

PREVIEW

Sophomore Dani Kell



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As the William and Mary women's basketball team prepares for the upcoming 2006-07 campaign, it would be difficult to argue that there has ever been a more exciting time to be a Tribe fan. A season ago, the Green and Gold earned the nation's second-best turnaround with the ninth-youngest team en route to recording the program's best record since the 1998-99 season. Additionally, the College's 11 conference victories set a school record, besting the previous mark of nine.

Individually, the accolades poured in as well, as Head Coach **Debbie Taylor** was tabbed as the CAA Coach of the Year, while sophomore forward **Kyra Kaylor** was honored as the CAA Player of the Year. Freshman **Dani Kell** earned all-conference honors on the all-rookie team, becoming the seventh W&M player in the past seven years to earn the distinction. Also picking up all-league honors was starting point guard **Sarah Stroh**, who was recognized for her success in the classroom by being named to the CAA All-Academic Team.

With four starters returning from last season, including the trio of all-CAA honorees, the Tribe has positioned itself as a team on the verge of becoming a fixture among the conference's upper echelon.

"Last season's success was a big step for our program," Taylor said. "We have established ourselves as a contender, one of the top five teams in the CAA. With so many players returning, we have a wealth of experience now and we are entering the season with a lot of confidence.

"We talk about making winning an attitude, and perhaps that was the biggest step the program made last year. The expecta-



2005-06 CAA Player of the Year **Kyra Kaylor**

tion this season is to continue improving, collectively and individually, so that we can make that next step in conference play. The foundation has been laid, and we are starting in a good place, which is really exciting for us."

With increased optimism and elevated expectations, the Tribe must maximize its strengths to achieve its goals. In addition to the team's athletic prowess, Taylor cites the squad's work ethic and acumen as key ingredients for building upon its success.

"This may be one of the smartest teams I have had," Taylor said. "Our team has an incredibly high basketball IQ. That is exciting because we do a lot of things that are motion oriented offensively, so there is a lot of reading defense. In addition to their intelligence, I have been impressed with the players' work ethic. I think the team is very excited about the upcoming season, and I am confident that will propel us to start well and keep improving."

Undoubtedly, much of this season's fortunes will be determined by the quartet of returning starters. In addition to Kaylor, Stroh and Kell, junior **Devin James** rounds out the group, which combined to average 43.9 points and 23.9 rebounds per contest. Those numbers represented 71 percent of the total scoring and 61 percent of the rebounding from a season ago.

"We have a lot of experience in our four starters," Taylor said. "They have weathered the battles and are experienced warriors, and they are what is going to lead this team. They communicate well and understand how to read each other well. They are going to provide us with a lot of stability and strong leadership, and that is what fosters success."

Also expected to vie for significant minutes are senior **Katie Neumer** and sophomores **Katie Tausanovitch** and **Courtney Portell**. Neumer will serve as one of W&M's tri-captains, along with Kaylor and Stroh, and is one of the team's best long-range shooters. Tausanovitch is a force in the paint and has the potential to earn a starting nod at the center position. Portell has a tremendous work ethic and, like Tausanovitch, could also work her way into the starting five.

Joining the talented group of returnees is a four-member incoming freshman class that will provide increased athleticism and depth. Their abilities should translate into contributions that will play an important role in the Green and Gold's success.

"The freshmen are very athletic as a group, which will be beneficial as we pick up our transition game," Taylor said. "They all run the floor and rebound well, and they are all intense competitors. As the season



Senior **Sarah Stroh**

progresses, I expect several of them to play significant minutes. Each one brings a different strength that will benefit the team."

Backcourt

Entering the season, the backcourt appears to be an area of strength for the Tribe, as Stroh, James and Kell highlight the unit. Complete with talent, experience, savvy and work ethic, the group is expected to provide leadership and steady play for the squad.

After playing a team-high 34.1 minutes per contest and starting in all 28 games at the point guard spot last season, Stroh will once again be the Tribe's primary ball handler. A year ago, she ranked fifth in the conference in assists with 4.0 helpers per game and shot a team-best 74.1 percent from the charity stripe. Solid defensively, she also swiped nearly a steal per contest with a 0.9 average.

"Sarah is a solid player with great leadership," Taylor said. "To have a senior point guard with her confidence and leadership abilities, that is what coaches love. While it is often overlooked, she may be our best defensive player. She does a great job on the ball and consistently gets back on defense. She is the core of our defense and the center of our team. We will play as well as she plays, and she will be on the floor a lot."

The two-guard position is slotted for James, who returns after averaging 31.6 minutes per game last season. An extraordinary athlete, she ranked fifth in the CAA in steals per game (1.86). Also talented at the offensive end of the floor, she was second on the team in scoring with 11.3 points per contest, while hauling in 5.2 boards per

outing. In just two seasons, she has already totaled 600 points, 301 rebounds and 118 steals.

"Devin is our best athlete and our best one-on-one scorer," Taylor said. "Devin can get to the rim, and she is a very good defender. We are really looking for her to step up and be a big player for us this year, and this could be a breakout season for her. She has been very good in her first two years, but this season we are looking for her to be great."

Another versatile and highly talented player, Kell is expected to see significant time on the perimeter, and also has the ability to play in the post. The CAA All-Rookie selection started all 28 games last season, averaging 30.3 minutes per contest. Her averages of 10.1 points and 5.6 rebounds per contest ranked her third and second on the team, respectively.

"Dani is such a versatile player with a great understanding of the game," Taylor said. "She is very talented around the basket, but we are looking for her to shoot and score a lot more from the perimeter this season. She is also a great passer who has the ability to read defenses and see the floor extremely well. She had some big scoring games last year while playing out of position. Dani just has a knack for the game. We are expecting great things from her this season."

With limited playing time during her career, Neumer is expected to see increased minutes during her senior season. A talented long-range shooter, she was 43.5 percent from beyond the arc as a sophomore and could provide an extra scoring punch off the bench.



2005-06 CAA All-Rookie Selection Dani Kell

"Katy is a candidate to be our first player off the bench, and a lot of coaches will tell you that is one of the most important spots on the team," Taylor said. "She is our best shooter and understands the system, so we know she is always going to do the right thing. She has experience, a great work ethic and good leadership. I love watching Katy play because she has such a great attitude and strong work ethic. She is a great teammate."

Like Neumer, Portell saw limited action last season but figures to earn increased time this year. An accurate shooter, she connected on better than 47 percent of her attempts from three-point range as a freshman. She is likely to spell Stroh at the point as well as playing some at the two-guard spot.

"Courtney is a very smart player who spent a lot of time in the gym during the off-season," Taylor said. "She is a very good three-point shooter, a good defender and has a tremendous work ethic. We are really looking for her to step up and contribute this year."

Providing depth in the backcourt will be a trio of freshman, who come in with loads of athleticism and potential.

The most decorated player of the incoming class is **Kelly Heath**, who played at Suffield High School in Connecticut. A McDonald's All-America nominee in 2006, she was also tabbed as an honorable mention All-American by *Street and Smith's* in 2005. She earned an invitation to the ABC Elite Camp and was named to the "Top 100" by *Blue Star Basketball*. A prolific scorer, she finished her career with 1,399 points and broke Suffield's previous record of 1,345 that had stood for 20 years.

"Kelly is a great shooter and just has a knack for the game," Taylor said. "She is a smooth player who can handle the basketball, shoot and pass. Her basketball instinct is solid, and she has good size for a guard."

Robyn Barton joins the Tribe after a successful prep career at Lake Oswego High School in Oregon, where she helped her team to a fourth-place finish at the state tournament. Additionally, she earned an AAU state title as a member of the Oregon Xtreme. A talented all-around athlete, she lettered four times in track and field and three times in volleyball.

"Robyn is a very solid player who is extremely intelligent and coachable," Taylor said. "She picks up things quickly. She is an incredibly good athlete and will be an asset to our transition game. She has great perimeter scoring skills and is a good rebounder. She also has the potential to be a good defender because of her quickness. I have been very impressed with her so far."



Junior Devin James

Lindsey Moller rounds out the group and comes to the College after excelling at Longmont High School in Colorado. A first-team all-state selection as a senior, she finished her prep career with 1,042 points and served as her team's captain during her final two years.

"Lindsey is probably the fastest player on the team," Taylor said. "She is also one of the strongest players we have. She is a great defender, especially on the ball, and I think that is going to be her strong suit. She works extremely hard and is easy to coach, and I see her improving a lot. I am excited about her potential."

Frontcourt

While the frontcourt is led by one of the nation's best players and a top candidate for conference player of the year honors in Kaylor, the post enters the season with some question marks. The group features a number of talented but unproven players who must demonstrate they can make significant contributions.

"Kyra gives us a tremendous post presence, as she is one of the top scorers and rebounders in the country," Taylor said. "However, we do have some question marks in the post in terms of experience, but it could be the best part of our game if the players develop. We have a lot of youth in the interior, so a goal of ours is to continue improving our rebounding, and we have the talent to accomplish that."

One of best players to ever don the Green and Gold, Kaylor will look to improve upon what was one of the top seasons ever by a Tribe women's basketball player. In addition to being selected as the CAA Player of the Year, the Pittsburgh, Pa., native

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ranked fourth in the nation in rebounding (11.9 rpg) and 24th in scoring (18.9 ppg). She led the conference in both categories and established single-season school records for points (522) and boards (334). Her 21 double-doubles ranked tied for second nationally, and she enters the season needing just 48 points to become W&M's 11th 1,000-point scorer.

"Kyra is the toughest and most competitive player I have ever coached, and that is what makes her great," Taylor said. "There are very few players who work as hard as she does, and she is extremely self-driven to succeed. She is a great leader and has high expectations for not only herself but for those around her. She is a great player, a great teammate and a great leader."

Joining Kaylor in the post will be Tausanovitch, who begins her second season with the Tribe. While she saw limited action during her rookie season, she is expected to play significant minutes this year and has the potential to earn a starting spot.

"We are looking for her to be our staple in the paint," Taylor said. "She worked hard this summer and went to Pete Newell's post camp on the West Coast to further develop her game. She is a really smart player, and she understands the system well. Her skills around the basket are good and she has some range. Kate has matured, and I think she is ready to take on a significant role and is poised to have a very good season."

Hampered by injuries throughout her career, **Jalen Boone** returns for her senior season at center. While her minutes will be determined by her health, she will be relied upon to provide steady leadership.

"Jalen is a great rebounder and is a presence in the post," Taylor said. "Her athleticism makes her difficult to guard around the basket and she could be a force. Her senior leadership will play an important role in the success of our team this season."

After appearing in just one game last season, **Julianne Thomas-Drolet** should see more time on the hardwood during the upcoming campaign. With a year of adjusting to the collegiate game behind her, she is expected to make significant contributions coming off the bench this season.

"Julianne has gotten better and will provide us with some depth at the post," Taylor said. "She is very fundamental and learned a lot last season. She has gotten stronger, and I think she is ready to bring her experience to the floor this year. She can really score and has improved greatly in the last 12 months."

After being plagued by an achilles injury that forced her to use her redshirt season, **Lauren Aadland** returns as a key reserve. While her size makes her a natural fit in the



Senior Katy Neumer

post, she has the versatility to move to the perimeter when needed.

"We are looking to play her at the four spot, but she will play the three spot as well because she has perimeter skills," Taylor said. "She is a talented offensive player who can score from anywhere on the floor. We are excited to have her back this season."

Freshman **Tiffany Benson** also joins the mix of players who will compete for time in the post. A four-year letterwinner at perennial power Princess Anne High School in Virginia Beach, Benson was selected as the district defensive player of the year twice. An incredible shot blocker, she was also named an All-American at the U19 AAU national tournament in Florida.

"Tiffany comes from a very solid high school program," Taylor said. "She is a talented athlete with tremendous potential. She is a shot blocker and a rebounder, and we are going to develop her scoring skills. I anticipate she will get better and better and make a strong contribution to our team this season."

Schedule

The Tribe will play 29 games during the upcoming campaign, 13 of which will be played at Kaplan Arena at William and Mary Hall. In addition to 18 CAA match-ups, the Green and Gold's non-conference slate includes 11 foes, with contests against Virginia Tech, Richmond, Duquesne and North Texas.

Following an exhibition game against M.I. Express on Nov. 6, the College will begin the regular season with a pair of road contests. W&M will open with Maine on Nov. 11 and then make a short trip up I-64 to square off against Richmond five days later.

The Tribe's home opener comes on Nov. 19 against North Texas, a team that captured the Sun Belt Conference's West Division championship last season. Two days later, in-state foe Longwood travels to Williamsburg for a 7 p.m. contest at the Hall.

Following a road game versus High Point on Nov. 26, the Green and Gold will head to Blacksburg to face Virginia Tech on Nov. 28. Last season, the Hokies advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament before falling to eighth-ranked Connecticut.

The Tribe will then take a brief break from non-conference play and return to Williamsburg for a meeting with Towson on Dec. 3. Five days later, W&M hits the road again and will square off against Mount St. Mary's before hosting Howard on Dec. 10, which marks the final game before the exam period.

During the next two weeks, the Tribe will play just one contest, which will be at Norfolk State on Dec. 21.

With the winter break and exams behind them, the Green and Gold will resume play with a home game versus Radford on Dec. 29. The Tribe then heads to Pittsburgh, Pa., Kaylor's hometown, for a contest against Duquesne on Jan. 2, which will conclude the non-conference portion of the College's ledger.

The Tribe returns to CAA action when it travels across the state of Pennsylvania and faces Drexel on Jan. 4. Three days later, George Mason visits the Hall before UNC Wilmington comes to town on Jan. 11. The following week, W&M heads to James Madison on Jan. 14 and Delaware on Jan. 18. After returning for a home game against Northeastern on Jan. 21, the Tribe will take to the road again for match-ups with Georgia State on Jan. 25 and Old Dominion on Jan. 28.

W&M will begin the final month of regular season with a pair of home games against Drexel on Feb. 1 and James Madison on Feb. 4. Three road dates then await the Tribe, as the team travels to Hofstra on Feb. 8, UNC Wilmington on Feb. 11 and Virginia Commonwealth on Feb. 15. Following two home games against Old Dominion on Feb. 18 and Georgia State on Feb. 22, the Tribe heads to George Mason on Feb. 21 before closing out the regular season at the Hall against Virginia Commonwealth on March 1.

The CAA Tournament will be held in Newark, Del., and is scheduled for March 8-11.