

Calm & Consistent

Joel Berry embraces role as the Tar Heels' unquestioned leader

By C Jackson Cowart
Sports Editor

Joel Berry brushed the confetti off his shoulder. He wasn't sure if it fell because of Kris Jenkins' game-winning shot for Villanova or if it was destined to drop when the clock ran out. He still isn't sure. But in this moment, the North Carolina point guard was drowning in the wrong shade of blue. And he couldn't escape it.

Behind him, Marcus Paige was crying. Brice Johnson was, too. And all around him stood a sea of stunned silence, faces stained with anguish.

"It's a feeling I can't describe," Berry said. "Because I was just so hurt."

But he can't show it — not now. Head down, eyes up. Stay calm through the storm, and let your example lead the way. You never know who's watching.

Is it for himself or for his team? It doesn't matter. The scoreboard shows zeroes, but the game isn't over. It never is.

"I don't like anyone to try to have a picture of me looking sad one day and then happy the next day," he said. "I just want to make it seem like it's all the same."

If you look closely, you can see Berry standing in the background.

He's hiding in plain sight, masked by Paige's omnipresent shadow. He likes it better this way.

In his first year, Berry studied under the All-American guard, mimicking the pace of his pickup game and drawing confidence from his post-play encouragement. But the following year, a preseason injury to Paige thrust Berry into a leading role. Soon, the sophomore surpassed his senior teammate — leading the backcourt in nearly every statistical category.

After garnering ACC Tournament MVP honors, Berry entered the national title game against Villanova as the Tar Heels' second-leading scorer. But the attention was still on Paige.

"I just kept on playing my game, doing what I had to do," he said. "And I knew, eventually, one day that people would notice."

They didn't — not yet.

From the opening tip, the Wildcats packed the lane in an effort to stop Johnson and Paige. So Berry took over.

The Tar Heels' first bucket was a catch-and-shoot three from the sophomore guard. Later, Berry buried another from three steps behind the line. Then a stepback jumper from the right elbow. Every shot felt right.

By halftime, Berry led all scorers with 15 points.

"I think they just put me in the background," he said.

The second half was a different story, as Villanova denied him open looks and played physical on his drives.

With 13 seconds left, the ball was back in his hands, down three. The Wildcats pressed Berry across halfcourt, forcing him to throw an ill-advised bounce pass to Paige.

With six ticks left, a desperate heave seemed like the team's only option.

But look closer.

"Once Marcus swung through, my guy actually went over to help," Berry said. "And I was just sitting there wide open. I thought he was gonna pass it to me."

Paige didn't pass it, instead burying the most iconic shot of his four-year career. But there's no time to celebrate — not for Berry.

"When I looked up at the clock and I saw there was 4.7 seconds left, I was like, 'All right, we've got to stay calm,'" he said. "'We've got to stay calm.'"

He's in the foreground now. He's earned it: 20 points, second only to Paige, through a team-high 37 minutes. But the only time that matters are these five seconds.

As Ryan Arcidiacono sprinted down the court, Berry shaded his left and drove him to the middle. But it wasn't good enough, not to the naked eye. So, Isaiah Hicks backpedaled, ever so slightly, to compensate.

But, there was Jenkins, streaking down the court for the wide-open catch and release.

"And when it came out of his hand," Berry said, "my thought was just, 'Please don't go in.'"

He could have jumped. But there was no point now. He watched, helpless and hapless, as the ball sailed over his head.

Let the confetti fall.

He wishes he could go back.

Every time he walks into the Smith Center, he remembers the shot against Villanova. And every time he looks into the rafters, he thinks about what isn't hanging: a national championship banner and his own jersey.

"I want my name up there with those guys," he said.

It could have been. Had the Tar Heels won the national title, Berry was in contention for Most Outstanding Player of the NCAA Final Four — an honor that would have put his name alongside Paige and Johnson.

"It haunts me a little bit," he said. "Like I still can't even go back and look at the shot that Kris made because it just hurts me every time."

In the days after, Head Coach Roy Williams called a meeting with Berry.

The team needed a new leader, and he was the ascendant to the throne.

"I think everybody looked at Marcus last year to say what we need," junior Theo Pinson said.

But when the Smith Center is quiet, Paige's jersey looms large.

"Now I look around, and I don't have Marcus there to do that anymore," Berry said.

Vocal leadership is foreign to Berry, but the Tar Heels need it. After their final practice before scrimmaging against Memphis, Williams begged for more effort from his team.

After the meeting, Assistant Coach Steve Robinson pulled Berry aside and told him he needed to be a leader — as Paige had been before him.

"I kind of feel in some way that I have to be like him," Berry said. "But I mean, that's not a bad thing ..."

"If they want me to be that guy, I have no problem with it."

Close your eyes and let go.

Forget about Villanova and the shot you haven't seen. Forget about Paige and the shots you're supposed to take. Forget about the expectation.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

"A lot of people get so caught up in what's going on, they lose sight of having fun," Berry said. "And so, I always meditate on just seeing myself having fun out there with my teammates."

He's been doing it since high school, no more than 10 or 15 minutes a day. Clear the mind. Prepare for the storm.

"We kind of let him do his thing," sophomore Luke Maye said. "And we know he's gonna be ready come game time."

Tonight at 9 p.m. in New Orleans, Louisiana, the No. 6 Tar Heels will play Tulane in Berry's first game as the unquestioned leader.

Win or lose — it's all the same to Berry, or so he'd have you think.

@CJacksonCowart
sports@dailytarheel.com

ANALYZING THE BEST

By John Bauman
Staff Writer

The top six players for the North Carolina men's basketball team attack the floor in different ways. Here is a breakdown of each one.

Joel Berry

From Berry's first season to his second, his volume from beyond the arc and from the midrange area went way up. Expect another jump this year as Berry serves as the focal point of the offense. He's slowly morphing into "Steph Curry-like."

Of course, he's got a long way to go until he equals the offensive prowess of the NBA's two-time MVP, but he's on that path in terms of shot selection. Berry looks more and more confident pulling up from deep in ball-screen settings, and he's always been a potent threat from there.

Look for North Carolina's offense to feature more high ball-screens for Berry this season to utilize his straight-away shooting.

Nate Britt

Britt is deadly from the left

corner 3-pointer, a favorite shot of the analytics community. But he struggles from the left wing and doesn't attack the basket relative to other guards.

Expect Britt to increase his volume from deep this season. He is in some ways taking over Marcus Paige's role from last season, playing a bigger role in the offense as the two-guard next to Berry. That means more chances to hit open 3-pointers after a drive and kick from his back-court teammates.

Theo Pinson

Pinson's strength is as a finisher at the hoop. He uses his athleticism and speed to convert his chances around the basket and create easy opportunities in transition.

He doesn't always shoot 3-pointers, but when he does, he's better on the right wing than on the left. He also avoids mid-range jumpers like the plague, either because they aren't his preferred shot or because he isn't very good at making them.

When Pinson returns from his injury, expect him to keep shooting threes and not taking long twos.

Justin Jackson

Jackson's pet shot, his trademark floater, is a work of art. It always seems to bend just over the reach of the defense, and seldom does he miss. For a wing, he's also pretty good at making his shots around the hoop.

Jackson is a much better 3-point shooter on the left wing than on the right. He was basically ice cold all of last season from that right side, but he could improve there in 2016-17 after an off-season of work.

Isaiah Hicks

Isaiah Hicks is almost automatic in and around the hoop once he gets the ball in the post. He finds different ways to get the ball in the basket, even if it seems at times like he wants to dunk every time he touches the ball.

Hicks has a toolbox of different post moves he can turn to. He hasn't shown much range outside of the paint, though. And the challenge for the senior is finding a way to stay on the court.

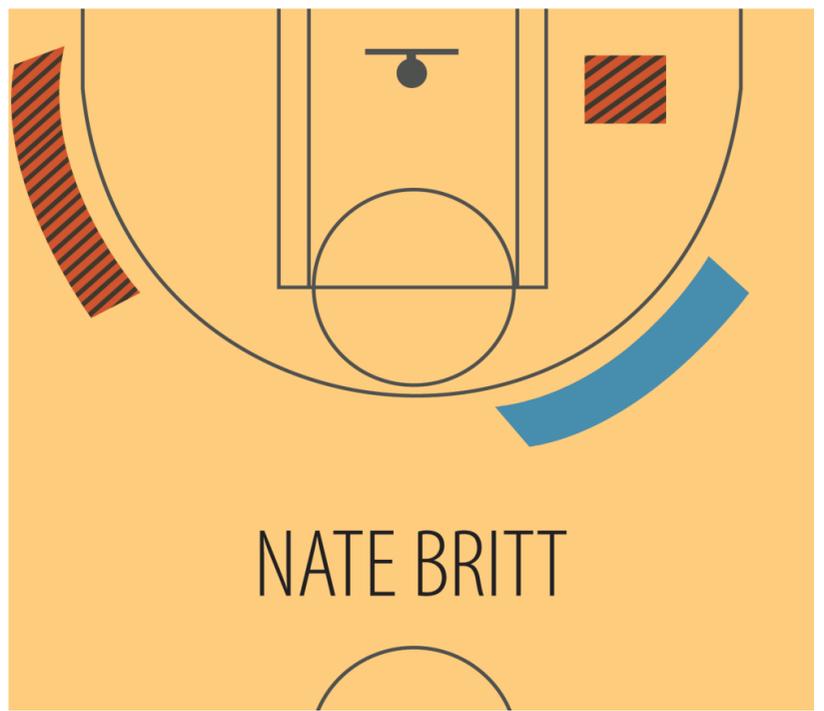
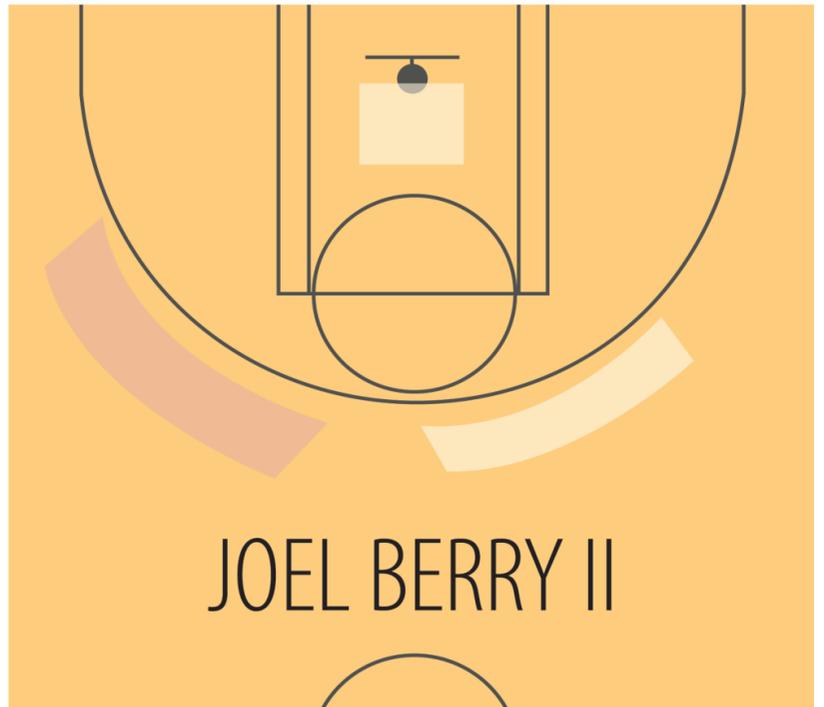
Kennedy Meeks

Kennedy Meeks is a little bit better on the right block than the left, but he mostly lives right underneath the basket.

He's a master of hanging out underneath the boards, collecting an easy offensive rebound and putting the ball back up for easy points. Some of the easiest points for any player come off offensive rebounds, and Meeks feasts off of them.

Meeks also has an underrated array of post moves, and he's maturing his body to get positioning in the post. Look for Meeks to get more usage this season as he gobbles up some of the possessions Brice Johnson and Joel James used last season.

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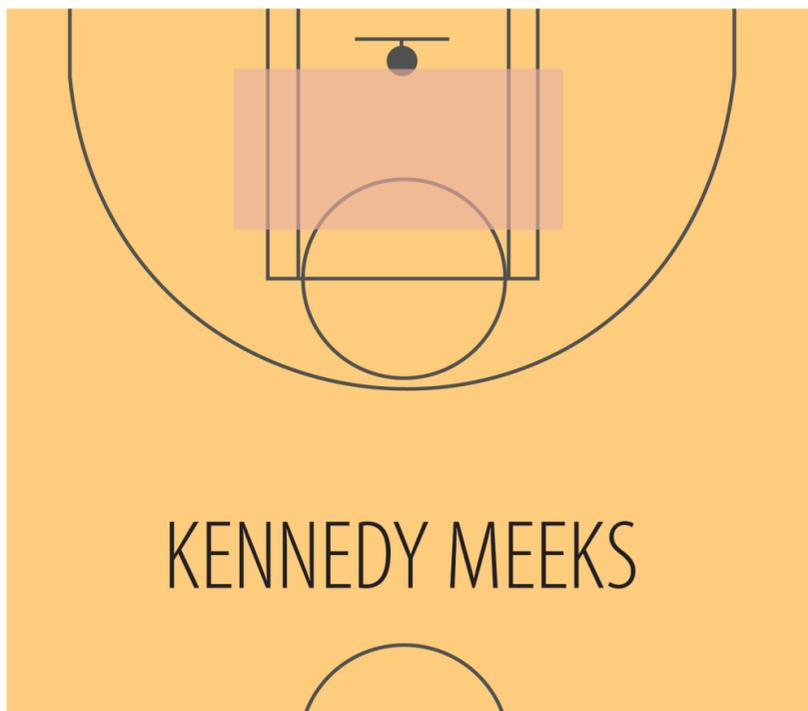
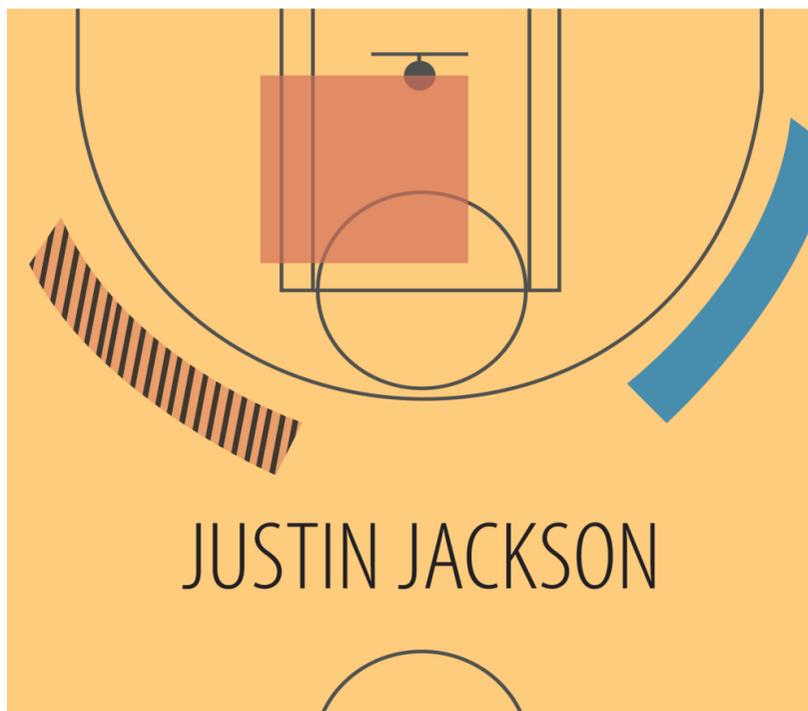
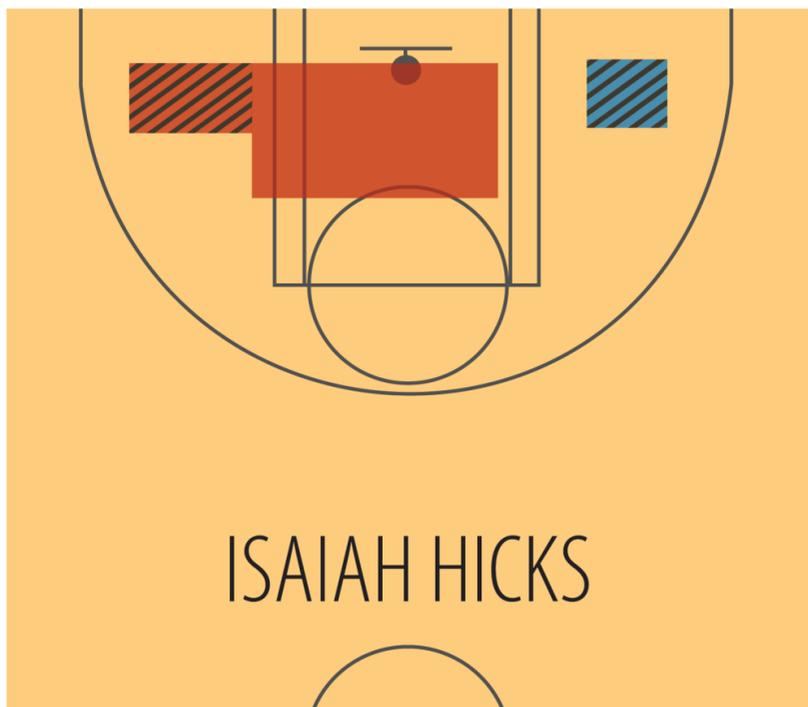
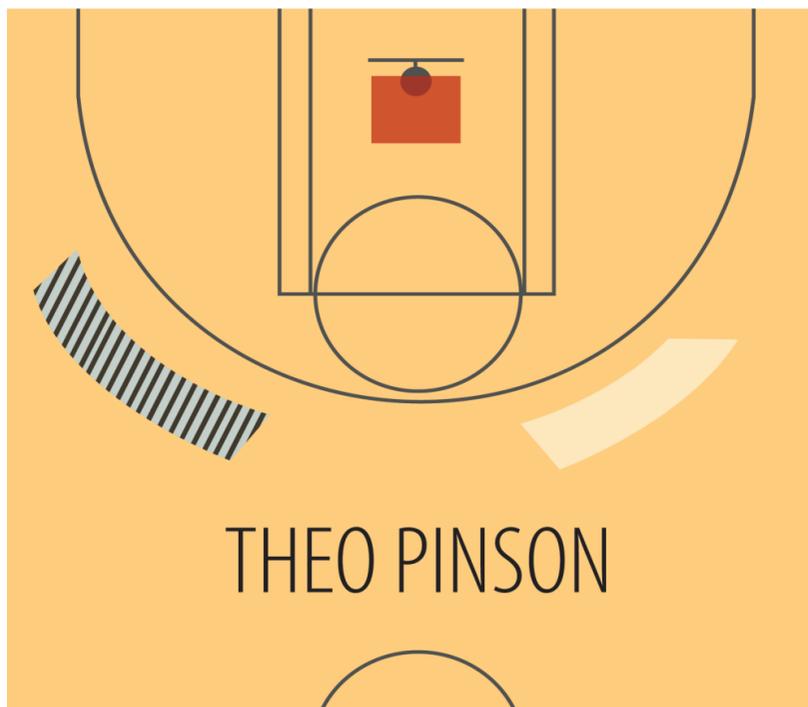
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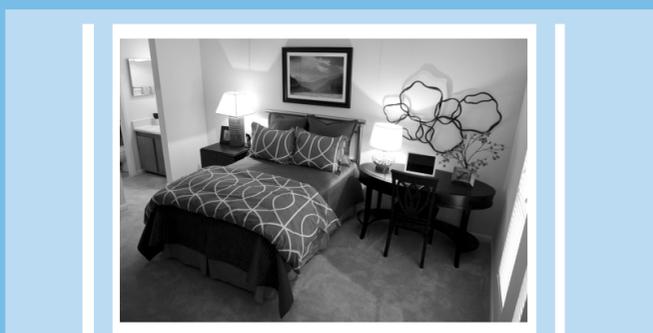
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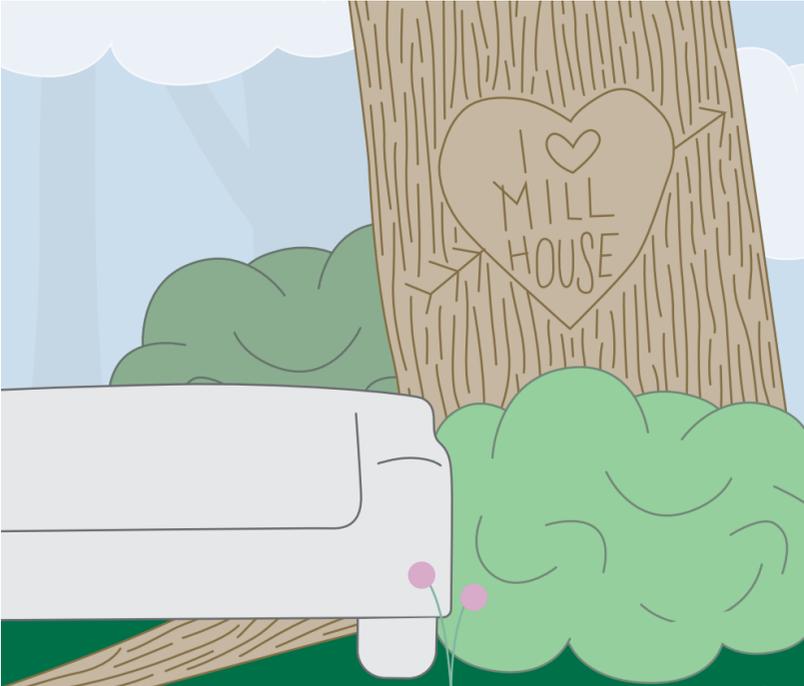
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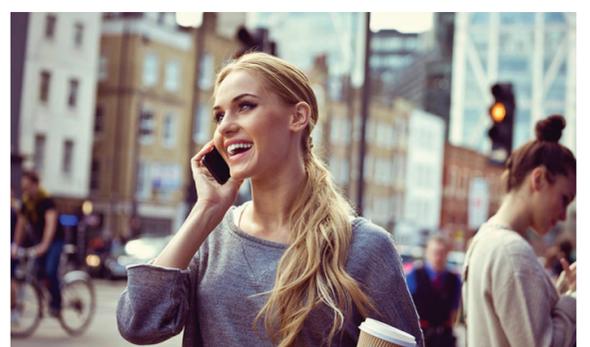
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Marcus Paige, Brice Johnson leave glaring void for Tar Heels

By Mohammed Hadadji
Senior Writer

Although UNC's lineup is made up of mostly familiar faces, there are two glaring absences this season.

Marcus Paige and Brice Johnson — the faces of North Carolina men's basketball for years — leave a gap where they once stood. Many UNC fans have forgotten what it feels like to watch the Tar

Heels take the floor without the two at the helm.

And for the Tar Heel upperclassmen — namely Nate Britt, Isaiah Hicks and Kennedy Meeks — the presence of the two superstars is

all they have ever known.

"Those were the guys that we always looked up to, since our freshmen year," Britt said. "With those guys being gone, (there) is a void that we're expected to fill."

UNC returned every non-graduated player from last year — including three starters — but Paige and Johnson left a gaping hole.

"They were our two best players," Coach Roy Williams said. "The best defender, the best outside scorer, the best inside scorer, the best rebounder."

But unlike most teams fresh off an appearance in the Final Four, North Carolina has the pieces to make up for some of the lost talent.

The Tar Heels will miss Johnson's inside presence, but the one-two punch of Hicks and Meeks is among the best in the nation. Both were starting-caliber players last season, each hovering around nine points per game on better than 54 percent shooting.

UNC will also look to a newcomer, first-year Tony Bradley, for a spark down low. The 6-foot-10 forward has shown flashes of brilliance, similar to those Johnson showed as a youngster.

As for replacing Paige, UNC has already been in this position — almost a year ago exactly. After Paige suffered a broken bone in his hand in November, Britt and then-sophomore Joel Berry played formidably to hold down the guard position. With another

year under their belts, the veteran guards are poised to produce despite Paige's departure.

Paige and Johnson were valuable far beyond the court, however. Replacing them as leaders won't be easy.

Johnson and Paige set an example in every way that mattered. Paige was the off-the-court support system his teammates needed, while Johnson was the booming voice that guided the ship on the court. Neither can be easily substituted.

And none of UNC's players are completely prepared to lead like Paige and Johnson did, because they've never had to. The team knows no one can force himself into that leadership role.

"I think everybody on the team needs to be themselves," junior Theo Pinson said. "Nobody's Brice. Nobody's Marcus."

Instead, the Tar Heels will rely on their veterans to lead as a group. And they will build off the example set for them.

"We've taken things from what Marcus has told us and what Brice has shown us, and we're going to try to do it as a team," Pinson said.

Paige and Johnson will be absent, but not missing.

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Justin Jackson embraces pressure

By David Adler
Senior Writer

Coming off a successful first year at North Carolina, many expected Justin Jackson to build on that season and shoulder more of the scoring load.

The junior did not have a breakout sophomore year. But now, after losing Marcus Paige and Brice Johnson, UNC needs him to step up.

With the pressure on, Jackson is embracing the challenge.

"For me, I've always done better whenever there's more pressure on myself," Jackson said. "Knowing that they're not here, knowing that I need to do more, I think I'm looking forward to stepping into that role."

Despite his dream of playing professionally, Jackson opted to return to UNC after initially putting his name in the NBA Draft and attending the draft combine.

"When I made the

decision, I was at peace right away," he said.

Even though Jackson came to UNC as a highly-touted recruit, he said there was no timeline for how long he planned to stay in college.

"I wasn't even focused on the number of years, honestly," Jackson said. "Obviously, you have hype being a McDonald's All-American one and done, but for me, I just wanted to come here and be as successful as possible."

The junior from Tomball, Texas, has shown he is more than capable of being the player the Tar Heels can count on. In Kansas City, Jackson won the 2015 CBE Hall of Fame Classic MVP after averaging 21.5 points over two games and leading UNC past Kansas State in the tournament title game.

But then there were games like the national championship against Villanova, where he was scoreless in the second half and faded into the background. The key for Jackson this season will be maintaining an

aggressive approach.

"I'm gonna try and go out there, always think next play," Jackson said. "If I can do that and keep being aggressive, I'll be all right."

In addition to being more aggressive, Jackson also hopes to become a more consistent 3-point shooter this year. In two seasons, Jackson has shot just 29.7 percent from behind the arc.

"Twenty-nine percent from three is weird," Coach Roy Williams said. "Because every time he shoots it, I think it's going in. I really do."

During offseason workouts, teammate Joel Berry has seen a noticeable improvement in Jackson's shot.

"Last year, he could really shoot the ball," Berry said. "But this year, he's been shooting it on a much more consistent basis."

The question for UNC is whether Jackson's offseason shooting will translate when the games begin. After finishing 263rd in the country last year in 3-point percentage,



DTH/ALEX KORMANN

UNC forward Justin Jackson (44) passes around two UNC-Pembroke defenders on Nov. 4.

the Tar Heels will take all the help they can get.

Jackson is aware of the added responsibility and scrutiny, but he is welcoming it.

"I feel pretty confident in myself," he said. "But it's all about what I do on the court. We don't have a 17 and 10 guy on the block,

so somebody has to step up. And I'm going to be as aggressive as possible."

@david_adler94
sports@dailytarheel.com

Theo Pinson still in the spotlight

The junior will begin the 2016-17 season on the sidelines.

By James Tatter
Staff Writer

Keep the camera on Theo Pinson.

Don't look away now. This is the guy who relishes the spotlight. This is the guy who invited himself to an NCAA Tournament press conference. This is the guy who impersonated Larry Fedora with the man himself standing right there. This is the guy whose dance moves are rivaled only by his basketball skills.

And this year, the junior wing might have been "the guy." The one to have the breakout year that the North Carolina men's basketball team will need to fill the shoes of its graduated seniors.

He might have been. On Oct. 11, Pinson's sense of humor drew laughs at UNC men's basketball media day. But 10 days later, the team announced Pinson had broken a bone in his right foot and would be sidelined indefinitely. He had suffered the same injury in his left foot twice before, most recently during his first year in Chapel Hill.

Among all of Pinson's lighthearted moments at media day — before he could

have imagined the unlucky fate that befell him days later — his serious comments on his first-year injury are haunting.

"I felt like I was starting to get it my freshman year, and then (the injury) was a big step back," Pinson said.

"You can't go for that long and then come back and play in our system, because we are going up and down and everything is happening so fast."

For Pinson, this is another big step back.

And for a team losing two of its brightest stars to graduation after a run that culminated in a title game loss, a step back is not what the Tar Heels need. The attention must be on moving forward to what might still be for these guys.

One way or another, this team is determined that Pinson will be a part of what might still be.

"If you came to one of our practices you would probably hear Theo more than anybody," Joel Berry said. "He'll still be on the sideline."

It was just a year ago when a preseason injury to Marcus Paige propelled Berry into the role of the team's vocal leader, much sooner than he expected. Now it is Berry's team, and he knows the vacancy on the court left by Pinson is met by a next-man-

"You can't go for that long and the come back and play in our system."

Theo Pinson
Junior wing

up attitude from the Tar Heels.

"Whoever gets those minutes, if they do well, if they succeed and if they have good moments, that's really gonna make them better at the end of the year," Coach Roy Williams said.

Make no mistake — the Tar Heels would prefer to have Pinson on the court.

"I'd rather make my team stronger just by everybody improving themselves instead of losing a guy," Williams said.

But don't take your eyes off Pinson. Even with a recovery timetable that would hold him out until at least conference play, you cannot forget about Pinson.

"If you do get Theo back, and he's ready to play, that makes your team stronger," Williams said.

Come conference play, the spotlight will be on North Carolina. It always is. So remember the guy whose most memorable moments come when everybody is watching.

Whatever you do, keep the camera on Theo Pinson.

@James_Tatter
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Tar Heels to explore small-ball lineups more often in 2016-17

By John Bauman
Staff Writer

One of North Carolina's most valuable lineups last season was a small-ball unit with junior Theo Pinson playing at the four. Those lineups feature just one big man and four guards spaced around the perimeter, as opposed to UNC's traditional lineups that feature two big men down low.

Pinson is the ideal man for the job. Players spoke at length last season about the spark — the energy he brought to the four. He's bouncy, rebounds well and can shoot just enough to draw opposing big men out to the 3-point line and away from the rim.

But unfortunately for the Tar Heels, he will start the season in a suit while nursing a broken bone in his foot.

The role now falls on Justin Jackson, who appreciates the flexibility of the position. He's not a perfect fit for the position, but his offensive blend of 3-point shooting and trademark floaters give him the tools needed to succeed.

"It gives me a lot of freedom, whenever I play that four spot, especially on offense," Jackson said. "I don't necessarily have to stay inside the whole time. So I think

whatever coach wants to do, I feel comfortable doing whatever that is."

Pinson and Jackson bring different things to the table as small-ball fours. Jackson is a better shooter, has a higher field-goal percentage and is the more menacing threat from beyond the arc.

But Pinson is a better rebounder — Jackson had a defensive rebounding percentage of 7.9 percent in 2015-16, while Pinson's was 11.9.

"I think when Justin is in at the four, everyone has to rebound as a group," junior point guard Joel Berry said. "We just can't have him and the other big man down there trying to rebound."

Rebounding is still just rebounding at the end of the day, sophomore Luke Maye said. It doesn't get any harder with two big or one.

"At the end of the day, it's all about boxing out," he said. "And if all five guys box out, we should get the rebound. It doesn't matter if we go four guards and a big or three guards and two bigs. I mean, at the end of the day, we've got to come out with the rebound."

What the small lineup does provide offensively is more space on the floor. Without another big clogging

the paint, cracks open up in the defense and the Tar Heels can attack them with strong punches. Often the beneficiary is Berry, who has the vision to read the extra space and the skills to take advantage of it.

"If we penetrate ... the big man has to step over," Berry said. "That's a dump down for our big man, or (we can) shoot the three ball."

Berry is illustrating what he sees from a point guard's perspective. When he drives, there is only one big man left in the paint to protect the rim. The other is usually floating aimlessly around the arc, drawn there by the threat of a Pinson or Jackson 3-pointer.

Jackson or Pinson are equally unguardable when the ball is in their hands. And the opposing team's big man usually isn't up to the task of staying in front of UNC's small-ball four, leading to defensive breakdowns.

Small-ball lineups break down defenses by creating favorable matchups. North Carolina will miss Pinson in the role for the early part of the season, but look for Jackson to step up and be just as bright of a spark.

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Senior forward Isaiah Hicks seeks stability in new starting role

By Blake Richardson
Assistant Sports Editor

Roy Williams had already signed the paperwork.

When the NCAA allowed players to receive NBA scouting without declaring for the draft, Williams encouraged Isaiah Hicks to do it. All Hicks had to do was sign his name. But Hicks refused.

“Coach, I don’t think you should try to do that unless you’re 100 percent sure that’s what you’re going to do,” Hicks told Williams. “... I’m 100 percent sure that I’m staying in school.”

“I want to get my degree. I want to keep playing.”

After winning ACC Sixth Man of the Year last season — when he averaged 8.9 points and 4.6 rebounds in 18.1 minutes — Hicks can build on his junior campaign.

North Carolina will need the senior more than ever, as he, Kennedy Meeks, Luke

Maye and Tony Bradley compose UNC’s squad of big men.

Furthermore, Hicks will be instrumental in filling the rebounding hole left by Brice Johnson, who tallied 416 rebounds last season — more than double Hicks’ total.

“(Williams) just wants us to know Brice is not here, so ... somebody needs to step up,” Hicks said.

Hicks said he will approach games with the same hunger that propelled Johnson to success at the glass. And he needs to. Someone must make grabs for UNC, and Hicks’ length makes him the ideal candidate.

“You see him making these leaps every year,” senior Nate Britt said. “And I think you’ll see that again this year.”

With Johnson gone, Hicks will likely start, like he did in the exhibition against UNC-Pembroke. As a starter, he’ll get more minutes, bringing Hicks closer to materializing his hopes of a stellar year.

But Hicks has one hurdle he must overcome — foul trouble.

“I wanted him to play more minutes than he did last year,” Williams said. “But I wanted him at the end of the game ... because he can block the shot, he can take the charge, he can do some of those things.”

“And this year I’d like him in the game at the start and the end.”

Hicks needed to be so efficient because he was rarely on the court for an extended period of time. But if Hicks gets his fouling under control, he could make a huge impact.

Williams has talked to Hicks about ways to avoid fouls — like being second to jump for a ball or approaching screens with caution.

Hicks committed a team-high three personal fouls in 16 minutes of play against UNC-Pembroke. But he scored 16 points — the same total as Justin Jackson, who played six more minutes.



DTH/ALEX KORMANN

“Isaiah still hasn’t played yet the way I want Isaiah to play ...” Williams said after the exhibition. “But I’m not worried about Isaiah.” Hicks could reach his full

potential. He just needs to stay on the court long enough to deliver.

So how can you get Hicks to stop fouling? “Scream at him,” Williams

said. “You’ll have to ask me at the end of the season if it worked, ‘cause that’s all I’ve done.”

@rblakerich_sports@dailytarheel.com

Kennedy Meeks making improvements just in time for UNC

By Will Bryant
Senior Writer

After losing a tremendous amount of weight between his first and second years at North Carolina, Kennedy Meeks has long been expected to assume a bigger role. But things haven’t gone as planned.

A knee injury sidelined Meeks for nearly a month last season, but he still

managed 9.2 points and 5.9 rebounds per game — down from 11.4 and 7.3 as a sophomore.

Now, considerably slimmer and more explosive, Meeks is learning how to control his new, more athletic body.

“I think I’m getting a lot better; I think I’m finally getting accustomed to my body,” Meeks said.

Meeks’ summer work ethic

did not go unnoticed. Fellow senior Isaiah Hicks, who has guarded Meeks in practice, has had a first-hand view of Meeks’ growth.

Throughout their time at UNC, the two have always been a good matchup. But Meeks is starting to get the better of Hicks.

“A couple years back, me and Kennedy could guard each other,” Hicks said. “But now it seems like I can’t even

do anything because he’s so strong right now.”

“It really shows in the weight room and stuff, how much work he put in to get that — he can post up wherever he wants.”

By keeping his weight down and his work ethic up, Meeks has earned the praise of teammates and coaches alike. With the season right around the corner, Coach Roy Williams has already seen great improvements in the 6-foot-10 forward.

“He’s done the most difficult work already, and that’s to lose the weight,” Williams said. “And now he’s got to realize who he is. He’s

more athletic, he can make moves quickly, he can be more explosive.

“And if he does that and translates it to every day, then I think he really does have some steps he can take.”

Meeks needs to transition quickly for the Tar Heels, who are looking to fill the void left by Brice Johnson — who was 20th nationally last season with 10.4 rebounds per game. Junior guard Joel Berry has seen Meeks embrace the role so far this preseason.

“I can’t describe it, but he has more energy this year than last year,” Berry said. “And I think that’s just because he knows that Brice

isn’t there to help him out.”

Johnson was dominant in the paint last year for UNC, leaving big shoes for Meeks to fill. But the senior from Charlotte doesn’t see it as replacing Johnson. He just wants to finish the work his former teammates started four seasons ago.

“For us to fall short only motivated us this summer to work extremely hard, probably the hardest we ever worked since we’ve been here, on and off the court,” Meeks said. “Me personally, I’m just trying to do it for those guys.”

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Nate Britt steps up once again

By **Brendan Marks**
Senior Writer

Maybe it's nothing. Maybe the hullabaloo is unwarranted — just a blip on the radar for this North Carolina men's basketball season. Maybe, when all's said and done, history will scoff at the notion that this moment was ever even relevant.

After all, what is Late Night With Roy if not a glorified practice? A scrimmage, sure, but nothing can be gleaned from it — at least not anything of substance.

So what if Nate Britt, a senior guard and expected fill-in starter for the injured Theo Pinson, won the 3-point contest? So what if, in the final round, he didn't miss a single shot?

"As everybody could see from Late Night," Isaiah Hicks said, "his shot is looking pretty good."

And maybe that's the reason this moment does matter.

Britt, now in his final season with the Tar Heels, wasn't expected to be a starter this season. Three starters from last season's national championship runner-up squad returned, along with Hicks. The last starting spot would surely go to Pinson.

Then Pinson fractured his foot, which sidelined him indefinitely. For some teams, losing a starter with Pinson's on-court talents and off-court persona would be catastrophic.

But most teams don't have someone like Britt waiting in the wings.

Britt arrived in Chapel Hill as a four-star recruit not expecting to start. But



DTH/ALEX KORMANN

UNC guard Nate Britt (0) passes the ball around a UNC-Pembroke defender mid-air during the exhibition game on Nov. 4.

circumstances forced Coach Roy Williams' hand.

Suspensions to guards P.J. Hairston and Leslie McDonald left the Tar Heels shorthanded in the backcourt. The team turned to Britt, who started for 16 games. He mostly facilitated the offense, feeding the ball to stalwarts Marcus Paige and James Michael McAdoo. He only averaged 5.1 points per game.

As a sophomore and junior, his playing time shrank. Instead of running with the starters, Britt was reduced to backup status.

That isn't to say he wasn't valuable. The minutes he gave off the bench were crucial, allowing Paige and Joel Berry a chance to rest. This year, he was expected to do the same for Pinson.

Instead, Britt will likely be pushed into the starting lineup. The move might not be permanent, but for the time being, it's the best option Williams

has: a senior with starting experience and a constantly improving jump shot.

"I do have more confidence in Nate because I've seen what he can do," Williams said.

So maybe Late Night With Roy does matter, then. Not as a prophecy that Britt's 3-point stroke will carry the team, but as an option that it could. Maybe it proves that, instead of funneling the ball to his teammates like he once did, he's worthy of having the rock in his own hands.

There's no telling how this will play out, no saying how Britt's last go-around in a UNC jersey will go. That might be unsettling for some, but not him. Not anymore.

"I've had a lot of different experiences just from being on this team," Britt said. "I don't think there's too much that would surprise me at this point."

@BrendanRmarks
sports@dailytarheel.com

Kenny Williams channels aggressiveness, confidence

The guard could see a more prominent role as a sophomore.

By **Kiley Burns**
Staff Writer

It's time for Kenny Williams to step up.

No. 6 North Carolina enters this season already under a microscope, as questions swirl around the team's ability to replace superstars Marcus Paige and Brice Johnson.

And junior Theo Pinson — one of the team's strongest defensive players — is out indefinitely with a foot injury, leading to uncertainty about how to fill his gap in the starting lineup.

So, the Tar Heels need guard Kenny Williams to make the leap in his sophomore campaign.

"I always say, I think the biggest jump is from some guys' freshman year to his sophomore year," Coach Roy Williams said. "Whether it's Joel Berry last year, I hope it's the same way for Kenny and Luke (Maye) this year."

Kenny Williams saw limited action in his first year, averaging just over four minutes per game in 30 games. But with Pinson's injury, the sophomore guard expects an increase in playing time. He, senior Nate Britt, and first-year Brandon Robinson are all vying to be thrown into a more prominent roll.

"On defense, he's just an aggressive guy, and that's what we need."

Joel Berry
Junior guard

against UNC-Pembroke on Nov. 4, with Coach Williams opting to give that spot to Britt.

But Kenny Williams impressed in the game, totaling 10 points, three rebounds and two 3-pointers in 16 minutes of play.

With Pinson out, the Tar Heels are going to rely on Kenny Williams to capitalize on his defensive skill set.

"On defense, he's just an aggressive guy, and that's what we need," Berry said. "At the end of the day, if you want to play, you have to play defense. And I think that's one thing that he's showing Coach."

Roy Williams called the sophomore a complete player, despite his shooting woes last season. This year, Kenny Williams is prepared to prove that basketball is as mental as it is physical.

And with increased confidence this year, the sophomore is ready to make the leap.

sports@dailytarheel.com

Luke Maye prepared to take next step

By **Sam Doughton**
Staff Writer

Luke Maye wasn't the first person off the bench last season for the North Carolina men's basketball team. Or the second. Or the third.

During his first year at UNC, the three-star recruit rarely left the cushioned seats on the sidelines. With Joel James and Isaiah Hicks coming off the bench, Maye wasn't called frequently to relieve starters Brice Johnson and Kennedy Meeks. The 6-foot-8 forward averaged 1.2 points and 1.6 rebounds in 5.4 minutes per game.

But the graduation of James and Johnson leaves UNC's frontcourt much thinner than it was a season ago. Hicks moves into the starting lineup, and with first-year

Tony Bradley as the only new big, Maye finds himself the most experienced reserve big man and likely the first person Coach Roy Williams will turn to at the 4 or 5.

"I'm ready to play this year," Maye said. "I've improved a lot over the summer and am just ready to step up and help my team do the best we can."

Williams thinks the early signs show Maye is ready, too.

"He's been playing with confidence," Williams said after the team's exhibition against UNC-Pembroke. "He played pretty doggone well in the scrimmage against Memphis. All the guys (on) the staff (voted) on who we thought were the most impressive people, and he was one of the top four."

Maye will be called upon to do a lot of things Johnson and

James did: Box out. Crash the boards. Score around the rim.

But what makes Maye unique among the recent big men in UNC history is his shooting touch. He has a much deeper range than a typical power forward, taking seven 3-point shots in the 2015-16 season and draining two. The rest of the UNC frontcourt took zero 3-pointers all last season.

This makes Maye an attractive option as a center in a small-ball lineup, being able to both post up and spread the floor to create mismatches on the perimeter. That sort of lineup is something Williams could use often this season for the Tar Heels.

After a strong showing in the UNC-Pembroke exhibition — where he had 15 points, eight rebounds,

five assists and a 3-pointer, to boot — the early signs seem good for Maye to take the next step that Williams expects from his sophomores.

"I think the biggest jump is from some guys' freshman year to his sophomore year," Williams said. "You just get more comfortable, you realize all this junk that coach is throwing at you is not nearly as complicated as you thought it was as a freshman."

That level of comfort will help Maye slide into a larger supporting role and complete his own goals for the season.

"I just want to do everything I can to help my team, whether it's rebounding, scoring, facilitating," Maye said.

"I'm just out there trying to make my team better."

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2016-17 men's basketball schedule

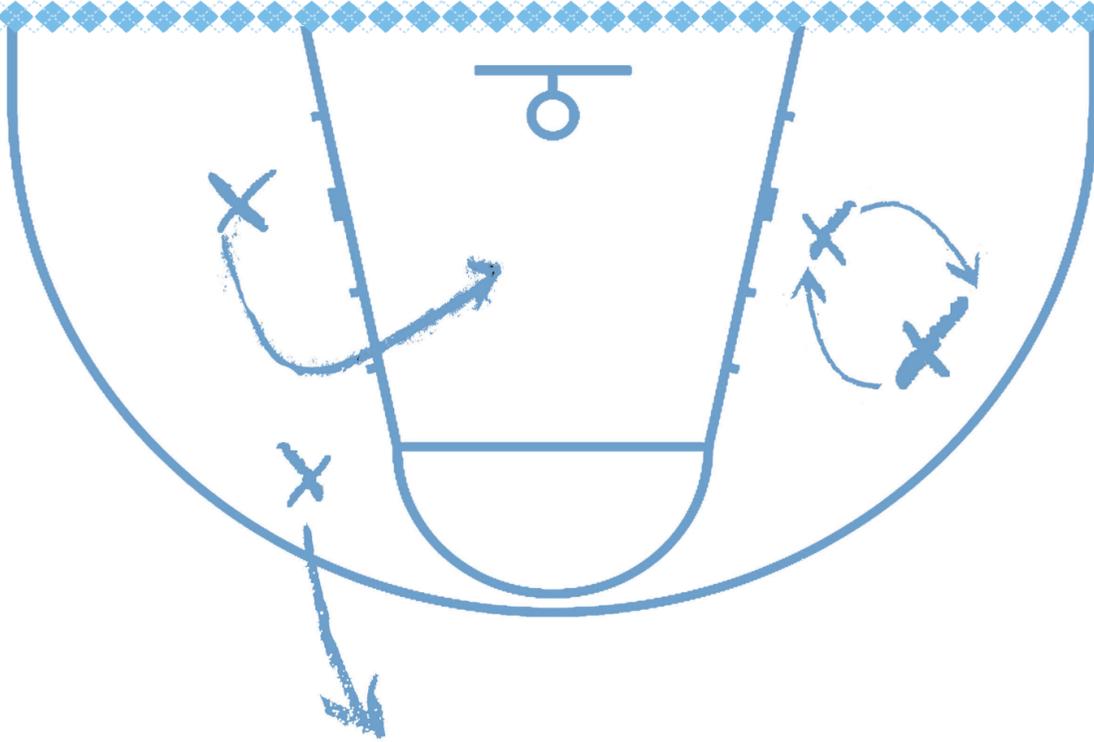
DATE	TIME	OPPONENT
Fri. Nov. 11	9 p.m.	at Tulane
Sun. Nov. 13	4 p.m.	vs. Chattanooga
Tue. Nov. 15	8 p.m.	vs. Long Beach State
Fri. Nov. 18	1 a.m.	at Hawaii
Mon. Nov. 21	11:30 p.m.	Chaminade (Maui)
Tue. Nov. 22	TBA	Maui Invitational
Wed. Nov. 23	TBA	Maui Invitational
Wed. Nov. 30	9 p.m.	at Indiana
Sun. Dec. 4	2 p.m.	vs. Radford
Wed. Dec. 7	9 p.m.	vs. Davidson
Sun. Dec. 11	5 p.m.	vs. Tennessee
Sat. Dec. 17	5:45 p.m.	Kentucky (Las Vegas)
Wed. Dec. 21	8 p.m.	vs. Northern Iowa
Wed. Dec. 28	7 p.m.	vs. Monmouth
Sat. Dec. 31	TBA	at Georgia Tech
Tue. Jan. 3	7 p.m.	at Clemson
Sat. Jan. 7	TBA	vs. N.C. State
Wed. Jan. 11	8 p.m.	at Wake Forest
Sat. Jan. 14	2 p.m.	vs. Florida State
Mon. Jan. 16	7 p.m.	vs. Syracuse
Sat. Jan. 21	12 p.m.	at Boston College
Thu. Jan. 26	8 p.m.	vs. Virginia Tech
Sat. Jan. 28	1 p.m.	at Miami
Tue. Jan. 31	7 p.m.	vs. Pittsburgh
Sat. Feb. 4	TBA	vs. Notre Dame
Thu. Feb. 9	8 p.m.	at Duke
Wed. Feb. 15	8 p.m.	at N.C. State
Sat. Feb. 18	TBA	vs. Virginia
Wed. Feb. 22	9 p.m.	vs. Louisville
Sat. Feb. 25	12 p.m.	at Pittsburgh
Mon. Feb. 27	7 p.m.	at Virginia
Sat. Mar. 4	8 p.m.	vs. Duke
Mar. 7-11	TBA	ACC Tournament

2016-17 men's basketball roster

NO.	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	YR.
0	Nate Britt	G	6-1	175	Sr.
1	Theo Pinson	F/G	6-6	211	Jr.
2	Joel Berry II	G	6-0	195	Jr.
3	Kennedy Meeks	F	6-10	260	Sr.
4	Isaiah Hicks	F	6-9	242	Sr.
5	Tony Bradley	F	6-10	240	Fr.
11	Shea Rush	F	6-6	200	Fr.
13	Kanler Coker	G	6-4	200	Sr.
14	Brandon Robinson	G	6-5	162	Fr.
21	Seventh Woods	G	6-2	180	Fr.
24	Kenny Williams	G	6-4	180	So.
25	Aaron Rohlman	F	6-6	210	Jr.
30	Stilman White	G	6-1	178	Sr.
32	Luke Maye	F	6-8	235	So.
44	Justin Jackson	F/G	6-8	210	Jr.

2015-16 combined team statistics

NO.	NAME	GP-GS	MIN/G	FG%	3FG%	FT%	REB.	AST.	PTS.
11	Brice Johnson	40-39	28.0	61.4	0.0	78.3	10.4	1.5	17.0
2	Joel Berry	40-39	30.7	44.6	38.2	86.7	3.4	3.8	12.8
5	Marcus Paige	34-34	31.6	39.8	35.6	77.4	2.5	3.8	12.6
44	Justin Jackson	40-38	28.4	46.6	29.2	66.7	3.9	2.8	12.2
3	Kennedy Meeks	33-28	20.6	54.8	0.0	68.9	5.9	1.1	9.2
4	Isaiah Hicks	40-3	18.1	61.4	0.0	75.6	4.6	0.7	8.9
0	Nate Britt	39-0	15.4	38.4	32.1	80.0	1.5	1.7	5.4
1	Theo Pinson	40-7	18.7	40.4	29.0	67.2	3.2	2.9	4.5
42	Joel James	37-10	7.8	45.3	0.0	52.2	2.3	0.0	2.2
32	Luke Maye	33-0	5.4	37.5	28.6	42.9	1.6	0.2	1.2
24	Kenny Williams	30-0	4.1	36.4	7.7	100	0.4	0.2	0.8
31	Justin Coleman	14-1	1.2	25.0	0.0	50.0	0.1	0.1	0.2
30	Stilman White	18-0	1.7	12.5	0.0	50.0	0.3	0.1	0.2
13	Kanler Coker	13-0	1.2	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.1	0.2
43	Spenser Dalton	18-1	1.2	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
34	Toby Egbuna	16-0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0



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2016-17 women's basketball schedule

DATE	TIME	OPPONENT
Fri. Nov. 11	4 p.m.	vs. Alabama State
Thu. Nov. 17	6 p.m.	vs. Alabama A&M
Sun. Nov. 20	6 p.m.	vs. Bucknell
Tue. Nov. 22	3 p.m.	vs. Charleston Southern
Thu. Nov. 24	5:15 p.m.	South Florida (Bahamas)
Nov. 25-26	TBA	Georgia/Minn. (Bahamas)
Thu. Dec. 1	8 p.m.	at Wisconsin
Sun. Dec. 4	5:30 p.m.	vs. Elon
Wed. Dec. 7	5:30 p.m.	vs. Marshall
Sun. Dec. 18	3 p.m.	LSU (Myrtle Beach)
Tue. Dec. 20	7 p.m.	Jacksonville (Myrtle Beach)
Wed. Dec. 28	2 p.m.	vs. Coppin State
Fri. Dec. 30	2 p.m.	vs. South Carolina State
Mon. Jan. 2	7 p.m.	at Virginia Tech
Thu. Jan. 5	7 p.m.	vs. Florida State
Sun. Jan. 8	2 p.m.	vs. Virginia
Thu. Jan. 12	7 p.m.	at Duke
Sun. Jan. 15	2 p.m.	at Pittsburgh
Thu. Jan. 19	7 p.m.	vs. Wake Forest
Sun. Jan. 22	12 p.m.	vs. Notre Dame
Thu. Jan. 26	7 p.m.	at Miami
Sun. Jan. 29	3 p.m.	vs. N.C. State
Sun. Feb. 5	2 p.m.	at Clemson
Thu. Feb. 9	5:30 p.m.	vs. Boston College
Sun. Feb. 12	3 p.m.	at Syracuse
Thu. Feb. 16	7 p.m.	vs. Georgia Tech
Sun. Feb. 19	12 p.m.	at Louisville
Thu. Feb. 23	7 p.m.	at N.C. State
Sun. Feb. 26	3 p.m.	vs. Duke
Mar. 1-5	TBA	ACC Tournament

2016-17 women's basketball roster

NO.	NAME	POS.	HT.	YR.	Hometown
1	Taylor Koenen	G	6-2	Fr.	Savage, Minn.
2	Ali Cyr-Scully	G	5-5	Fr.	Chapel Hill, N.C.
4	Jocelyn Jones	G	6-0	Fr.	Richmond, Va.
5	Stephanie Watts	G	5-11	So.	Wesley Chapel, N.C.
10	Jamie Cherry	G	5-8	Jr.	Cove City, N.C.
11	Emily Sullivan	F	6-4	Fr.	Newburgh, Ind.
13	Hillary Fuller	F	6-2	RSr.	Fernandina Beach, Fla.
14	Liz Roberts	G	5-8	Fr.	Chapel Hill, N.C.
15	Olivia Smith	G	6-0	Fr.	Raleigh, N.C.
21	Alyssa Okoene	F	6-3	Fr.	Houston, Texas
22	Paris Kea	G	5-9	RSo.	Tarboro, N.C.
24	Destinee Walker	G	5-10	So.	Orlando, Fla.
34	Naomi Van Nes	C	6-6	Fr.	Dorchester, England

2015-16 combined team statistics

NO.	NAME	GP-GS	MIN/G	FG%	3FG%	FT%	REB.	AST.	PTS.
5	Stephanie Watts	32-29	33.9	36.0	29.2	71.3	7.2	2.5	14.7
24	Destinee Walker	32-31	37.3	37.4	26.7	81.3	3.7	2.5	13.9
10	Jamie Cherry	32-31	36.5	33.6	30.7	81.3	2.7	3.8	13.6
30	Hillary Summers	32-32	32.2	49.3	0.0	58.4	7.8	1.0	10.6
34	Xylina McDaniel	16-12	23.6	41.4	16.7	68.3	6.8	1.1	8.7
22	N'Dea Bryant	32-21	28.4	41.2	12.5	65.9	6.0	1.4	7.1
31	Erika Johnson	32-2	18.2	31.3	18.2	44.2	4.6	0.9	2.6
1	Rachel McGirt	16-1	3.0	30.8	0.0	100	0.3	0.0	0.6
15	Marissa Riley	6-0	2.2	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.3
20	Anne Corrigan	4-1	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
55	Paige Neuenfeldt	2-0	3.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
UNC		32		38.6	28.2	72.0	40.0	12.6	67.2
OPP		32		38.6	31.7	71.2	42.4	15.2	70.3



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FIRST-YEAR EXPECTATIONS

After a down year on the recruiting front in 2015, the North Carolina men's basketball team is hoping its group of three scholarship players from the high school class of 2016 can make an immediate impact on the court.

For most of the signing period before the 2015-16 season, UNC's only commitment was from Luke Maye, a three-star forward from Huntersville. The Tar Heels didn't get another signee until Kenny Williams — a four-star shooting guard from Virginia — flipped his commitment from Virginia Commonwealth to UNC in May 2015.

The Tar Heels had gotten steady production from its two classes before Maye and Williams, but that wasn't the case with the duo last season.

Maye saw action in 33 games, but he only averaged 1.2 points and 1.6 rebounds in 5.4 minutes per game.

Expectations were higher for Williams, who was expected to alleviate some of the 3-point shooting woes the Tar Heels had the season before. But instead, the guard attempted just 13 shots behind the arc — and only made one. He averaged less than five minutes per game.

North Carolina is expecting bigger things out of its 2016 class. Or maybe "hoping" is the right word.

The Tar Heels have a talented roster, but they are

still trying to figure out how to replace Brice Johnson and Marcus Paige — UNC's star seniors from last season's national runner-up team.

Johnson put together an All-American season in 2015-16, averaging 17 points and 10.4 rebounds per game and acting as the Tar Heels' anchor down low.

Paige, North Carolina's unquestioned leader on and off the court, also had a solid season. He tallied 12.6 points per game while knocking down 35.6 percent of his 3-point shots.

As far as replacing Johnson, North Carolina hopes five-star big man Tony Bradley can come off the bench and provide a spark. Bradley could be the longest player on the team, meaning he should be able to rebound on both ends and cause havoc for opposing players in the paint.

Replacing the leadership of Paige will be a near-impossible task for this trio of first-years, at least right away. But UNC has a new pair of guards it hopes can make up some of the on-court production left behind by the former All-American guard.

Brandon Robinson, a four-star shooting guard, has shown in the preseason he can knock down 3-pointers. And Seventh Woods, a four-star combo guard, has the athletic ability to be a special player but still needs to refine several parts of his game.

Tony Bradley

As the lone incoming big man, Bradley is already making waves.

Bradley, a five-star power forward, averaged 22.8 points, 12.6 rebounds and three blocks as a senior in high school. And his length has already impressed his teammates.

Recording nine points and eight rebounds in the exhibition against UNC-Pembroke, Bradley could prove crucial in filling the rebounding deficit left by Brice Johnson. Bradley will likely see considerable playing time, especially if senior Isaiah Hicks continues to struggle with foul trouble.

Coach Roy Williams said he expects Bradley to have the biggest impact of the first-year players.



DTH/ALEX KORMANN

Brandon Robinson

The scouting report on Robinson before he came to Chapel Hill showed the 6-foot-5, 162-pound shooting guard could knock down 3-pointers consistently, and he has shown an ability to do that so far in the preseason.

At Late Night With Roy, Robinson finished second in the 3-point contest to senior Nate Britt. And his teammates have said he has been able to show the same kind of range in practice.

But Robinson isn't just a one-trick pony. He showed in the Late Night scrimmage that he can slash and score in the lane. If he can get a little stronger and handle contact better down low, he has the ability to score anywhere on the floor.



DTH/ALEX KORMANN

Seventh Woods

Don't blink — you might miss him.

All offseason, players and coaches have been clamoring for Woods to realize the blazing speed and athleticism that vaulted him atop the recruiting boards in South Carolina.

But the transition to point guard hasn't been easy for the four-star prospect, whose claim to fame came more from high-flying dunks in his middle-school mixtapes than pocket passes in high school.

Nevertheless, Woods looked comfortable leading the offense against UNC-Pembroke, notching nine points and seven assists.

And if he can unleash his impressive physical tools at the point guard position, he might never look back.



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Women's basketball moves forward through rebuild

The Tar Heels have eight first-years on this year's roster.

By Ethan Belshe
Staff Writer

If there's one thing North Carolina women's basketball Coach Sylvia Hatchell is tired of doing, it's talking about the past. Instead, she's ready to look forward.

"I told the kids yesterday at the end of practice, I said, 'Look, I'm not going to talk about the past, that's over,'" Hatchell said. "I'm so excited about the future and about these kids. All that stuff is behind us."

"All that stuff" refers to the tumult the women's basketball program has experienced over the last half decade.

After securing the No. 1 recruiting class in 2013, it seemed North Carolina was poised to continue the dominance it had sustained for decades under Hatchell. The four-player class was arguably the best in school history.

By the beginning of the 2015-16 season, the entirety of

the heralded 2013 recruiting class had transferred from UNC, leaving the team lacking in depth and experience.

Last year's squad finished 14-18 and lost 13 of its final 15 games. With such limited depth, the team struggled with fatigue and often couldn't keep pace with opponents with its six-deep rotation.

Despite returning only three players who saw the court last year — and replacing eight graduated seniors with eight first-years — there is reason to believe the Tar Heels will be much improved in 2016-17.

All three of UNC's top scorers from a year ago return in the form of an intimidating backcourt trio.

After accounting for nearly 63 percent of the team's scoring last year, junior guard Jamie Cherry and sophomore guards Stephanie Watts and Destinee Walker will once again be expected to carry the team offensively.

Hatchell will especially look to Watts, the 2016 ACC Freshman of the Year, to be a dominant force on the court this season.

"(Watts) stayed here all summer," Hatchell said.

"She's gotten stronger, more aggressive, faster, just everything. She'll be an All-American before it's over with."

The backcourt's success will be paramount to North Carolina's plan to run the same four-out, one-in style as last season with four guards on the court.

Though the scheme will remain the same, Hatchell wants her team to play much faster than it did a year ago. She has placed an emphasis on scoring on the fast break and out-hustling opposing teams.

"We need to be at a 10 or 11 at all times," Watts said. "We're going to press and trap and just play up and down."

This increased tempo should help the Tar Heels make up for a lack of experience in the frontcourt.

Redshirt senior forward Hillary Fuller — who sat out last season with an achilles injury — is UNC's only frontcourt player with collegiate experience.

Though the additions of first-year forwards Emily Sullivan and Alyssa Okoene provide Hatchell with interesting options up front, Fuller will be expected to



DTH/GABI PALACIO

Sophomore guard Stephanie Watts (5) defends during the game against Elizabeth City State.

carry the majority of the load for the unit.

Fuller's contributions will be especially important to this year's frontcourt given that North Carolina was, on

average, outrebounded by 2.3 boards per game last season.

"So we've got some size now and we've got some kids that are going to be really, really good," Hatchell said. "I

think we're gonna surprise — no, I don't think — I know we're going to surprise some people."

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Roundtable discussion of the season's biggest questions

After reaching the national title game in 2015-16, the No. 6 North Carolina men's basketball team enters this season without its top two stars but with similar expectations. Sports editor C Jackson Cowart and assistant sports editors Blake Richardson and Jeremy Vernon debate the biggest questions heading into this season.

Most pivotal player?

CC: This team will go as far as Joel Berry takes it. The junior guard was quietly the Tar Heels' best player in the brightest moments a year ago, and the coaches have

anointed Berry as the team leader this season — and why shouldn't they? He is UNC's best 3-point shooter, top passer, most adept scorer in the lane and off the dribble, surest free-throw shooter and most consistent offensive threat. Nobody is as indispensable to the team as Berry.

BR: Between Justin Jackson's length, athleticism and trademark floater, it's clear he has potential. Jackson needs to make the mental breakthrough necessary to capitalize on that, but what if he does? The Tar Heels should have a good season, but with an explosive Jackson, they have a shot at greatness.

JV: The wild card for this team is Kennedy Meeks. You know what you're going to get with most of the roster, but Meeks can outperform or not live up to expectations in any given game. If we're to believe his teammates, Meeks has gotten stronger and more explosive. If that's true, he could be a 15-and-10 guy for the Tar Heels, and a safety valve if Isaiah Hicks fouls out midway through the second half of every game.

Biggest unknown?

CC: What happens if UNC runs out of frontcourt players? Hicks is notoriously poor

at committing fouls, and Meeks has struggled to stay on the floor. But with only four players capable of seeing time in the frontcourt, the Tar Heels are dangerously thin down low. One bad break could cripple the stable of big men.

BR: Who is going to take Brice Johnson's rebound load? Hicks seems the natural successor but his foul trouble leaves uncertainty. With Johnson's rebound total (416) more than double Hicks' (185) last season, every big man needs to improve for UNC to compete on the glass.

JV: Who's playing the two?

We assume Theo Pinson will return to the starting role once he gets healthy, but who will fill in for the time being? Nate Britt, Brandon Robinson and Kenny Williams are all viable options, but if no one steps up, nonconference play could be tougher than expected for UNC.

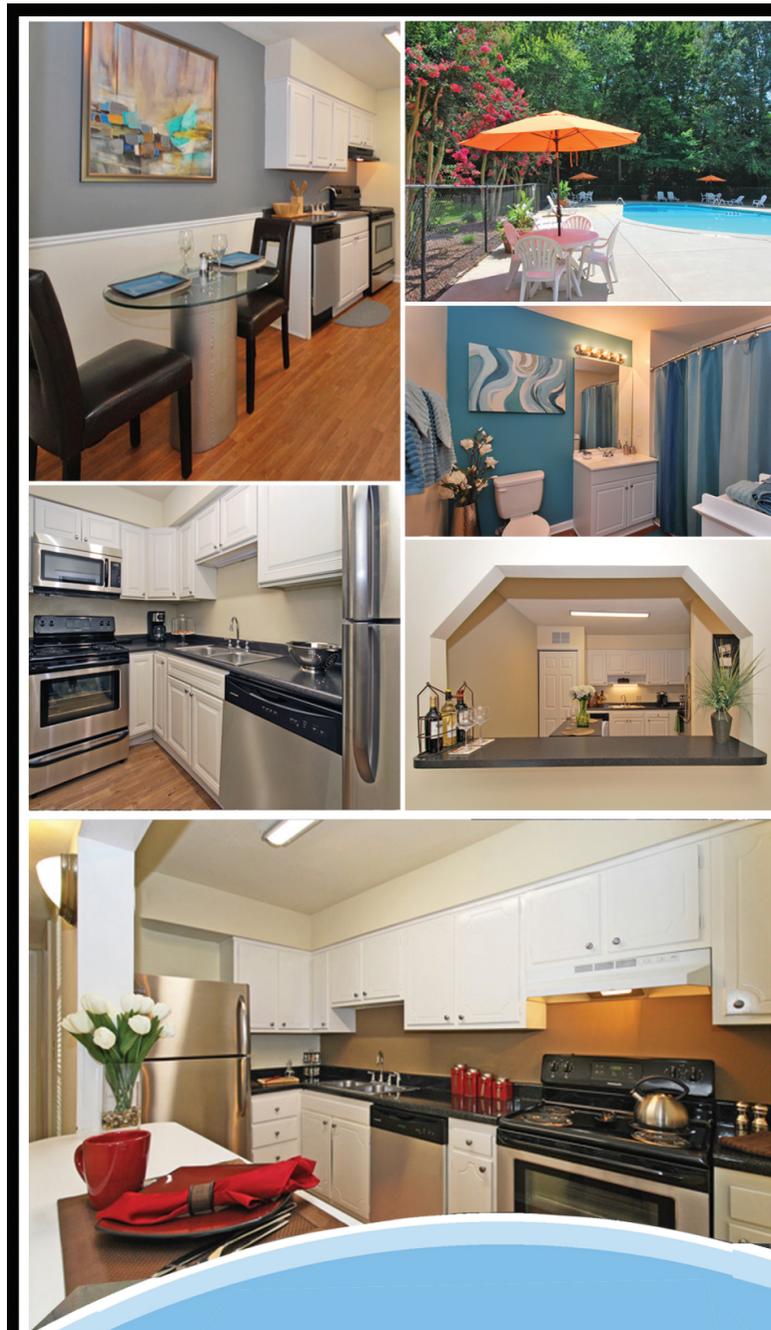
How far will they go?

CC: Elite Eight. The Tar Heels could cut down the nets or pack up after the Sweet 16, depending on how the upper-classmen progress. I'll split the difference and say UNC gets tripped up just outside the Final Four, doomed by

foul trouble and a poor shooting night.

BR: Final Four. UNC can go far with skill and Roy Williams' leadership. But don't forget three national championship starters are returning with plenty of experience off the bench. UNC knows what it takes to make a deep tournament run, and I expect that to pay off.

JV: Sweet 16. UNC has the talent to go all the way, but there are some obvious cracks in the armor. Without a reliable big down low, UNC might struggle against top teams. And if Hicks fouls out, it will make things much worse.



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