talent.

So now it's more of I think we have to try to be -- we have to be more of a special preparation for people, and that's kind of what we want to be.

Q. So other than a win, how will you know when you're successful during this rebuild? Are there markers that you put in place?

COACH CHRISTIAN: Yeah, I think -- I don't know if you put markers. I think it's just watching the players develop, watching the players grow, seeing the chemistry that's amongst our young players, and making sure they understand that we're committed to them and we're committed to their development.

So I think it's a day-by-day thing. I think the one thing when you have a young team is you have to talk with them more than you would an older team. So I have more individual meetings, more collective meetings. I probably meet with our freshmen as a group one day a week to talk about one specific thing we're teaching, because I think they're really comfortable in smaller groups asking questions, getting to learn. And at the same time they're kind of building this camaraderie as a group and an understanding as a group of hey, this is what we're trying to do, this is the way we're trying to do it, and now they can bond with one another. So now next year more when more new guys come, they can become some teachers, as well.

In the beginning they're head is spinning a little bit, everything is different for them. But the games now and practice being into the third week, it's starting to slow down and their abilities are starting to take over.