

# The Daily Tar Heel

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BASKETBALL PREVIEW 2015

Friday, November 13, 2015

## BRICE JOHNSON

12.9 POINTS PER GAME  
2014 - 2015

## MARCUS PAIGE

14.1 POINTS PER GAME  
2014 - 2015

## KENNEDY MEEKS

11.4 POINTS PER GAME  
2014 - 2015

## JUSTIN JACKSON

10.7 POINTS PER GAME  
2014 - 2015

# THE MISSING PIECE

DTH/ZACH WALKER, KATIE WILLIAMS

‘We have a lot of pieces, and we have the right pieces to be able to make a long run’

By Pat James  
Sports Editor

“I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.”

North Carolina men’s basketball player Justin Jackson struggled to find himself during the 2014-15 season. His once steady scoring ability seemingly vanished, and the first-year wing wasn’t living up to the hype fans built when he was a recruit.

“I wanted to come in and produce right away, but that’s not the way the Lord wanted it.”

So he clung to God and clung to his faith because he knew that if he was struggling to find a place where he fit, it was for a reason.

“My faith is the biggest thing to me. For me, I always knew God would bring me through,” he said. “Obviously, you can’t really see it through the hard times, but you always know he’s not going to give you more than you can handle.”

### Humble beginnings

Justin’s parents introduced him to basketball at an early age. But success didn’t come easily.

If the ball came his way, he ducked. Every

time he fell, he shed a tear. The fundamentals were challenging, the game a struggle.

“Honestly, I would probably just say I was scared,” he said. “I loved basketball, but I didn’t love having to be out there.”

Yet he stuck to it. By the sixth grade, his determination started paying off.

Lloyd and Sharon Jackson knew their son — who was typically taller than his classmates but skinnier than his opponents — would never develop into a brute in the paint. So they taught him a jump shot to compensate. His signature floater came on its own.

But he also excelled away from the basketball court. In the classroom, he was advanced among his peers. His assignments didn’t challenge him, leaving him free time to color. In the fourth grade, his parents elected to make a change to his education, opting to homeschool him.

Homeschooling allowed Justin to study at his own pace, spend time with his family and receive Christian-based instruction.

His education strayed from the home school stereotype. But the misconceptions about his schooling followed him. His teammates — specifically senior Marcus Paige and sophomores Joel Berry and Theo Pinson — still tease him.

By ninth grade, Justin realized he could play

college basketball, at one level or another. About the same time, UNC started showing interest.

He established himself as a five-star recruit and led the Homeschool Christian Youth Association Warriors to a national championship in 2012.

Then came the phone call from Roy Williams a few days after an AAU tournament in the summer of 2012. Justin sat in his room in Tomball, Texas, as Williams offered him a scholarship over the phone.

Five other schools remained on Justin’s list, but after taking an official visit to UNC the following March, he committed to the Tar Heels just two days later, becoming the first homeschooled player to sign with North Carolina.

“I wanted to see a little bit more as far as the other schools and see if maybe I fit somewhere else; maybe I fit a little bit better somewhere else,” he said. “When I came here, it just cemented that.”

But in his first year in Chapel Hill, Justin’s performance was anything but concrete.

### An unexpected slump

Following UNC’s 92-90 overtime loss at Duke, Justin boarded the team bus and took a

seat next to Williams.

In what he refers to as perhaps the worst game of his basketball career, Justin scored two points on 1-of-8 shooting in a season-low 17 minutes and was searching for answers more so now than ever.

The early stages of the season saw Justin lack aggressiveness at times as he struggled settling into his offensive role. He admitted to being tentative and worried about mistakes.

But the shot his parents helped him develop was also missing, and the Tar Heels’ top recruit in their three-man class felt more than just his own expectations mounting.

“(Fans) don’t see the inside, the in and outs that you have to get through, whether it’s in this program or any other program ...” he said. “All those fans that I had, they were still fans, but they were waiting for me to play like I did in high school or to produce like I was projected to produce.”

So as he sat next to Williams on the ride back to Chapel Hill, they discussed what Justin could improve on. Williams stressed having a big picture point of view. Justin’s mindset immediately changed.

SEE JACKSON, PAGE 4

## Marcus Paige eyes spot among UNC greats

### The senior point guard serves as the Tar Heels’ unquestioned leader.

By Carlos Collazo  
Senior Writer

During the North Carolina’s men’s basketball team’s media day on Oct. 12, Coach Roy Williams made it very clear how important it was to have a healthy Marcus Paige.

The senior point guard battled through plantar fasciitis for much of his junior year and underwent ankle surgery immediately after the season. By August practices, it appeared Paige and UNC were in the clear.

“Knock on wood,” Williams said. “He’s healthier than he’s been in a

while.”

But for Paige, Williams and the top-ranked Tar Heels, knocking on wood didn’t pay off.

Just over three weeks later, during a Nov. 3 practice, Paige fractured the third metacarpal on his right, non-shooting hand — forcing him to sit out the first two to three weeks of the season.

That’s no minor loss. The ACC Preseason Co-Player of the Year is UNC’s unquestioned leader, on and off the court.

“I’m just trying to do all the little things that he did as a leader,” said senior forward Brice Johnson. “I’ve been paying attention for the past couple of years, and I know I’m not the best leader on the team, but I’m just trying to fill that void until he gets back.”

During the 2014-15 season,

despite a slow start and nagging injuries, Paige managed to lead the team in scoring (14.1 points per game), 3-pointers (career-high 94) and assists (career-high 170). He was the team’s MVP for the second consecutive year and the team’s defensive player of the year for the third straight year.

It’s certainly not a stretch to say the Tar Heels revolve around Marcus Paige.

But they are going to have to start the year without him. And that means everyone else is going to have to be a little bit better, something Paige is expecting and something the Tar Heels will need in order to make it to the Final Four — anything less is, according to Paige, “Just not meeting what we think

SEE PAIGE, PAGE 4



DTH/CLAIRE COLLINS

Marcus Paige cheers for his teammates from the sidelines during the team’s home game against Guilford. Paige is currently sidelined for a hand injury.

“Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen.”

MICHAEL JORDAN



BASKETBALL PREVIEW STAFF

**PAIGE LADISIC**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
EDITOR@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**BRADLEY SAACKS**  
DIRECTOR OF ENTERPRISE  
ENTERPRISE@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**TYLER VAHAN**  
VISUAL MANAGING EDITOR  
VISUALS@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**PAT JAMES**  
SPORTS EDITOR  
SPORTS@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**JOSÉ VALLE**  
DESIGN EDITOR  
DESIGN@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**KATIE WILLIAMS**  
PHOTO EDITOR  
PHOTO@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**ALISON KRUG**  
COPY CHIEF  
COPY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**KELSEY WEEKMAN**  
ONLINE MANAGING EDITOR  
WEBMASTER@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

**C JACKSON COWART**  
**LOGAN ULRICH**  
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# Brice Johnson reaches for his potential

By Jeremy Vernon  
Assistant Sports Editor

Brice Johnson is used to tough love.

The forward played at Edisto High School in Cordova, S.C., for his own father, Herman Johnson. And despite the numerous awards he garnered, including Gatorade South Carolina Boys Basketball Player of the Year honors as a junior and senior, Brice said his father wasn't quick to offer praise.

"He probably would say he did, but even in the stands today, he doesn't move," he said.

"He sits there with his arms folded, and he doesn't really show much emotion. I'm kind of used to things like that."

Once Brice committed to North Carolina in October of 2011, he moved on to a new coach in Roy Williams. But he did not escape the coaching style his father employed.

There is always something more to do — one more rebound to grab, one more defensive assignment to fill. This methodology is what helped Brice transition into a starting role during the 2014-15 season, when the 6-foot-10, 230-pound forward had to — oddly enough — learn how to grow up, as both a basketball player and as a leader.

As a junior, Brice averaged 13.3 points per game and 8.5 rebounds per game in ACC play and put together monster performances in contests against Florida State, Duke and Miami. Often times, the then-junior came into the locker room feeling like he had played a near-perfect game. That is when Williams



Brice Johnson (11) dunks the ball during the Jan. 18 game against Virginia Tech during the 2014-15 season. UNC beat the Hokies 68-53, and Johnson scored 12 points. DTH FILE PHOTO

saw it necessary to bring Brice back to Earth.

"Brice has always wanted to be great, but he just didn't realize all of the work that it took to get there," Williams said. "He has never been a problem or a bad kid from day one. I just wanted a lot more from him than he was giving."

Several times during the 2014-15 season, Williams sat down with the forward to go through film and to point out the little things — not boxing out or hustling to get back on defense. Here, Brice said he learned the attention to detail he needed to become the best player he could.

"After I finally got adjusted to it, I was like, 'Well, I know what I need to do now,'" he said. "This is what you need to do, and you can do that every game if you just go out there and give it your all."

And as the Tar Heels enter the season, Brice has taken the direction from two of the most impactful men in his life and turned it into a catalyst for what he hopes is a special senior season.

It hasn't always been easy, but he realizes the lessons he has learned from both will help him reach his potential, something his teammates have noticed in practice.

"I think he's finally realized that what separates him from being a big-time player at this level and even the next level is just that extra gear," said senior guard Marcus Paige. "And he's starting to try to dig deep and find that."

@jbo\_vernon  
sports@dailytarheel.com



Kennedy Meeks poses for a photo during the men's basketball media day held in the Smith Center. DTH/KATIE WILLIAMS

## Slimmer Kennedy Meeks expands game

By Ben Coley  
Senior Writer

If one wanted to know the secret to losing weight, North Carolina junior forward Kennedy Meeks might be the right person to ask.

Prior to the beginning of his first season, Meeks entered UNC weighing nearly 320 pounds. Fast forward two years, and he has shed approximately 60 pounds — the average size of a 9-year-old boy.

In Friday's exhibition game versus Guilford College, the 260-pound junior registered 14 points and five blocks. The growth in his speed and agility was clear to other players on the floor, like junior guard Nate Britt.

"He's lost a lot of weight — he looks more athletic and more fit," Britt said. "Everyone can see that he is running the floor better. He's also more mobile on defense, and that will help us out a lot."

Off the court, the key for Meeks is making better nutritional decisions. He shies away from the fried chicken and hamburgers, instead opting for the salads and grilled chicken.

On the court, a new practice drill called the 15-second shot clock has helped with Meeks' weight loss. In the drill, players must score in less than 15 seconds. The drill lasts about 15 minutes.

"It's a great conditioning tactic," Meeks said. "But it also gets us up and down the

floor a lot more as far as getting those easy buckets and getting stops on the defensive end."

Coach Roy Williams said the challenge for Meeks isn't nearly as hard as what he's already done. Now that he isn't carrying as much weight, Williams expects him to jump higher and use his athleticism.

"I'd get on him all the time about his double pump and laying it up against somebody's armpit," Williams said. "And he can explode up now."

Although he has lost bulk, Meeks said he doesn't think his weight loss will prevent him from being physical with bigger players.

Instead, the weight loss is only an opportunity to improve his game.

"Going against Joel (James) in practice every day doesn't hurt," said Meeks, regarding matchups versus physical defenders. "Right now, I have enough experience to know when I should take control of getting a certain position or playing below the rim or whatever it may be against certain players."

In the offseason, the junior forward has tried to add finesse to his arsenal. Along with perfecting his jump hook and turnaround jumper, he has also worked with Coach Hubert Davis on expanding his shooting range.

But Meeks isn't looking to become a 3-point shooting threat any time soon — he is well aware of his role on the

team.

"Eventually that'd be my goal," said Meeks, regarding his perimeter shooting ability. "But right now I just need to do what coach wants me to do."

"Which is be a big-time player in the post."

@BenColey15  
sports@dailytarheel.com

## Mature Joel James relies on experience to inspire

By Danielle Herman  
Senior Writer

If Joel James wasn't a basketball player, he'd be a teacher. High school. That's when there's the best chance of impacting young people, he said at North Carolina men's basketball media day.

And if not a teacher, then he'd be a chef.

Those two professions are different but supportive in their own ways. Both teachers and chefs are often inspiring and comforting. And that fits with what's been said about the senior forward, who is one of the most active and emotional players on the bench and court, high-fiving teammates and shooting searing glares at opponents.

"Whether he plays a lot or not, he's still going to be a great teammate," junior forward Kennedy Meeks said after an exhibition game against Guilford on Nov. 6. "He's still going to stand up and clap for you."

James is supportive for his team and now, for all student-athletes. He's the ACC representative on the NCAA's National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee — a role he said gives him confidence and will allow him to create

and vote on legislation to benefit student-athletes.

James, who is often the biggest person in the room, has stepped into bigger roles this season.

At 6-foot-11 and 280 pounds, he's the biggest player on UNC's team.

And being big, his mother taught him, automatically demands attention.

"Having that attention is one thing," James said. "But speaking and saying the right things when it's needed is another thing."

The senior forward has matured — a lot — during his four years at UNC.

A native of West Palm Beach, Fla., James didn't start playing basketball until his sophomore year of high school.

But after three years of experience, as well as a summer of expanding his knowledge of playing the post under the tutelage of former UNC big men Sean May and Brendan Haywood, he feels more patient on blocks. He's

not afraid of the double team anymore or to dribble the ball to make a move.

"The game has slowed down," he said. "I feel like my game has expanded a lot. I'm fully confident in it."

"Joel (James) is one of the most improved (players) on our team," Meeks said. "He's very composed."

Between his sophomore and junior years, James made a jump in minutes played — from 7.9 to 10.1 — and in points, improving to 2.5 per game a season ago compared to 1.7 his sophomore year.

And some of his best games came when UNC needed him most. No one can forget how well James defended former Duke star Jahlil Okafor or how he ripped his own jersey after UNC lost to Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium in February.

James has continued to improve, and he supports his team emotionally in a big way — and that commands attention.

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**PAIGE**

FROM PAGE 1

we're capable of."

"This team has talent and experience," Paige said. "And we did last year, but this year I feel like our core guys that were freshmen aren't freshmen anymore, so that kind of helps. And everybody else is a little bit better too."

The good news is Paige will be back and that a fractured

hand should linger less than his injuries did a season ago.

And once he does come back, we could see the best version of Marcus Paige we've seen yet — because this is his last year to run the Smith Center floor.

"I'm old now," Paige said. "So there's no next year at Carolina for me ... It would mean a lot (to win some championships). It would complete a lot of what I

came here to do. Just be a part of something bigger than myself."

"It would be weird to come back and not see myself as apart of one of these team accomplishments that hang around the gym. I feel like we kind of need to — I know I need to, or else I'm going to drive myself crazy after I graduate."

@CarlosACollazo  
sports@dailytarheel.com

**JACKSON**

FROM PAGE 1

"After that conversation, it really opened my eyes to the fact that coach probably has the most confidence in me out of anybody, so why do I not have that much confidence in myself?" Justin said.

And it showed. He scored in double figures in 11 of UNC's final 12 games of the season and shot 52.1 percent

from the field and 44.7 percent from 3-point distance.

He scored 22 points in the Tar Heels' 71-67 upset of top-seeded Virginia in the ACC Tournament semifinals and averaged 15 points per game on 71 percent 3-point shooting in three NCAA Tournament games.

"His confidence has just been on an upward trajectory ever since," Paige said.

Now, he must sustain it.

**'A vital cog'**

In the offseason, Justin returned to Tomball with one goal in mind — to improve his game in order to fit the Tar Heels' needs. He gained close to 10 pounds and worked on his mental game.

"He's played better in practice so far 100 miles than he did last year in preseason practices as a freshman," said Williams at UNC media day on Oct. 12. "I think he's much more confident now."

"But still, I've seen some guys who are the greatest players in the world out there on the court in practice. I want to see how it is when the lights are on and you have to play against somebody else."

Justin started 37 games a season ago, tying for the most by a first-year under Williams at UNC. And while his transition from highly-touted recruit to All-ACC first-year included its hurdles, some things come with age as Justin enters his sophomore season.

With UNC entering the season ranked No. 1 in the nation, Justin says the team has one goal in mind — the national championship in Houston.

"Anything less than that will be a disappointment to us because we know we have a lot of pieces, and we have the right pieces to be able to make a long run."

And after finding his place and clinging to his faith, Justin knows he could be a vital cog in helping the Tar Heels' achieve their goals.

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# Berry aims for potential starting spot

**The sophomore guard has impressed this offseason.**

**By Mohammed Hedadji**  
Senior Writer

As the spotlight turns to him, North Carolina guard Joel Berry expects to excel. The No. 1 Tar Heels lived in the limelight in the offseason, heralded for their strength at all positions, highlighted by a dominant frontcourt and an experienced backcourt. But as the season approaches, all eyes have focused in on Berry. On Nov. 3, senior point

guard Marcus Paige fractured the third metacarpal on his right hand, benching him for three to four weeks. With the season kicking off, the Tar Heels find themselves short of their sharpest shooter and gallant general — but Berry has the Tar Heels breathing easier as the season gets underway. The sophomore, whom Coach Roy Williams tabbed as one of the players that impressed him the most in the offseason, plans not only to contribute while Paige is injured but to excel throughout the season. The guard has been thrown into a more prominent role — but then again, that was always his plan.

“I’m hoping (to start),” Berry said when asked even before Paige’s injury. “I’m coming out here and competing every day to try to get that spot.” And Paige knows he has players with experience — including Berry — to back him up as he works to get healthy. “Having those options is a good thing,” Paige said. “Our freshmen last year — Justin (Jackson), Theo (Pinson) and Joel — assimilated really well.” Berry will have large shoes to fill. But with his growth in the offseason, teammates and coaches don’t see him as a downgrade. “Joel has really done some

*“I’m coming out here and competing every day to try to get that spot.”*

**Joel Berry**  
North Carolina sophomore guard

nice things shooting the ball in the basket and taking the ball to the basket,” Williams said at ACC media day. “So we’ve seen some of that improvement.” After dealing with an injury stint of his own in the 2014-15 season, Berry saw an increased role at the end of his first season. After returning from a seven-game hiatus because of a groin injury, Berry averaged 15.2 minutes per game.

But while Berry saw increased minutes on the court to end his first-year season, playing from the bench helped him as much as his time on the floor — even if he didn’t know it at the time. “I needed that,” Berry said. “I didn’t want to sit out, but it was something I had to go through to be able to improve my game.” Facing the challenge of serving as a backup, Berry learned from the bench, pre-

paring himself for when he did earn the start. Now, finding himself in that position, Berry has made a key improvement to elevate his game. “I was doing too much thinking last year, trying to get everything down,” Berry said. “Now, I can just go out there and play ball.” Accustomed to the system and comfortable where he stands, Berry’s presence on the floor could add to an already talented North Carolina offense. And when he steps onto the hardwood to open the season, he’ll be ready. @Brohammad sports@dailytarheel.com

# Theo Pinson a natural to succeed Tokoto

**The sophomore wing is primed to jump into a starting role.**

**By C Jackson Cowart**  
Assistant Sports Editor

Theo Pinson is not J.P. Tokoto. The comparisons between the North Carolina wings are striking. Both feature 6-foot-6 frames and weigh 200 pounds, and each sports subpar shooting, elite athleticism and a penchant for playmaking. So when Tokoto declared for the 2015 NBA Draft in April, Pinson seemed a natural fit for the vacated starter spot. “He’s pretty much very close to as athletic as J.P. was,” junior guard Nate Britt said. “A lot of those intangible things that J.P. did for us, Theo can do as well.” In the 2014-15 season, Tokoto was the consummate complementary player for the Tar Heels. The junior averaged 8.3 points and 5.6 rebounds and finished in the top 10 in the ACC in assists and steals — the only forward to do so. But his absence creates a hole in the starting lineup. “I wish he was still here because he was a great teammate, great player, and that would have just made us even better,” Pinson said. “But at the same time, that means somebody’s got to step up. And if that’s my job, then I’m ready to go.” But first, the sophomore must stay on the court. After breaking the fifth metatarsal in his left foot on Jan. 21 against Wake Forest, Pinson was sidelined the next



DTH FILE/KATIE WILLIAMS

Theo Pinson (far right) celebrates with the team after their win against Louisville on Jan. 10. The Tar Heels won 72-71 after a missed field goal by Louisville’s Terry Rozier.

10 games and played sparingly the remainder of the season. While Tokoto flashed his wide array of skills, Pinson could only watch. “The injury has definitely helped me ... focus on the little things,” he said. From the bench, Pinson closely observed Tokoto’s defensive dominance. With

his predecessor gone, Pinson is ready to assume the role of defensive stopper. And just as Tokoto was known for bringing energy with his signature slams, Pinson is prepared for the mantle of resident dunker. “I was blessed with the ability,” he said. “So I’m going to do my best.”

As for Pinson’s health, the sophomore has taken a much slower approach to this season, sitting out offseason pickup games and preseason practices. Following UNC’s exhibition win on Nov. 6, Pinson admitted the trainers have told him to temper his efforts to avoid reaggravating his injury. “I’m getting there,” he said.

“But of course, I can do better.” With the recent injury to senior guard Marcus Paige shorthanding the Tar Heels, Pinson’s return holds even greater importance. “We need to get Theo back out there,” Coach Roy Williams said. And with Tokoto’s starting spot up for grabs, Pinson isn’t

taking any chances. “They’re telling me to take it slow because they really want me to be on the court this year,” he said. “I know how important I am to this team.” He’s no Tokoto. But perhaps Pinson is all the Tar Heels need. @CJacksonCowart sports@dailytarheel.com

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DTH/CLAIRE COLLINS  
Nate Britt (0) throws a pass during the game against Guilford on Nov. 6. The Tar Heels won 99-49.

# Nate Britt prepares to answer the call

By Logan Ulrich  
Assistant Sports Editor

There might not be a more underrated player on the North Carolina men's basketball team than Nate Britt. He doesn't have the late-game heroics of Marcus Paige, the raw scoring production of Justin Jackson, the flashiness of Theo Pinson or the hype of Joel Berry. Even his jersey number is zero to remind him of the naysayers he's had since high school. But starting with today's game against Temple, Britt will be key to UNC's success. With Paige sidelined due to a broken hand, either Britt or Berry will be the starting point guard. Berry came on strong at the end of his first year, but Britt has more experience with 19 career starts. "In the past, teams with the most experience tend to go the furthest in the tournament," senior forward Brice Johnson said. "Those guys know what to expect and they know what coach wants out of them." After Paige returns in three

to four weeks, Britt could still carve out a significant role. Depth is considered a strength for UNC this season, and Britt is a big reason why. If Coach Roy Williams slides Paige over to shooting guard, Britt could play the point and run the offense. Williams has also shown a tendency to play with three point guards late in the game where the added shooting and speed can help close out the win. This is where Britt's 84 percent career free throw shooting percentage becomes crucial. After switching shooting hands following the 2013-14 season, Britt's 3-point percentage leaped from 25 percent to 37 percent, and his 26 made 3-pointers made him third on the team. He hit four 3-pointers en route to a career-high 17 points to spark a UNC win against Syracuse, and he's continued to work on his shot this offseason. "That's one of the things that our team has been lacking the last two seasons and we depended on Marcus to do

that," Britt said. "Me being able to knock down some shots last year was an improvement and me being able to do that more and increase the percentage will help us a lot." Britt has also continued to work on protecting the ball and improving his assist to turnover ratio. He's also worked on improving his on-ball defense, which Williams identified to the team as a weakness a season ago. All of this will allow Williams to rely more on Britt, like he did at the end of the 2014-15 season. Britt played 23 minutes against Arkansas in the NCAA Tournament and scored 10 points, including going 5-for-5 from the free-throw line. "Being ready for whenever Coach is going to call my number is important," Britt said. "I think that was big for our team." Perhaps that's what No. 0 will be known for this season — being ready when called upon. @loganulrich sports@dailytarheel.com



DTH/KATIE WILLIAMS  
Junior Stilman White (30) warms up before starting practice. White is the oldest member of the team.

# Stilman White embarks on a different mission

By Evan Chronis  
Staff Writer

Stilman White enters the 2015-16 season as an academic junior, but the 6-foot-1 guard from Wilmington is the oldest member of the North Carolina men's basketball team. The 23-year-old completed his two-year Mormon mission after his first year at UNC in 2011-12. This season will mark White's second year back from the mission, and he looks to be more adjusted than he was a season ago. "Everyone has different time tables on how quickly it takes them to get back," said White regarding players returning from a mission. "It took me a little longer." White, who will be fighting for playing time in a competitive Tar Heels' backcourt, said he uses his mission as motivation to stay positive. "No matter what happens here, I can always tell myself that I've been through tougher," he said. "Knocking on doors all

day and getting rejected by everyone, people saying nasty stuff to me — it toughens you up. It gives me self-confidence in myself that if I can go through that mission for two years, then I can go through anything." White played sporadically during the 2014-15 season, when he saw just 23 minutes in nine games and amassed only three assists. The guard missed eight games in the middle of the season due to a stress reaction in his right foot. The team White joined in 2011 as a first-year is vastly different than the group he plays with now. He delayed his mission for a year because Coach Roy Williams needed another guard for his team — but with a handful of quality guards on this year's squad, it might prove difficult for White to find minutes. But one thing that has remained consistent for White is the quality of his game. The junior believes his teammates' work in

practice helped him pick up right where he left off when he returned to the team a year ago. "We have a lot of great guys on the team, so it's not hard to integrate back," White said. One way the junior could benefit the Tar Heels this season is as an experienced veteran. White is one year older than the senior Tar Heel players and could help his younger teammates mature quickly, a skill he picked up in his time away from the team. "My mission did nothing but help me — it made me a more mature person ..." White said. "It made me smarter on the basketball court." A full season is unpredictable, and no team knows when the injury bug will strike. For that exact reason, having a player like White — who aided an injury-riddled UNC squad in an Elite Eight game against Kansas in 2012 — could be beneficial for the Tar Heels. @Evan\_Chronis sports@dailytarheel.com

# Forward Isaiah Hicks set to blossom in his junior campaign

By David Allen Jr.  
Staff Writer

When Isaiah Hicks set foot in Chapel Hill for the first time as a member of the North Carolina men's basketball team, the expectations were already soaring. And given the accolades the then-precocious forward from Oxford had already racked up, it made sense. McDonald's All-American. North Carolina Associated Press Player of the Year in 2013. Five-star recruit. Hicks seemed destined to be next in a long line of prolific UNC big men, but instead buoyed along, averaging just over seven minutes a game two years ago in a reduced role on an experienced team. He primarily played at the small forward position, which was a major adjustment for the prototype power forward. It wouldn't be until a season ago that Hicks stepped into a more prominent role. Co-recipient of UNC's most improved player. Sixth-best scorer on the team. Go-to big man off the bench. Now, in his junior campaign, it's Hicks' time to shine.

"I think his confidence has grown more than anything," said junior guard Nate Britt. "Last year was really his first year playing his natural position in our system. He's a lot more comfortable, and he can play his game now." In the 2014-15 campaign, Hicks' renewed levels of confidence and comfortableness were obvious. He finished third on the team in field goal percentage, won the team's defensive player of the game award a team-high 13 times and played at least 20 minutes in games against rivals Duke and N.C. State. "I played more comfortable," Hicks said. "Like I did in high school, shooting more and playing within myself." Junior forward Kennedy Meeks echoed Hicks' increased level of confidence. "The things he did in high school you can kind of see coming out in his game right now," Meeks said. "He attacks the basket and is more aggressive off the dribble." The notion of Hicks adopting a more aggressive style of play and not being afraid to get to the basket is something Coach Roy Williams would

like to see as well. "We need him to score," Williams said after Late Night With Roy. "We need him to take the ball to the basket and be a lot more aggressive than he's been in the past." With senior forward Brice Johnson and Meeks returning, Hicks is slated to once again come off the bench but continue to add valuable minutes. Being physical is something Hicks said he prides himself on and expects to add as another dimension to his game. "I just think every year you just need to add something new," Hicks said. "It's all about getting ready to go out there and be physical." It might not be until next season that Hicks will take on a starring role for the Tar Heels, but Joel James believes Hicks is still motivated to show what he's made of. "He can do a lot of different things," the senior forward said. "I see a guy who's hungry to prove to everyone what he can do." @davidallenjr sports@dailytarheel.com



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# Women’s basketball still confident

## 2015-16 WOMEN’S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	TIME	OPPONENT
Fri. Nov. 13	3:30 p.m.	vs. Gardner-Webb
Sun. Nov. 15	12:30 p.m.	vs. Oregon
Tue. Nov. 17	6 p.m.	vs. Florida A&M
Fri. Nov. 20	6 p.m.	vs. Fairleigh Dickinson
Sat. Nov. 21	3 p.m.	vs. Iona
Sun. Nov. 22	3 p.m.	vs. Yale
Wed. Nov. 25	2 p.m.	vs. Pacific
Sun. Nov. 29	2 p.m.	vs. Gonzaga (Uncasville, Conn.)
Wed. Dec. 2	6 p.m.	vs. Northwestern
Sat. Dec. 12	2 p.m.	vs. Appalachian State
Mon. Dec. 14	8 p.m.	at Oklahoma State
Wed. Dec. 16	4 p.m.	vs. USC Upstate
Sun. Dec. 20	5 p.m.	vs. Southern Miss (Myrtle Beach, S.C.)
Tue. Dec. 29	2 p.m.	vs. New Hampshire
Thu. Dec. 31	1 p.m.	vs. Maine
Sun. Jan. 3	2 p.m.	vs. Clemson
Thu. Jan. 7	7 p.m.	vs. Syracuse
Sun. Jan. 10	1 p.m.	at Notre Dame
Thu. Jan. 14	7 p.m.	at Georgia Tech
Sun. Jan. 17	12:30 p.m.	vs. Miami
Thu. Jan. 21	7 p.m.	at Wake Forest
Sun. Jan. 24	3 p.m.	at Duke
Sun. Jan. 31	2 p.m.	at N.C. State
Thu. Feb. 4	7 p.m.	vs. Louisville
Sun. Feb. 7	1 p.m.	at Boston College
Thu. Feb. 11	7 p.m.	vs. Virginia Tech
Sun. Feb. 14	2 p.m.	at Florida State
Thu. Feb. 18	7 p.m.	vs. Pittsburgh
Thu. Feb. 21	1 p.m.	vs. N.C. State
Thu. Feb. 25	7 p.m.	at Virginia
Sun. Feb. 28	3 p.m.	vs. Duke

**By Jeremy Vernon**  
Assistant Sports Editor

In just over six months, the North Carolina women’s basketball team went from challenging for a national title to holding open tryouts. During the offseason, the Tar Heels lost six of their top seven scorers. The final three members of the Tar Heels’ top-ranked 2013 recruiting class, — Allisha Gray, Stephanie Mavunga and Jessica Washington — transferred to South Carolina, Ohio State and Kansas respectively after losing star Diamond DeShields in 2014. Add to that a host of questions that were raised when the University released the NCAA’s Notice of Allegations, and it’s easy to see why many have counted UNC out before the season has even begun. But Coach Sylvia Hatchell isn’t worried. The Tar Heels are still setting their sights on championship wins — shooting for the moon, if you will. “You remember the Apollo flight, 13, I guess, when people thought it was going to be a disaster?” Hatchell said. “And the astronauts, one

### 2015-16 WOMEN’S BASKETBALL ROSTER

No.	Player	Year	Pos.	Height
1	Rachel McGirt	SR	F	6-2
5	Stephanie Watts	FR	G	5-11
10	Jamie Cherry	SO	G	5-8
13	Hillary Fuller	JR*	F	6-2
15	Marissa Riley	SR	G	5-10
20	Anne Corrigan	SR	G	5-11
22	N’Dea Bryant	SR	G	6-0
24	Destinee Walker	FR	G	5-10
30	Hillary Summers	JR*	F	6-2
31	Erika Johnson	SR*	F	6-1
34	Xylina McDaniel	SR	F	6-2
41	Paris Kea	SO	G	5-9
44	Hadiya Bembry	FR	G	5-6

\*denotes redshirt

of them said, ‘No, this will be our finest hour.’ “This will be our finest hour.” While the losses are the easiest to see, the pieces that return from a North Carolina team that made it to the Sweet 16 a year ago cannot be overlooked. After spending the majority of her first season with the Tar Heels as the backup point guard behind now-graduated Latifah Coleman, sophomore

Achilles. In her last her previous healthy season, when she was a sophomore, the forward averaged 11.3 points and 5.8 rebounds per game while helping lead the Tar Heels to the Elite Eight in 2014. But despite McDaniel’s past triumphs, she was left off Preseason All-ACC Team — something she’s using as inspiration. “I do see it as a slap in the face, but at the same time I’m using it as motivation to continue to work harder and show everyone that I’m back,” McDaniel said. The Tar Heels are also aided by the arrival of two key newcomers in McDonald’s All-Americans Stephanie Watts and Destinee Walker, who are both poised to see significant minutes when UNC opens its season against Gardner-Webb at 3:30 p.m. at Carmichael Arena. Even with the losses the Tar Heels are facing, the pieces they bring back and the new additions they bring in have Hatchell confident UNC can still make noise in the ACC this season. @jbo\_vernon sports@dailytarheel.com

## PLAYERS TO WATCH

### UNC FIRST-YEARS

In the wake of the University’s academic-athletic scandal, the North Carolina men’s basketball team struggled to draw in new players — its 2015 recruiting class was ranked No. 54 in the country by 247Sports. But despite this, the Tar Heels hope that two new players can help contribute this season.

#### Kenny Williams



Kenny Williams, a late addition to the Tar Heels’ 2015 class, brings a much-needed component to North Carolina’s offense — 3-point shooting. During the 2014-15 season, UNC shot just under 36 percent from behind the arc. Of the Tar Heels’ 184 made 3-pointers, over half came from one player in Marcus Paige (94). In four years at Lloyd C. Bird

High School in Chesterfield, Virginia, the 6-foot-4 175-pound guard had 1,603 career points while shooting 38 percent from 3-point range. And while Williams’ 3-point shooting should be a plus for North Carolina, the first-year has shown so far in practice that he is no one-trick pony. “I found out he’s a much better basketball player ... and a

much better defender, which I didn’t give him credit for, than he is just a shooter,” said Coach Roy Williams. But at the end of the day, the head coach hopes the first-year guard’s 3-point prowess can add to an already loaded North Carolina offense. “We need him to shoot the ball in the basket for us, and I expect him to,” he said.

#### Luke Maye



North Carolina’s first commitment from the class of 2015, Luke Maye brings even more depth to an already talented UNC frontcourt. While playing at William A. Hough High School in Cornelius, Maye put up 1,923 points and 1,369 rebounds and was named to the Associated Press All-State team twice. As a senior in 2014-15, the

6-foot-8, 230-pound forward averaged 20.7 points, 15.5 rebounds and 3.5 assists per game while leading his team to the second round of the 2015 North Carolina state playoffs. While Maye might not see as much playing time as his first-year counterpart Kenny Williams, Coach Roy Williams believes that when the forward’s name is called, he will be ready to come in

and provide good minutes. “Luke is just one of those kinds of guys that’s just a plugger. He’s just going to keep plugging along, plugging along, playing, doing things,” he said. “He’s an extremely intelligent kid that I think will find a way to get in the game and help us.” And if Maye can contribute, he’s another tool in an already talented UNC roster.



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DATE	TIME	OPPONENT
Fri. Nov. 13	7 p.m.	vs. Temple (Annapolis, Maryland)
Sun. Nov. 15	4 p.m.	vs. Fairfield
Wed. Nov. 18	7 p.m.	vs. Wofford
Sat. Nov. 21	2 p.m.	at Northern Iowa
Mon. Nov. 23	9:15 p.m.	vs. Northwestern (Kansas City, Mo.)
Tue. Nov. 24	TBA	TBA (Kansas City, Mo.)
Tue. Dec. 1	9:30 p.m.	vs. Maryland
Sun. Dec. 6	6 p.m.	vs. Davidson
Sat. Dec. 12	5:15 p.m.	at Texas
Wed. Dec. 16	7 p.m.	vs. Tulane
Sat. Dec. 19	1 p.m.	vs. UCLA (Brooklyn, N.Y.)
Mon. Dec. 21	7 p.m.	vs. Appalachian State
Mon. Dec. 28	6 p.m.	vs. UNC-Greensboro
Wed. Dec. 30	7 p.m.	vs. Clemson
Sat. Jan. 2	Noon	vs. Georgia Tech
Mon. Jan. 4	7 p.m.	at Florida State
Sat. Jan. 9	TBA	at Syracuse
Sat. Jan. 16	Noon	vs. N.C. State
Wed. Jan. 20	7 p.m.	vs. Wake Forest
Sun. Jan. 24	6:30 p.m.	at Virginia Tech
Sat. Jan. 30	4 p.m.	vs. Boston College
Mon. Feb. 1	7 p.m.	at Louisville
Sat. Feb. 6	TBA	at Notre Dame
Tue. Feb. 9	8 p.m.	at Boston College
Sun. Feb. 14	1 p.m.	vs. Pittsburgh
Wed. Feb. 17	9 p.m.	vs. Duke
Sat. Feb. 20	1 p.m.	vs. Miami
Wed. Feb. 24	8 p.m.	at N.C. State
Sat. Feb. 27	TBA	at Virginia
Mon. Feb. 29	7 p.m.	vs. Syracuse
Sat. March 5	TBA	at Duke

2015-16 MEN'S BASKETBALL ROSTER					No.	Player	Year	Pos.	Height
0	Nate Britt	JR	G	6-1	24	Kenny Williams	FR	G	6-4
1	Theo Pinson	SO	F/G	6-6	30	Stilman White	JR	G	6-1
2	Joel Berry II	SO	G	6-0	31	Justin Coleman	SR	G	6-1
3	Kennedy Meeks	JR	F	6-10	32	Luke Maye	FR	F	6-8
4	Isaiah Hicks	JR	F	6-9	34	Toby Egbuna	SR	F	6-4
5	Marcus Paige	SR	G	6-2	42	Joel James	SR	F	6-11
11	Brice Johnson	SR	F	6-10	43	Spenser Dalton	SR	G	6-3
13	Kanler Coker	JR	G	6-4	44	Justin Jackson	SO	F/G	6-8



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