



New-look Trailblazers hope to sample old-school VU tradition

By Troy Guthrie, Sports Information Director

Recruiting and rebuilding are constants in the life of a two-year basketball program, but Vincennes has taken the process to new levels for the 2008-09 campaign.

Even the head coaching position is manned by a new person, although Coach David Ragland is certainly no newcomer to the program after three seasons as the top assistant.

In 2007-08, VU again achieved what a two-year program is supposed to do – graduate and prepare players for four-year basketball programs. Nine members of last year's squad transferred to four-year programs. Those players and their current teams are:

- Zvonko Buljan, TCU
- Devon Dumes, Indiana
- Dodie Dunson, Bradley
- LaMarcus Lowe,
Western Michigan
- Aaron Pogue,
Cleveland State
- Pat Posey,
South Carolina Upstate
- Rashad Reed, Indiana State
- Forrest Smallwood,
Bellarmine University
- Mario Thomas, TBD

Of course, that required an influx of new players for 2008-09, and creates the potential for an exciting season. This year's initial roster included 12 players on scholarships and four walk-ons.

Despite the roster having only two returning players, Ragland – who steps into the head coaching slot after Everick Sullivan accepted an assistant coaching position at Eastern Kentucky – thinks the latest edition of Trailblazers can be a memorable one.

"If we can keep everyone healthy and they all continue doing the right things, we could be very good," he said prior to the season. "The way they've responded and worked with me has been very optimistic. There's an incredible tradition here at Vincennes, but there hasn't been a national champion in basketball since 1972. We want to start working on changing that and doing all the little things that lead to making history."

The veterans are forwards Devon Archie (Indianapolis; Ben Davis) and John Freeman (Indianapolis;

Arlington). In terms of leadership for the young team, Ragland said the 6-9 Archie and 6-5 Freeman "aren't very vocal," but have other qualities that can make an impression on the new players. He said that Archie and Freeman can draw upon the valuable experience of being part of the 2007-08 team that won 28 games and advanced to the NJCAA Tournament in Hutchinson, Kansas, for example.

Ragland added that 6-8 sophomore transfer DeAntre Jefferson (Bloomington, Ill.; South Georgia Tech Community College) and 6-7 freshman J.P. Olukemi (LaHabra, CA; Stoneridge Prep) displayed a blue collar mentality in early workouts as well.

Besides, if Archie, Freeman, Jefferson and Olukemi lead with actions and work ethic, the vocal motivation from fellow players will be there, Ragland said. He cited guards Cordell Passley (Indianapolis; Harmony Prep) and Johnie Davis (Canton, Ohio; Timken) as players who speak up and try to light a fire under a teammate if necessary but also be a supportive peer.