



2008-09 PREVIEW



Tribe

JOHN'S
THE Tribe
BEAT TEAM
-72

KELLY HEATH '10

Coming off of the best three-year stretch in school history, the William and Mary women's basketball team looks to be one short step away from competing at the highest echelons of the Colonial Athletic Association, and expects to challenge for the conference title in 2008-09.

While the loss of Kyra Kaylor '07 and Devin James '08, both among the top players in the program's history, will be significant, head coach **Debbie Taylor '86** and her staff have brought in four outstanding recruits to bolster the 10 returning athletes. Add to the mix the fact that Taylor has put together a challenging early-season non-conference slate that looks to springboard the Tribe into an advantageous position when CAA play begins in January.



"I think it's going to be a very different season for a team that has been centered around two of the best players in school history for the last four or five years," said Taylor. "It's very much a situation where everybody has a shot at playing time. It's going to be a very new look, a very different kind of team, which everyone is really excited about."

Leading the way for the College will be a pair of senior guards, **Courtney Portell** and **Dani Kell**. A deadly shooter beyond the three-point line, Portell came to the fore last season by both taking, and making, more three-pointers than anyone in school history. The staff expects her to con-

tinue her growth this year as one of the focal points of the offense. Kell was outstanding as a freshman and was well on her way to an equally impressive follow-up campaign when a torn ACL abruptly ended her sophomore season. Despite being limited by the injury, she was still a valued competitor last year as a junior. The coming year will see her look to reclaim her position as one of the pre-eminent players on the wing and in the small forward spot in the CAA after another offseason spent honing her strength and skills.

Also expected to expand her presence on the court with the graduation of Kaylor and James is junior **Tiffany Benson**, arguably the top interior defender in the CAA. An all-rookie selection after ranking among the league leaders in blocks as a freshman, Benson earned all-defensive honors in 2007-08 while ranking among the top four players in the CAA in three different statistical categories, including offensive rebounds (first), blocks (second), and total rebounds (fourth).

All told, the 2007-08 squad individually and as a team set or tied 20 school records, and made Taylor the winningest coach in school history with its 75-57 victory over Georgia State on January 17. Four players return who averaged more than 20 minutes per contest, and returning athletes accounted for 58.5 percent of the Tribe's offense (74.3% of the three-point production).

In addition to the nine letterwinners on the roster, Taylor welcomes four true freshmen and one athlete back from a medical redshirt to the program with some of the best prep credentials ever seen in one recruiting class at the College.

GUARDS

One of the hallmarks of a Taylor-coached team is outstanding guard play, and this year looks to be no different with a deep and experienced corp of perimeter players. Led by Portell, the backcourt features five veterans and three freshmen who are equally proficient on both the offensive and defensive ends of the hardwood.

A natural shooting guard, Portell has also trained to be able to take over the point for the Tribe at a moment's notice. When depth allowed her to return to the wing more often in 2007-08, Portell responded with a long-range barrage of historic proportions, tying the school-mark for most three-point shots made in a game with seven in each of three consecutive contests last December and finishing with the most triples made (72) and attempted (193) in a single season. Ranking second in the CAA with a .373 shooting percentage behind the arc and third with an average of 2.4 three-point shots made per game, Portell enters her final season as one of the top shooters in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

"Courtney's just such a great team player," said Taylor. "Obviously, her ability to shoot the three is something that's very noticeable, but she brings an incredible intelligence and work ethic to the defensive end of the floor. She's probably one of our best defenders, just a really really smart defensive player who understands the game incredibly well, and is also a very good passer. When she has the open shot, she obviously is going to knock it down, but she also has worked a lot on her shorter game, her pull-up game, and hopefully we'll see a little bit more of a variety of shots from her this year. She's going to be one of our team leaders, which is great because she's one of our hardest-working kids, and she's a proven at this level."

The likely starter at the point is sophomore **Katy Oblinger**, a former all-state athlete from Altoona, Pennsylvania. A quick and tenacious player, Oblinger helped the team last year with 41 assists and 20 steals in 30 games, to go along with 2.2 points and 1.2 rebounds per game.

Sophomore **Katherine DeHenzel** had a big impact on the team last year as a freshmen, but will redshirt this season after tearing her ACL over the summer. After missing the first part of the season with an injury, DeHenzel came on strong late, starting each of the last 18 games and ranking as the squad's leader with 52 steals (2.26 per game) on a team that ranked 22nd in the nation with 11.13 steals per game.

Freshman **Janine Aldridge** is a two-time all-state shooting guard and McDonald's All-America nominee from Massapequa, New York.

In addition to leading Massapequa to four consecutive conference titles, she averaged 19 points, 8.1 rebounds, and 6.2 assists per game for the Long Island Lightning AAU team. During her time with the Lightning, Aldridge's 21 points led all scorers in a victory over the Boo Williams 2007 AAU National Championship team at Nike Summer Slam.

With the Tribe operating mainly in a four-guard look, Taylor has four athletes to chose from to round out the starting line-up that combine the size of a small forward with the speed and range of a shooting guard. Junior **Kelly Heath** had a break-out year in 2007-08, quickly transitioning from reserve to spot-starter and oft-time-sixth man. Over the last three weeks of January, Heath scored in double-figures in six consecutive games, averaging 15 points per contest and finishing the string with a 25-point outburst at home against UNC Wilmington. That ranked as the best single-game performance for the Tribe all season.

Classmate **Robyn Barton** is one of the Tribe's quickest players, and uses her speed effectively to seal off passing and driving lanes on defense. On the offensive end, she is one of the team's most successful outside shooters, connecting on 37.3% of her attempts from beyond the arc over the last two years.

Junior **Lindsey Moller** brings a great intensity to the floor, and is especially effective on defense in harrying the Tribe's opponents into bad shots and turnovers. Last season she played in all but two games, and pulled in five rebounds in only six minutes against Georgia State in the first round of the CAA Tournament. Moller also set career-highs in scoring on two occasions, with five apiece against Campbell and Howard, and started the first two games of her career against Iona and UC Irvine at the Hawai'i Tournament.

Taysha Pye joins the Tribe this year from the St. Annes-Belfield School, outside of Charlottesville. Pye was one of the best players in the state of Virginia over the past three years, earning all-state honors each year of her career at STAB and being named the Player of the Year in Central Virginia by the *Daily Progress* newspaper and for all independent schools by the state association.

SWING PLAYERS

Dani Kell looks to earn significant minutes, especially early in the season, as the Tribe's only veteran swing player. She possesses both the speed and accuracy to play out on a wing as well as the size and agility to battle inside on the post. In 2007-08, Kell was very balanced in her scoring, hitting almost as many shots outside the arc as inside, and ranking fourth on the team in rebounding. The team is looking forward to Kell improving her numbers and competing on the same level as she did in 2006-07, when she averaged 12.6 points and 5.7 rebounds per game (third and fourth on the team, respectively) despite playing less than half of the season.

"I'm really excited about Dani's senior year," said Taylor, "because she truly is one of the more talented players we've ever had here. She is the 'glue' player on our team, she does everything incredibly well and she can play all over the floor from 1-4. Having had the opportunity to rehab and come back now, she's in better shape than she has been in two years, she's much stronger than she's been, and she made a big commitment to her strength and conditioning this summer to get herself back in the picture. She's going to be a focal point on our team and is ready to step into a leadership role and shine in the conference this year."

The staff is very impressed with the duo of freshmen **Aleia Gland** and **Chanel Murchison** who will be backing up Kell, and will be looking for both to step up quickly into the team's system. Gland has been impressive in workouts over the past months, and will suit up for the first time in more than a year after spending 2007-08 redshirted while recovering from knee surgery in the spring of 2007. Gland averaged 21 points per game her senior year at the David and Mary Thomson School in Toronto, ranking as one of the top-five players in the Toronto area and leading her squad to a 23-10 record.

Murchison is another exciting talent with the size and power of a forward to go along with speed and ball-handling ability that will make

her a very tough draw for any defender. A three-time all-district honoree and all-state player in 2006-07, Murchison played for Colonial Forge High School in Virginia, averaging close to a double-double for her career. Additionally, she played in the AAU league with the highly successful Fairfax Stars program, leading her team to a fifth-place finish at the 2007 national championships.

POST PLAYERS

While the graduation of the program's all-time leading scorer and rebounder in Kyra Kaylor is a hurdle that the Tribe will have to face on the interior, two upperclassmen and one newcomer possess the talent and tenacity to hold down the interior and keep



the Tribe's offense running at a high level.

Benson followed up her outstanding freshman campaign in 2006-07 with an equally impressive sophomore season. She ranked second in the league with 58 blocks, and, after only two years, already stands a scant 31 blocks from taking over the top spot on the Tribe's career listing. Also a force on the offensive end of the court, she set a school-record with 139 offensive rebounds, leading the CAA in that category, and averaged 8.3 points per game on 44 percent shooting from the floor.

"I think this year is an opportunity for Tiffany to really shine," said Taylor. "It's been so much fun to watch her game develop in the last two

years. She stayed for summer school in both sessions and she's put the time and effort in over the summer to improve her offensive game. She's been a defensive powerhouse in the conference her first two years and now is a chance to see her shine on the offensive end. She's really improved her short game and ability to score on the block and obviously she's a very good rebounder already. I think we're going to see a breakout year in this conference for Tiffany Benson as she establishes herself as one of the top post players in the league."

Redshirt-junior **Lauren Aadland** started to come into her own last year, and the staff has high hopes for the trend to continue over the next two years. Aadland more than doubled her impact last year over her red-shirt-freshman



campaign, and matured into an able reserve both in the post and on the wing, averaging three points and two rebounds on 10.5 minutes per game. With a surplus of guards on the team, Taylor looks to develop Aadland more fully in the front court.

Freshman **Courtney Flynn** has the size and attitude of a top-flight post player, but brings surprising range to the post position. Her ability to step back and be a threat from the perimeter will create match-up issues and room in the lane. A four-year starter at Central Catholic High School in Oregon, Flynn helped the team to four-straight conference championships and four-consecutive berths in the state final

four. As a junior, she shot a team-high 88.6 percent from the free throw line and averaged 10 points and six rebounds per contest.

SCHEDULE

Highlighting the 29-game regular season schedule are 13 home games, including four in the non-conference season, and three in-season tournaments. The Tribe will face at least two NCAA Tournament teams from a year ago in New Mexico and Old Dominion, and could face a third (Nebraska) at New Mexico's Thanksgiving Tournament. Four teams would be new to the College, including Saint Peter's, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Nebraska, and Fairfield. Finally, W&M will take on five teams from the MEAC in 2008-09, including two of last year's semifinalists. Five teams from one conference is the most that the Tribe has ever faced since moving up to Division I in 1984-85.

"This season's non-conference schedule is well suited for our team," said Taylor. "It will provide some early challenges for our young players in hopes of preparing us for the demanding and intense competition of the CAA."

After a scrimmage against M.I. Express at 7:30 p.m. on November 7, the proper season opens with a road trip to Asheville, North Carolina for a two-day tournament at UNC Asheville. The Tribe will face Morgan State at 2 p.m. on Friday, November 14, before taking on either UNC Asheville or Fairfield University the next day at either noon or 2:30 p.m. W&M returns home from the mountains to face local rival Norfolk State at 7 p.m. in Kaplan Arena on Thursday, November 20, and Delaware State on Sunday, November 23, at a time to be announced later in the year.

The College will spend Thanksgiving in the air, flying to Albuquerque, New Mexico for the Holiday Inn & Suites Express Midtown Thanksgiving Tournament, hosted by the University of New Mexico at one of the sport's most famed arenas in "The Pit." The Tribe will face the host Lobos at 7 p.m. Mountain (9 p.m. Eastern) on Friday, November 28, and will face either Nebraska or Butler on November 29 at 5 p.m. MST/7 p.m. EST or 7 p.m. MST/9 p.m. EST.

A home game against Howard out of the MEAC and a road trip to Richmond fill out the College's schedule before the exam break. The Tribe will face the Bison in Kaplan Arena at 7 p.m. on Thursday, December 4, and look to repeat last year's 90-56 victory. The Spiders will host W&M at 7 p.m. on Saturday, December 6.

After exams finish, the non-conference portion of the schedule draws to a close with three games. On Friday, December 19, the Tribe hosts Hampton at 6 p.m. in the final non-conference home game. After Christmas, W&M will travel to Jersey City, New Jersey, to take part in the Saint Peter's College Holiday Classic. Monday, December 29, the Tribe will take on the host Peahens of Saint Peter's at 7:30 p.m., before facing the New Jersey Institute of Technology the following night at 5 p.m.

CAA play begins on the road at Towson on Sunday, January 4 at 2 p.m. In addition to the Tigers, the Tribe will face Virginia Commonwealth (January 15, 7 p.m.), Hofstra (January 18, 2 p.m.), Northeastern (January 25, 2 p.m.), James Madison (February 5, 7 p.m.), Drexel (February 8, 1 p.m.), Delaware (February 12, 7 p.m.), UNC Wilmington (February 22, 1 p.m.), and Old Dominion (March 4, 7 p.m.) on the road in conference play.

Home CAA match-ups include Drexel (January 8, 7 p.m.), UNC Wilmington (January 11, 2 p.m.), Old Dominion (January 22, 7 p.m.), Virginia Commonwealth (January 29, 7 p.m.), Georgia State (February 1, 2 p.m.), George Mason (February 15, 2 p.m.), Northeastern (February 19, 7 p.m.), James Madison (February 26, 7 p.m.), and Towson (March 1, 2 p.m.).

The CAA Women's Basketball Championship moves to Harrisonburg, Virginia this season after two years in Newark, Delaware. The automatic bid to the NCAA Championships will be contested over four days, March 12-15.