

VILLANOVA



2003-04

P r e v i e w



Lessons of 2002-03 Will Serve the Young Cats Well in 2003-04

Through all the upbeat moments of his maiden voyage as Villanova's head coach in 2001-02, Jay Wright always politely flashed a yellow caution light to those convinced the Wildcats needed only to step across a threshold to immediate prosperity.

"We're building a program here for the long term," Wright said then. "When you do that, you understand that it doesn't often happen overnight."

A year ago cautionary words had the feel of cold water tossed on a warm fire. With four starters returning from a 19-13 squad that nearly climbed into the NCAA Tournament and four of the nation's most highly touted freshman joining the party, what wasn't to like? Indeed, Villanova found itself included in some preseason top 25 polls as a buzz built.

By the end of January all of that seemed well justified. Villanova got off to its best start in Big East Conference play in 20 years by winning its first five games in league play. The Wildcats were playing their best basketball of the season and owned a 12-6 record as February dawned.

However, the final seven weeks of the season brought trials. The tendinitis in Jason Fraser's knees grew worse and his effectiveness as the backbone of Villanova's interior defense sank. By the end of the month he was on the bench in street clothes, his season ended by cranky knees and a stress reaction in his foot.

In early March the Wildcats' on-court problems were compounded by revelations of the misuse of a telephone access code by 12 members of the men's basketball team. Suspensions were levied that reduced the Villanova roster to seven active players, including two walk-ons, for the final three games of the season. Though the 'Cats reached the National Invitation Tournament, giving Villanova its ninth postseason appearance in the last 10 years, it was an odd end to a campaign that once was overflowing with promise.

"Obviously it was a very tough season at the end for us," stated Wright. "But I was proud of the way our guys handled a difficult situation. We talk about attitude often in this program and this was a chance for our guys to demonstrate their character. They did that and will be stronger for the experience."

The issue of those suspensions will impact the 2003-04 campaign as well, at least in the early stages. A total of five Wildcats have suspension time to serve: Chris Charles, Curtis Sumpter and Derrick Snowden must sit out three games while senior Andreas Bloch will be sidelined for five games and junior Marcus Austin for eight contests.

Yet in the face of that and the loss of graduates Gary Buchanan, Andrew Sullivan and Ricky Wright, there is still much to like about the 2003-04 Villanova Wildcats.

"We made a step in the Big East, going from 7-9 the previous season to 8-8 last season," said Jay Wright. "To us, that's an important barometer of how we are doing — our record in our own conference. We started to see some progress with our guys learning to play on the road. And our young guys got a lot of experience, which should be a big help to them this year."

The first order of business is to replace the 1-2 scoring punch of Buchanan and Ricky Wright. Both were proven Big East scorers. Sullivan was a versatile defender who earned the trust of the coaching staff to check the opponent's most dangerous offensive threats.

"It's difficult to replace Rick, who was an effective low-post scorer," said Jay

Wright. "Andrew gave us a defender and rebounder who always played hard. And Gary is one of the best shooters I have ever been around.

"We will miss their experience and leadership."

Yet Jay Wright likes the makeup of his roster. Seven of the nine men who figure to see the most minutes this winter are underclassmen. Many of those underclassmen gained valuable experience in 2002-03 and the hope is that will allow them to overcome some early hurdles.

One of those barriers is the uncertainty surrounding Snowden, the Wildcats' most battle-tested performer.

In many ways, Snowden was Villanova's most consistently effective player late in the season. His 108 assists led the team (3.5 apg) and his turnovers dropped from 120 in 2001-02 to 64 in 2002-03. The Baltimore native connected on 432 of his 3-point field goal attempts and led the 'Cats in minutes played (29.6 per outing).

Snowden closed the year with an 8.6 ppg scoring average.

However, Snowden underwent surgery on his left knee in late August to repair a torn anterior cruciate ligament. There is no target date for his return and it is possible he could miss the entire 2003-04 campaign. Yet there is also a chance he could make it back to the lineup this season.

"Derrick is our leader and we will miss him on the court," says Jay Wright. "But I know how dedicated he is to the rehabilitation and we will monitor his situation as we go along."

Fortunately, the backcourt offers quality alternatives as Snowden mends.

Randy Foye became Villanova's primary quarterback on offense as a rookie in 2002-03. At 10.3 ppg, he is the 'Cats top returning scorer but Jay Wright is convinced that the 6-3 Newark, N.J., native has only begun to tap into his extensive toolbox, especially at the offensive end.

"I thought Randy did an outstanding job of running our team last year," Jay Wright noted. "He sacrificed some of his own ability to score by focusing on getting the other guys involved. With the addition of Mike Nardi at point guard, I think Randy has a chance to show more of his offensive game and continue the improvement he made defensively."

Allan Ray, another sophomore, shined as well in his debut. A slashing scorer, Ray can pull up for jumpers or navigate the forest of tall arms near the basket. The Bronx, N.Y., native averaged 25 minutes, 9.9 points, and 2.5 rebounds per game off the bench in 2002-03.

"Villanova fans saw the kind of tremendous toughness and great attitude Allan brings to the floor each night," noted Jay Wright. "His ability to get to the rim or make jumpers will be a major asset for us."



Randy Foye



Foye appears locked into a starting assignment. Ray and Nardi could also join him if Wright elects to go with a 3-guard set. Even if that isn't the way the Wildcats open the game, you can expect to see plenty of the three guard attack.

Another reason for that is the arrival of Nardi, who succeeded Foye as New Jersey's High School Prep Player of the Year. At 6-0 Nardi is a pure point guard from St. Patrick's (N.J.) High School who offers an excellent grasp of fundamentals and a sharp shooting eye from deep.

"Mike brings us leadership on and off the floor," said Jay Wright. "He is a self-motivated gym rat who is a winner and demands that of everyone else he plays with."

Nardi will be in the mix of guards expected to see significant action.

The frontcourt situation is less clear.

One key issue centers on Fraser. The 6-10 product of Amityville (N.Y.) H.S. endured a bumpy freshman campaign plagued by knee and foot woes. The 2002 McDonald's All-American underwent surgery on both knees to remove cartilage on April 9 and the early portion of his rehabilitation has gone well. But he isn't slated to return to the hardwood until September and it may take him time to regain the form he demonstrated only in flashes during the latter part of the campaign.

"Villanova has not seen the real Jason Fraser," stated Jay Wright. "He demonstrated incredible heart and courage last year. Jason was in pain every day and continued to give his best effort. I look forward to Jason's opportunity to show what he can do when not battling injury."

Assuming his recovery continues to go smoothly, Fraser will return to his spot as a defensive linchpin as the starting center. Long and lean, Fraser owns terrific hands and contributed 7.1 points and 6.3 rebounds last winter.

One of the two forward slots belongs to Curtis Sumpter. After a tentative start to the campaign as he adjusted from the role of high school post performer to college wing man, Sumpter prospered late in the season. He closed the campaign with a 23-point, nine rebound effort at Siena in the NIT and will be a wing fixture this season. At 6-7, he is effective both inside and outside.

"Curtis made the most improvement of any player we had last year," said Jay Wright. "He learned how to play on the perimeter and I'm looking forward to some big things from Curtis this year."

The power forward spot offers a variety of intriguing alternatives. Senior Andreas Bloch has toiled diligently to add muscle to his frame and is a 3-point shooting threat. Junior Marcus Austin, 6-9, exploded for 15 points and seven rebounds in a midseason win at Rutgers and brings good size to the arena.

"Andreas has come a long way in our program," said Jay Wright. "He earned playing time last year and is a threat on the perimeter."

"Marcus is a very intelligent player who is extremely coachable. He has a good feel for the game and can really help us with rebounding and defense."

There are two other intriguing candidates who figure to be in the playing rotation.

Chris Charles, 7-0, played spotty minutes as a freshman in 2001-02 and showed flashes of skill. However, two bouts with an irregular heartbeat, one in November and the other in March, sabotaged his season. The Milwaukee native sat out as a redshirt last winter.

Villanova At A Glance

2002-03 Record	15-16 Overall (9-4 H, 3-9 A, 3-3 N)
	8-8 Big East (5-3 H, 3-5 A)
Postseason	Lost to Siena, NIT Opening Round
Final Rankings	N/A
Head Coach	Jay Wright (Bucknell '83)
	Overall Record: 156-114 (578)
	VU Record: 34-29 (540)
	Big East Record: 15-17 (469)
Associate Head Coach	Fred Hill Jr. (Montclair State '81)
Assistant Coaches	Brett Gunning (UNLV '94), Ed Pinckney (Villanova '85)
Coordinator of Basketball Operations	Billy Lange (Rowan '94)
Lettermen Returning	11 (Three Starters)
Lettermen Lost	Four (Two Starters)
Newcomers	Two
Percentage of Scoring Returning	60.0 percent
Leading Returning Scorer	Randy Foye, 10.3 ppg
Percentage of Rebounding Returning	62.9 percent
Leading Returning Rebounder	Jason Fraser, 6.3 rpg
Starters Returning (3)	G Derrick Snowden (Sr., 6-0, 160)
	G Randy Foye, So. (6-3, 185), F/C Jason Fraser, So. (6-10, 220)
Starters Lost (2)	G Gary Buchanan (Gr., 6-3, 196),
	F Ricky Wright (Gr., 6-7, 215)
Other Lettermen Returning (8)	F Marcus Austin (Jr., 6-9, 231)
	F Andreas Bloch (Sr., 6-8, 215), F Chris Charles (R-So., 7-0, 215)
	G Michael Claxton (Fr., 6-2, 175), G Baker Dunleavy (R-Fr., 6-5, 200),
	G Tom Grace (Sr., 6-0, 150), G Allan Ray (So., 6-2, 175),
	F Curtis Sumpter (So., 6-7, 205)
Other Lettermen Lost (2)	G Lou Ruskey (Gr., 6-0, 180)
	F Andrew Sullivan (Gr., 6-7, 215)
Newcomers (2)	G Mike Nardi (Fr., 6-0, 170), F Will Sheridan (Fr., 6-9, 225)
Personnel by Class	Seniors (3) Andreas Bloch, Tom Grace, Derrick Snowden;
	Junior (1) Marcus Austin; Sophomores (6) Chris Charles, Michael Claxton,
	Jason Fraser, Allan Ray, Curtis Sumpter; Freshmen (4) Ross Condon,
	Baker Dunleavy, Mike Nardi, Will Sheridan
Personnel by Height	7-0 (1) Chris Charles; 6-10 (1) Jason Fraser
	6-9 (1) Marcus Austin; 6-8 (2) Andreas Bloch, Will Sheridan;

"Chris took full advantage of his redshirt season," stated Jay Wright. "He got stronger, grew more confident and became hungrier as a player."

Another attractive option is 6-8 freshman Will Sheridan, a product of Bear, Del.

"The thing about Will Sheridan is that he is a skilled frontcourt player," noted Jay Wright. "He can put the ball on the floor and is an outstanding rebounder."

Also on the scene are a trio of guards: Baker Dunleavy, 6-6, who redshirted in 2002-03; 6-2 sophomore Mike Claxton; and 6-0 senior Tom Grace.

"We've made some progress and I'm looking forward to seeing us continue down that path," stated Jay Wright. "We are young but a lot of those guys received great experience last year. We're hopeful that will help them mature a little more quickly than they otherwise might have."

In many ways, it was a trying 2002-03.

But the most durable foundation for success is often forged from just such difficulties.



The 2003-04 Villanova Wildcats. Front Row (L-R): Associate Head Coach Fred Hill, Michael Claxton, Mike Nardi, Randy Foye, Derrick Snowden, Allan Ray, Tom Grace, Ross Condon, Director of Basketball Operations Billy Lange. Back Row: Graduate Manager Mike Cacace, Assistant Coach Brett Gunning, Baker Dunleavy, Curtis Sumpter, Will Sheridan, Marcus Austin, Head Coach Jay Wright, Chris Charles, Jason Fraser, Andreas Bloch, Assistant Coach Ed Pinckney, Administrative Intern Jason Crafton.

2003-2004 Villanova Rosters

Alphabetical Roster

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.-Exp	Hometown (High School)
44	Marcus Austin	F	6-9	231	Jr.-2L	Irvington, N.J. (St. Patrick's)
1	Andreas Bloch	F	6-8	215	Sr.-3L	Wurmlingen, Germany (Fresno Central)
21	Chris Charles	F	7-0	220	R-So.-1L	Milwaukee, Wisc. (Crispus Attucks)
5	Michael Claxton	G	6-2	198	So.-1L	Hempstead, N.Y. (Christ the King)
4	Ross Condon	G	5-11	180	Fr.-HS	Springfield, Va. (Potomac School)
22	Baker Dunleavy	G	6-5	205	R-Fr.	Portland, Ore. (Lawrenceville Prep)
2	Randy Foye	G	6-3	185	So.-1L	Newark, N.J. (East Side)
20	Jason Fraser	F/C	6-10	220	So.-HS	Amityville, N.Y. (Amityville)
10	Tom Grace	G	6-0	150	Sr.-2L	Catonsville, Md. (Cardinal Gibbons)
12	Mike Nardi	G	6-0	170	Fr.-HS	Woodbridge, N.J. (St. Patrick's)
14	Allan Ray	G	6-2	175	So.-1L	Bronx, N.Y. (St. Raymond)
50	Will Sheridan	F	6-8	230	Fr.-HS	Bear, Del. (Sanford School)
3	Derrick Snowden	G	6-0	160	Sr.-3L	Baltimore, Md. (Archbishop Spalding)
34	Curtis Sumpter	F	6-7	205	So.-1L	Brooklyn, N.Y. (Bishop Loughlin)

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Head Coach: Jay Wright; Associate Head Coach: Fred Hill; Assistant Coaches: Brett Gunning, Ed Pinckney; Coordinator