

2007•2008 USC Outlook

2006•2007 OVERALL: 25-12

2006•2007 PAC-10: 11-7 (T-3RD)

The Trojans are coming off a special season in which they set a school record for wins, reached the Pac-10 Conference Tournament finals, advanced to the NCAA Sweet 16 and unveiled the spectacular Galen Center. USC is looking to continue the momentum in the 2007-08 season and has the coach to accomplish the feat in Tim Floyd.

Floyd has a 42-25 record in his first two seasons as USC's basketball coach, more wins in the first two seasons than any other Trojan head basketball coach. He guided the Trojans into the NCAA Tournament for the first time since the 2001-02 season and advanced to the 2007 Sweet 16 with wins over Arkansas and Texas, before falling to No. 4 North Carolina. During his first year as USC's head coach, Floyd guided the Trojans to 17 wins, their most wins in a season since 2002. The year before Floyd arrived at USC, the Trojans had a 12-17 record and finished in last place in the Pac-10.

Last year's recruiting class produced 2007 Pac-10 All-Freshman Team selection Taj Gibson as well as key contributors Daniel Hackett and Dwight Lewis. This season USC claims the No. 1-ranked men's basketball recruiting class after the regular signing period by ESPN.com and Hoopscoop.com, highlighted by the electric O.J. Mayo. USC will need everyone to contribute, as the team's top three scorers from last season - Nick Young, Gabe Pruitt and Lodrick Stewart - have departed to the NBA or graduated.

"We lost more scoring than anybody in the Pac-10, probably more experience with the graduation of Lodrick Stewart and early departures of Nick Young and Gabe Pruitt. They were our top three scorers, nearly averaging a combined 44 points

last season. At the same time, we remain encouraged with our returning team and the recruiting class we have."

The top returner is 6-9 sophomore forward Taj Gibson, who averaged 12.2 points and 8.7 rebounds and set the USC freshman rebounds and blocked shots record. He was one of just five freshmen to record 11 or more double-doubles during the season, with two of the others being the No. 1 and No. 2 picks in the 2007 NBA Draft -- Greg Oden and Kevin Durant.

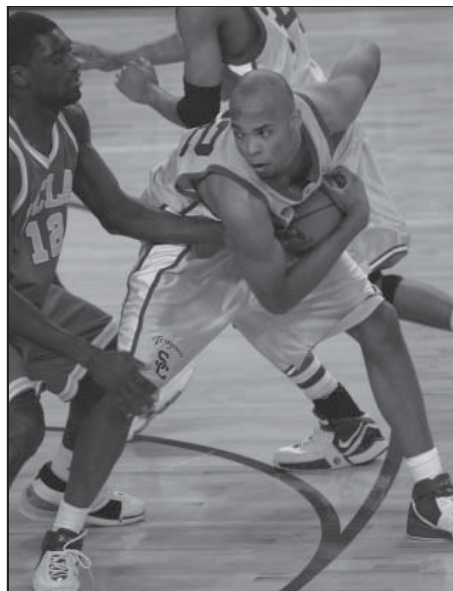
"Taj demonstrated a skill set last season with his ability to take people off the dribble, shoot the mid-range jumper and his tremendous rebounding instincts," said Floyd. "Yet, he still has a tremendous upside. With the addition of more muscle during the offseason and with the experience he has gained, he could develop into one of the best big men in the country."

The Pac-10 promises to be one of, if not the toughest conference again as 15 of the top 20 rebounders in the league are returning, as are 12 of the top 20 scorers from a year ago. Add to that some of the top recruits in the country and you realize the challenge that lies ahead.

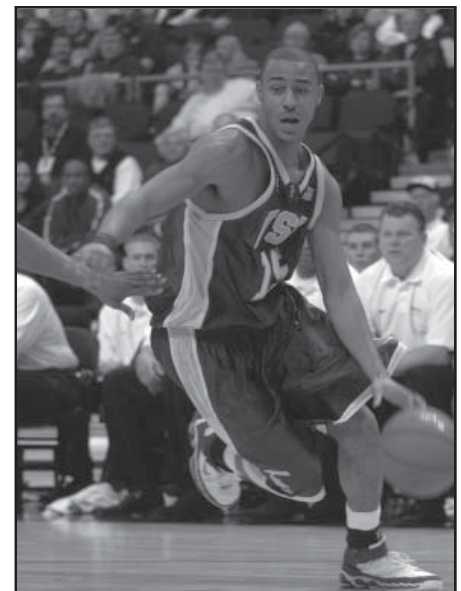
"We took on an ambitious schedule to go along with the always tough Pac-10 games with a different team in mind, but I'm not going to sell our guys short, even though we lost a great deal," said Floyd. "A year ago we rotated guys into our fifth starter spot with this in mind, so Daniel Hackett started 16 games, Dwight Lewis started 11 and RouSean Cromwell and Keith Wilkinson started five each."



Daniel Hackett



Taj Gibson



Dwight Lewis

2007-2008 OUTLOOK CONTINUED

In the frontcourt, Keith Wilkinson continues to improve and gain minutes on the court. The 6-10 junior forward played in 33 games and averaged 1.7 points and 2.2 rebounds, while demonstrating the ability to hit the outside shot and stretch defenses.

The other returning big man is 6-11 forward RouSean Cromwell. He was unable to workout much before last season due to injuries and averaged 2.3 points and 2.2 rebounds per game. He has been working hard all summer and the Trojans are hopeful that he can make a big leap this season.

"In the backcourt, obviously we will have to rely on Daniel Hackett, Dwight Lewis and Kyle Austin to sure up the loss of our perimeter," noted Floyd.

As an early-entry freshman last season, 6-5 guard Daniel Hackett was a key member of the squad, at first running the point while Pruitt was ineligible and then making spot starts and taking on the tough defensive assignments, including guarding 6-10 2007 NCAA Player of the Year Kevin Durant in the NAAs while scoring a career-high 20 points. He played with the Italian national team and the Italian Under-20 team during the summer which should excel his development. Last season Hackett averaged 5.3 points and 2.9 rebounds, while finishing second on the team with 103 assists.

Sophomore 6-5 guard Dwight Lewis also figures to see significant minutes. He demonstrated his ability to score, reaching double figures in scoring eight times while averaging less than half a game played. Lewis scored 5.8 points and 2.1 rebounds per game, while finishing fourth on the team with 20 three-pointers made.

Another sophomore the Trojans maybe counting on is Kyle Austin. The 6-7 swingman scored 1.4 points and grabbed 1.6 rebounds per game while appearing in 17 contests.

"Kyle is a guy the coaching staff had confidence in all year as a young freshman," said Floyd. "He made as much progress as anyone on the team. He has the ability to shoot and rebound it, is a very good passer and plays with great effort."

There is a good chance that the Trojans recruiting class will be called upon to make up a great deal of the 44 points per game lost by the departures of Young, Pruitt and Stewart. Leading the way should be 6-5 guard O.J. Mayo, considered by many to be the top high school player in America last season. He is a McDonald's and Parade All-American, the 2007 EA Sports Player of the Year and the No. 1 ranked 2007 recruit by Scout.com.

"O.J. can play the point or the two-guard position. Given our lack of returning firepower, I'm not sure what his role will be, but we will probably use him at both positions. I love his poise, instincts, maturity, toughness, understanding of the game and ability to make baskets."

"We are really excited about our entire recruiting class," added Floyd. "We feel we have fortified our team. One of the questions we don't have an answer to yet is will we have the ability to score and shoot it from the outside like last year, when we were second in scoring and led the conference in field goal percentage in Pac-10 games."

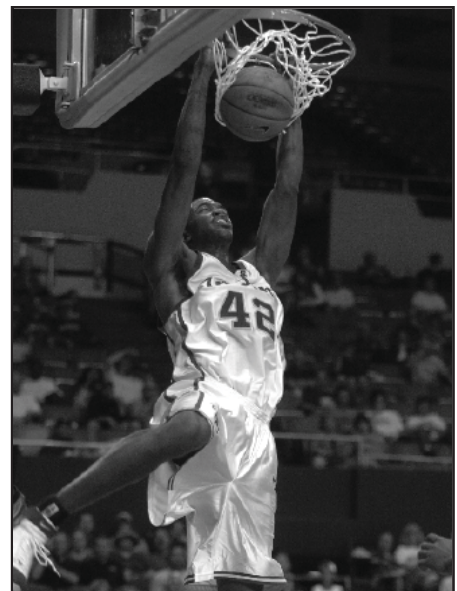
One of the key members of the highly-rated recruiting class is 6-8 wing Davon Jefferson. He was widely regarded as a top 10 recruit two years ago and as a top five recruit among fifth-year prep school basketball players a year ago.



Keith Wilkinson



O.J. Mayo



RouSean Cromwell

“Davon is a versatile player,” said Floyd. “He seems equally comfortable whether he is facing the basket or posting up which will give us the opportunity to take advantage of different matchups. He has an uncanny ability to score and rebound the ball.”

Guard Marcus Simmons could have just as big of an impact on the defensive end. The 6-6 guard was one of the top players in the state of Louisiana and is regarded as one of the top high school defenders in the country. He averaged 18 points and eight rebounds his senior year at Peabody High School and earned All-State honors.

Perhaps contributing right away on the frontline is 7-0 forward Mamadou Diarra of Stoneridge Prep in Simi Valley, Calif. He averaged 8.1 points and 6.4 rebounds in his senior season.

“Mamadou has a great ability to not only jump, but jump quickly off the floor and uses that ability to block shots and get rebounds,” said Floyd. “He is more advanced than a lot of Africa-born players (Mali) because he has played in the U.S. for a few years. In one AAU game, he made seven three-pointers, so he can score from the perimeter or the post.”

His teammate from Stoneridge Prep, 5-10 guard Angelo Johnson also will join the Trojans for the 2007-08 season. Johnson is a lightning-quick point guard that knows how to run an offense and could see significant playing time.

Rounding out the six-man recruiting class is 6-4 guard James Dunleavy from Harvard-Westlake in North Hollywood, Calif. He is a heady ballplayer like you might expect, being that he is the son of Clippers’ head coach Mike Dunleavy.

Another player who is returning to action this season after redshirting the 2006-07 season is Kasey Cunningham, a 6-7 forward from Cibola High in Albuquerque, N.M. His team went 21-7 and finished the season ranked sixth in the state of New Mexico his senior season. Cunningham averaged 22 points, 15 rebounds and six blocks and led Cibola to a 13-1 record before suffering a season-ending knee injury.

“Kasey was positioned as a power forward as a senior in high school and did well,” said Floyd. “He spent his entire redshirt year working on his outside shot and ball handling. His strength is rebounding, defense, scoring within 15 feet of the basket and effort. He is a great competitor and will really be another great addition to the freshman class.”

Other returning players for the Trojans will be Ryan Wetherell and Terence Green.

The 5-10 Wetherell is another perimeter player that showed promise last season. He walked on to the team out of Canada and demonstrated a hard-nosed attitude and a burst of speed.

Green, a 5-10 junior guard, appeared in four games in his first season at USC after transferring from Irvine Valley College.

“We should be able to have a better ability to play inside and outside with Gibson, Diarra, Cromwell, Wilkinson, Jefferson, Cunningham and Austin this season,” said Floyd. “We are young and may be searching for an identity early on in the season, but there is no question that the talent is there to be very competitive in our league once again.”