



2021-22 DUKE BASKETBALL
CLIPS FILE

How the West was won: Why Coach K's 13th Final Four is among his sweetest

By Andrew Carter, Raleigh News & Observer (March 27, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- Mickie Krzyzewski stood near the corner of the court and waited. The final minutes turned into the final seconds, the anticipation building. It was real now, one part of the storybook dream turning into reality. This is a walk she'd made many times, from the first row of the seats at an NCAA tournament regional final to the edge of the court and then onto it to celebrate with her husband, another trip to the Final Four secure.

Now it was different, though. She knew this would be the final time, just like everybody knew this would be the final time. Mike Krzyzewski is retiring whenever Duke's NCAA tournament journey ends, and for a while it looked like it might end last week against Michigan State, in Greenville, S.C., just like for a while it looked like it might end here at the Chase Center on Thursday night, against Texas Tech.

Instead, here were the Krzyzewskis, Mike and Mickie, embracing on Saturday night in a far corner of the court near the Duke bench. After two agonizing victories, the kind that might age a younger coach and even tested Krzyzewski's mettle, the Blue Devils made it look comparatively easy during their 78-69 victory against Arkansas in the West Regional final.

The horn sounded and the celebration began and Mickie waited patiently for her husband to find her in the aftermath. When he did the cameramen gathered all around them. Their family was lined up nearby, their daughters and their grandchildren, and a few of their longtime friends, too. A crew of workers hustled past, carrying parts of the makeshift stage they were assembling for the victory ceremony. Blue and white confetti had fallen from the ceiling. Duke had done it.

"I can't explain it," Mike Krzyzewski said several minutes later, while some of his granddaughters bent to the court and gathered pieces of that confetti and tossed it up over their heads, creating a blue and white paper shower. "I'm a grandfather, and I've lived through my daughters. (Now) I'm living through my grandchildren."

Krzyzewski first experienced this kind of moment back in 1986, when his hair was jet black and when his future as a college basketball coach seemed much less certain than it soon became. Some Duke supporters had wanted him fired before that breakthrough. In '86, when Krzyzewski first led Duke to the Final Four, he was a much younger man -- not even 40.

He and Mickie were a young couple, at least much younger than they are now, after more than 50 years of marriage. His trips to the Final Four became milestones to mark the years, and perhaps there was a part of him on Saturday night that could look back and see some of those past celebrations, his little girls becoming young women and then mothers themselves; his family expanding, some of the grandkids growing up before his eyes.

That was part of why his voice cracked a bit Saturday night, during the celebration on the court. He's a 75-year-old man now -- an "old man," he called himself at one point during Duke's postgame press conference -- and he's traveling this road for the last time. That the journey will end in New Orleans, in his 13th Final Four, is all Krzyzewski could've hoped for when he announced his retirement early last June; indeed, it's the stuff of Hollywood or boyhood dreams, to go out like this.

Yet what makes this regional championship even grander, beyond the fact that Krzyzewski is now at most eight days away from coaching his final game, is how the Blue Devils won it. It wasn't that long ago when Duke was thought to be too young and too inconsistent. Wasn't that long ago when the rap against the Blue Devils was their toughness, and whether they possessed the kind of fortitude to survive this tournament.

They were a consistent top-10 team throughout the season, yes, but they melted down during that humiliating defeat against North Carolina in Krzyzewski's final home game. In the ACC tournament championship game defeat against Virginia Tech, Duke allowed the Hokies to look a little like the Golden State Warriors, and there in Brooklyn, too, Duke lacked much fight. And besides, before Thursday Duke had never won a game out West in the NCAA tournament in Krzyzewski's 42-year career.

And so yes, he said on the court after his team had won the one regional he never had, this is different. It's the first time since 1994 that Duke has advanced to the Final Four without being a No. 1 seed. It's the first time ever that Duke has made a Final Four with this kind of roster composition, with a team so reliant on freshmen and without a senior starter.

"This isn't that four-year team," Krzyzewski said, "or even (2015), where you have Amile (Jefferson), Quinn (Cook), Matt Jones -- they're really young."

Now Jefferson is a member of Krzyzewski's staff and Jones was there Saturday night, among the masses in the maw of the postgame celebration. Mike Dunleavy, a member of Duke's 2001 national championship team, was there, too, while Grant Hill, among the leaders of the 1991 and '92 title teams, worked the West Regional with Jim Nantz and the rest of CBS' lead broadcasting crew.

Krzyzewski's farewell season has been the dominant story in college basketball over the past several months and everything surrounding that story -- the drama and the exposure and the attention -- has only increased in March. It has made for a cauldron of pressure and yet for once, after stress-test victories against Michigan State and Texas Tech, Duke allowed itself a chance to exhale in the final minutes against Arkansas.

The folks behind the Duke bench, Krzyzewski's family and friends and one white-haired man in the first row who goes by Pucci, could feel the impending victory throughout much of the second half. They could feel it especially when the lead grew to 18 with 6 1/2 minutes remaining, and soon enough Mickie Krzyzewski was making her way to the corner of the court to greet her husband.

"The most amazing moment," said John Pucci, a longtime Las Vegas casino executive formerly at the Wynn and now with Caesar's Palace, who insisted people only knew him by the one name, his last, like Madonna or Prince. "Like Zorro."

Pucci and Krzyzewski have become close friends over the past 20 years -- close enough that Pucci was right behind the Duke bench Thursday and Saturday nights; close enough to hear Krzyzewski pleading with his team to muster some defensive stops against Texas Tech, and close enough to watch Krzyzewski breathe easier with the Blue Devils in control against Arkansas.

"We've become so close," Pucci said. "But tonight was an amazing moment because he's retiring, and everybody thinks when you're going to retire you're done. He's not done. We're going on. We're going to carry the flag out in New Orleans, too. ... He's going to go out with a sixth ring. That's what I think."

It is becoming a more and more realistic thought, though that was for another night to decide. On this one, Krzyzewski embraced the people closest to him and stopped to share a few quick thoughts while all around him his players and their families soaked this in.

Duke is certainly Duke, as former Virginia coach Pete Gillen once said, creating a meme before anyone knew what a meme was. And yet the Blue Devils celebrated Saturday night not as though they represented one of the most successful programs in the history of the sport, but as if they weren't sure this moment would arrive.

A good number of these Blue Devils had never played in an NCAA tournament game before this team's first, which had come eight days earlier, in Greenville, when Duke's direction seemed much less certain. And in college, at least, no member of this Duke team had ever climbed a ladder to cut down a net following a championship. Paolo Banchemo, the Blue Devils' freshman forward, had wanted to climb such a ladder after a high school championship. He'd been left somber that it didn't happen.

He shared the story Saturday night, wearing a hat that said FINAL FOUR on it.

How the West was won: Why Coach K's 13th Final Four is among his sweetest (cont.)

By Andrew Carter, Raleigh News & Observer (March 27, 2022)

"My mom won a state championship as a coach, and she got to go up on the ladder and cut the net, and I remember her swinging the net around and (saying) I always wanted to do that," Banchemo said. "Then I won state in high school, and they lowered the hoop to cut the net. They didn't bring the ladder, and so it kind of ruined the moment a little bit."

When he climbed the ladder Saturday night, Banchemo said, he locked eyes with his mom. He said he told her, "Make sure you get this on video, and get a picture."

Listening to the story to Banchemo's right was Krzyzewski, beaming like a father.

"That was good," he said. "That's really good."

Moments earlier Krzyzewski had turned to his players when they'd arrived in the interview room and, unprompted, told them that they'd been "terrific," which is one of Krzyzewski's go-to words when he's pleased, along with "my guys" – as in, "proud of my guys." He hadn't had an opportunity to use any of those during the first two Saturdays in March, after defeats against Carolina and Virginia Tech, but he could use them now.

"I'm so proud of you guys, and happy for you," Krzyzewski said. "You've crossed the bridge, man."

For the next several minutes, Krzyzewski did his best to keep himself and his players in this moment. It was as though he didn't want to think about anything except having just won the West. He deflected one question about the prospect of meeting North Carolina, again, in the Final Four.

Krzyzewski swatted away another question, directed at Banchemo, about whether the Blue Devils felt confident they could send their retiring coach out a national champion for the sixth time. That was when Krzyzewski referred to his age, saying, "They've won a (conference) regular season championship and they've won the western regional championship. They did that."

"They did it for us, and enough about doing it for the old man here."

It was true, in a way: Krzyzewski has aged. The hair isn't quite as black. The step isn't as spry. He limps when he walks, especially when he's out of sight, away from the bench and in the bowels of an arena before or after a game. Sometimes it looks as though he's in pain, like the work isn't comfortable anymore. Not that he showed it, much, in the heat of the moment.

Next to him his players were trying to put this all into words, with Jeremy Roach, the sophomore point guard, acknowledging the pain of last season and how "we came back hungry," and Wendell Moore, Jr., a junior forward who is a captain and the most experienced of Duke's starters, saying, "You come to Duke looking to get to moments like this."

Moore and Roach, like their teammates, were carrying souvenirs – the pieces of the net they'd cut down – and earlier, on the court, Krzyzewski had done the honors on the final strand. He'd just spent a few minutes around a crowd of reporters, a couple of his granddaughters playing in front of him, when he said, "I'm going to go cut down the net," and with that he made his way slowly to the ladder and climbed it while someone handed him some scissors.

Soon he was waving that net around, as jubilant as when he'd first done it a decades ago, and it had been a long time, seven years, since he'd had the occasion to climb a ladder during an NCAA tournament. If Duke had lost before now, Krzyzewski's career would've ended with its longest Final Four drought. Instead it continues on.

A good 45 minutes after the final buzzer, some of Duke's players and their parents were still on the court, taking everything in. They posed for pictures. They embraced each other. The blue and white confetti was everywhere, still. It was almost like nobody wanted to leave, as if they wanted to remain in this moment forever.

But the journey wasn't yet finished. Duke would celebrate throughout the night and return home to North Carolina, if only briefly.

Krzyzewski's final March would stretch into April. New Orleans awaited.

The timeout where Coach K, Duke proved they had what it takes for Final Four

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (March 27, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- Before all the fun -- before the ladder-climbing, scissor-snipping, net-waving, granddaughter-hoisting jubilation Mike Krzyzewski felt after making his 13th Final Four, the one that pushes him past John Wooden on the all-time ledger -- there was frustration. Borderline fury, really. Krzyzewski's Duke team, 13 minutes and 13 seconds away from "the promised land" of college basketball, had allowed Arkansas to rip off a 9-2 run and come storming back into contention. A 12-point halftime lead, suddenly, dwindled to five. Notions of New Orleans, suddenly, weren't so certain. Krzyzewski was clearly pissed, and you can't really blame him.

Sensing this special something was teetering, he called timeout. But as Krzyzewski's players meekly slid into the five folding chairs across from their head coach, he said nothing. Straight silence. Steam wasn't quite shooting out of his ears yet, but judging by his fully-flushed cheeks? That internal fire was raging. He stared at each and every one of them, the sort of glare that cuts straight to your soul. That alone might've sent the message, but since timeouts are timeless, he eventually articulated his anger:

"We've gotta keep our poise," he growled.

OK ... just, how exactly?

Let him show you.

So while the rest of Krzyzewski's spiel couldn't be printed without a pass through the PG-translation machine, his actions could. He pulled out his double-sided Duke dry-erase board, the one designed like the Cameron Indoor court that bears his name, and at that point, school was in session. With an uncapped black marker in one hand, and 47 seasons worth of coaching wisdom in the other, Krzyzewski started drilling into his squad the details of how, actually, they were gonna win this game. Like a mad architect, or a toddler tapping into previously-unknown fingerprint reserves, Krzyzewski started scribbling everywhere, back and forth and dots for emphasis. It was a ride, his players along for it, college basketball's winningest coach crafting a team-crusher in real-time. Occasionally he'd look up at Mark Williams, or Paolo Banchero, and bark out an observation -- sometimes as simple as staying down on shot fakes, sometimes much more complex -- and, like a flight attendant to the exit row, require verbal confirmation. Yes, Coach. Got it, Coach. Finally the horn sounded, the hurricane-force winds whirling in the huddle wound down, and Krzyzewski got back to basics. He slapped himself on the chin, as if to say, they just did that to you. And then he summoned them together, standing this time, and sent them on their merry way.

By this point, everything burning inside him had boiled over, appearing in the form of sweat streaking across his brow. Like his players checking back in, he needed a towel to wipe his face. You want intensity? A coach who isn't ready for his career to end? Well, there you have it.

"In the start of the second half I thought they just took control of the game, and we were not playing well, but they were making us not play well," Krzyzewski said after it was over, after Duke had beaten Arkansas 78-69. "At that timeout, our guys really got organized offensively."

That timeout only matters because it worked. All of it. Out of that break, Duke rolled off a 10-0 run of its own that all but ended any hope of an Arkansas win. If you're looking for the moment in the Blue Devils' final step to Krzyzewski's 13th Final Four, it was right then. Because from the clipboard to the court, Krzyzewski's crash course came to life. He isolated Banchero -- the eventual MOP of the West regional -- on the block, letting his 6-foot-10, 250-pound star do the sorts of things only he can do. Banchero backed down Arkansas big man Jaylin Williams, or whoever else was unfortunate enough to wind up in his way, and sank the shots (or got fouled trying to) that survival requires. "They ran a wedge play, a little mid-post up-screen for number 5 (Banchero), and he converted or got fouled," Arkansas coach Eric Musselman said, "and we go down to the other end and didn't convert."

Speaking of the Hogs' inability to convert, that wasn't an accident either. On Duke's defensive end, Krzyzewski went back to the well he tapped against Texas Tech, breaking the "in case of emergency" glass and pulling out of the Blue Devils' backup plan: its zone defense. By parking 7-foot center Mark Williams around the rim, rather than forcing him to defend ball screens he sometimes struggled with, Krzyzewski kept his Naismith Defensive Player of the Year candidate on the court rather than the pine. "All these guys played well," Krzyzewski said, "but Mark really was the difference-maker for us today." From that moment on, Williams made life miserable for Musselman's two most important players, J.D. Notae and Jaylin Williams, forcing them to shoot just 3-of-11 for nine combined points. (Notae eventually fouled out with 3:47 to play, finishing with 14 points while making just five of his 14 attempts.)

"Going zone helped. I think it gave them a different look, slowed them up a little bit," Mark Williams said postgame. "Obviously (Notae) was trying to get downhill a lot, so I tried my best to protect the rim. I thought that was important for us."

You know who else did? Ding ding ding: The dude who now has made at least one Final Four appearance in five straight decades. And while Arkansas perhaps presented less of a challenge than Michigan State or Texas Tech before them, you've got to give credit to Krzyzewski for coaching his tail off. The reason that's relevant? Because if there has been a criticism of the Hall of Famer in recent seasons, it's that he has sometimes failed to make the most of the talent at his disposal. See: 2019, and a team with three eventual top-10 picks -- including the no-doubt national player of the year, that Zion Williamson fellow -- not getting past the Elite Eight. That squad's postseason shortcomings still sting, or stung, for a Duke fan base dying to see Coach K make one more March run.

"For me it's been a three-year wait," Wendell Moore Jr. said from the postgame podium, still donning his celebratory cap and its new netting attachment. "You come to Duke looking to get to moments like this, and unfortunately for me, those first two years, that moment was taken away. So to be able to do it with these guys right here, I wouldn't want it any other way."

And so much as Krzyzewski has shied away from it, count him in as one of those guys. Sure, he's way past his playing days -- even if, in winning his first two NCAA Tournament games ever in the West region, he was conveniently close to the old Presidio gym where he once tried out for the All-Army basketball team -- but no ride keeps rolling without a conductor. And this postseason, at least from an Xs and Os perspective, Krzyzewski has confirmed an old coach can still show out with a few new tricks.

Go back to Michigan State, when Duke trailed by five with five minutes to play. Yes, Banchero and Williams got the necessary stops, and Roach rattled home the dagger 3-pointer, but... who do you think put them in those spots? Who do you think enabled them in the first place? It was Krzyzewski's decision, after all, to insert Roach back into the starting lineup against Cal-State Fullerton, to entrust the sophomore guard with the keys to the Duke blue sports car. And how Roach has responded? Oh, just by rattling off four of the best performances of his career in a row, the last two of which landed him on the All-West Region team. "Just getting to this point, all the hard work has paid off since June," Roach said. "I'm very happy for that." It was also Krzyzewski who came up with a solution, or at least the semblance of one, against Texas Tech and Mark Adams' maniacal no-middle defense. Long heralded as a defensive-minded coach, Krzyzewski instead leaned on offensive sets -- like Roach wrapping from the wings around elbow ball screens, straight into the middle of the lane and the belly of the best -- that sent the Red Raiders home on a Thursday night redeye. And against both Texas Tech and later Arkansas, Krzyzewski was the one willing to trust a defense he, according to Synergy, had only thrown out there on 4 percent of Duke's pre-Sweet 16 possessions.

The man's been in the Hall of Fame for 21 years already for a reason.

But, hey, a little reminder never hurts.

"Thought Duke was phenomenal," Musselman said, after a masterclass of his own two days earlier when Arkansas toppled top-seeded Gonzaga. "Would be surprised if they're not playing to win a national championship."

The storyline side of that is, at this point, severely overdone. By now, the news that this is Krzyzewski's final season has even made its way to those living under the most far-removed rocks. And, yes, doomsday still looms, the possibility that Krzyzewski's penultimate (or final) basketball game comes against rival North Carolina, in the first meeting of the schools in the Big Dance. (Standing in the way? A pack of pesky Peacocks.)

But on this circus ride to a regional championship, and whatever comes after the West, it's Krzyzewski's coaching chops, the clinics he's put on, that deserve as much of the spotlight as any spicy newspaper headline. "Enough about doing it for the old man here," Krzyzewski said. "We're not going to do it unless we all own it, and we all owned this." Be it A.J. Griffin's team-high 18 points, the tantalizing way he hung in the air en route to multiple midrange makes, or Williams' game-high 12 rebounds, it was the players who cut down the nets first and foremost. But that moment in the huddle, a microcosm of the tactical mastery Mike Krzyzewski has shown this March, is deserving of its own serious shoutout. (This is to say nothing of the near-perfect two-for-one sets Krzyzewski drew up in the final minute of the first half, which culminated in a Williams offensive putback and a Trevor Keels 3; those two baskets, and the stop sandwiched between them, were the reason Duke led by 12 at the break instead of seven.)

Not even two full minutes after the huddle, after order had been restored, after Duke's runway to New Orleans had been repaired, Krzyzewski once again found himself in a huddle. Even with momentum, and in the midst of that aforementioned game-sealing 10-point swing, the Blue Devils were in a high-wire trapeze act; press the wrong buttons, don't prepare your team properly, and things can twist in the worst way, fast. Only this time, rather than steely silence, Krzyzewski played good cop. "You guys are winners!" he said, breaking out in a smile. "Come on, men!" He was part military officer, part basketball coach in that moment, equally as entranced with his players' emotions as he was his own tactics. But you know what else he was in that moment, when he said that? What he's been during each of Duke's last four games, the ones that determine how his sendoff season ultimately ends?

Right.

Duke dispenses with drama, embraces celebration as it crosses bridge to Final Four

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 27, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- There was, nearing the end but not at the end of this final season, finally a net for Mike Krzyzewski to cut down. He ascended the ladder a little more cautiously than he did six years ago, one rung at a time, but he swung the detached net around in front of him with practiced nonchalance.

Duke had, finally, lived up to the expectations placed upon it by these circumstances. The farewell tour has new dates, in New Orleans. It hasn't been a smooth path to this point, but this was how it was supposed to go all along.

"The joy, you can't explain," Krzyzewski said, on the floor, while the celebration erupted around him.

The remarkable turnaround since the disappointment ACC tournament continues to push Duke farther down their coach's final road. The Blue Devils are headed back to the Final Four for the first time since 2015, and they may see a very familiar face when they get there.

But if it is indeed North Carolina that awaits, the Tar Heels will find a very different Duke opponent than the one it last saw, one that has developed an identity of its own while embracing the traits and tactics that made its predecessors so successful over Krzyzewski's four decades.

Saturday's 78-69 win over overmatched Arkansas was a clinical performance, free of the drama that had accompanied Duke's previous two wins or, quite frankly, most of the second half of the season, when the Blue Devils seemed to be awash in self-doubt. There was none of that Saturday, just a vintage Duke performance, of any era, to deliver Krzyzewski to his 13th and final Final Four, passing John Wooden, chasing a sixth NCAA title at this last gasp.

So this traveling basketball circus moves on to the biggest tent of all, a national semifinal in the Superdome against either North Carolina or Saint Peter's, the significance of either opponent almost too gargantuan to contemplate in very different ways.

Almost lost amid all the hoopla, there's a curious coda to this coda, with Krzyzewski now avoiding the longest Final Four drought of his career. Not since his first five seasons has Duke failed to make the Final Four in five straight NCAA tournaments. Who knows what might have happened in 2020, but this is the sixth season since 2015. Amid the cavalcade of acclaim, it would have been a quietly ignominious way to go out.

Of course, that narrative would be completely different if either or both of the Elite Eight games in 2018 or 2019, both decided by a single possession, had gone the other way. But that's not how this works, and the drought was the drought was the drought. Was. It's over now. This team has done what its immediate predecessors could not.

"You come to Duke for moments like this," Duke's Wendell Moore said. "Unfortunately, my first two years that moment was taken away. To do it with these guys, I wouldn't have it any other way."

Krzyzewski talks about making the Final Four as "crossing the bridge," and until Saturday night there was still that nagging doubt whether this group could make it to the other side, this team that proved itself capable of beating the best teams in the country before struggling and, finally, collapsing in Krzyzewski's final home game at Cameron and the ACC tournament.

But there was also a gift buried in that mess, one final throwback to the early days of Krzyzewski's career, when his teams were tempered into shape over a period of years like hardened steel. This group, with three one-and-done freshmen, grew as much in two weeks as Krzyzewski's older teams would in the space of two seasons or more.

That growth ushered in a series of games that, in their searing intensity and his team's newfound heart, amounted to an inadvertent tribute to Krzyzewski's entire tenure. The way Duke closed things out against Michigan State, in a game Tom Izzo thought the Spartans had won, hearkened back to the players a generation ago that made Duke -- and Krzyzewski -- great.

Then they made that lineage tangible, slapping the floor like days of yore as they crushed Texas Tech's spirit, turning the tables on the best defensive team in the country by going zone, and then telling Krzyzewski when it was time to go back to man, the players calling their own shot.

And against Arkansas, more classic Duke. The Blue Devils more or less ended the game at halftime with a classic Krzyzewski gambit, the use-it-or-lose-it timeout with 56.8 to go to set up a two-for-one. Mark Williams scored at one end, the Blue Devils forced a miss at the other and Trevor Keels buried a 3 at the buzzer to turn a seven-point lead into 12, just like that.

All that was missing was the possession arrow for Krzyzewski's beloved silent run, getting the ball to start the second half. They even went back to zone in the one moment in the second half when Arkansas threatened, with Mark Williams swatting away shots around the basket with volleyball swings and Paolo Banchemo taking over at the other end.

Somehow these kids have figured out how to play all the hits. It's a two-way street. Krzyzewski has pulled all the strings. His players have hit all the right notes.

"In this NCAA tournament, my team has just played such good basketball, and in pressure situations," Krzyzewski said. "They were a close team before the NAAs but during these last four games they have been terrific."

He turned to the players on the dais next to him.

"I'm so proud of you guys and happy for you," Krzyzewski said. "You crossed the bridge, man."

Duke's path to this point has been anything but easy, but getting to the Final Four creates a completely different series of challenges given the two potential opponents awaiting in the neighboring quarter of the bracket.

Saint Peter's, the upstart of upstarts, has beaten Wooden's alma mater, the home of Wooden's dynasty and, with a win over North Carolina to go with its first-round win over Kentucky, would have knocked off two of the bluest bloods. If the Peacocks do eliminate the Tar Heels, they could potentially face Duke and then Kansas or Villanova. That's ... everyone.

So college basketball's greatest giant would put his career on the line against the greatest giant-killer in college basketball history. And it's not like Krzyzewski has never lost to a No. 15 seed before.

More likely, a rematch with North Carolina awaits, the basketball Armageddon everyone has feared for decades and came narrowly close in 1991, a sort of Carolinian Hoops Crisis safely averted by a Roy Williams-led blockade. Even under normal circumstances, the winner of a Final Four game between the two would have ultimate bragging rights forever and ever, amen, but the stakes in this particular season would be catastrophically high.

A Duke win would avenge March 5 when it truly matters and bring Krzyzewski to the brink of a farewell title, the worst nightmare of Tar Heels fans entering this season. And North Carolina being the one to apply the coup de grace to Krzyzewski's career, after ruining his Durham goodbye, would make Tyler Hansbrough's undefeated record in Cameron feel as insignificant as a Champions Classic championship banner.

Banchemo, famously, said in Brooklyn he wanted North Carolina again. Virginia Tech interfered. CBS' Tracy Wolfson hit him with the same question Saturday night.

"You're not going to get me this time," Banchemo said.

All of that will depend on what happens Sunday in Philadelphia. On the other coast, across the country, Duke has taken care of its business. Krzyzewski's career lives on. The Blue Devils move on, across the bridge, no matter what awaits on the other side.

Duke Makes the Final Four in Coach K's Last Season

By Billy Witz, New York Times (March 26, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- Spanning several generations, Duke Coach Mike Krzyzewski has molded four-year stalwarts and one-and-done hot shots into championship teams, instilled some teams with a floor-slapping toughness and others with a freewheeling offense, and at times has seemed to be able to bend a referee's whistle to his will.

Krzyzewski's neatest trick, though, may be taking his final team – and his greenest – to another Final Four.

The Blue Devils, seeded second in the West region, kept alive their hopes of sending Krzyzewski into a retirement with a sixth national championship by turning back fourth-seeded Arkansas, 78-69, in the round of 8 on Saturday night.

As befitting a talented young team that is hitting its stride at the most opportune time, freshmen Paolo Banchemo, who scored 16 points, and Adrian Griffin, who had 18, spurred Duke. They were complemented by the defensive anchor, center Mark Williams, a sophomore, who added 12 points, 12 rebounds and 3 blocked shots.

The victory sends Duke to a Final Four for the 13th time under Krzyzewski – and the first since the Blue Devils won the title in 2015. Duke (32-6) will play either its fiercest rival, North Carolina, or the miracle makers from tiny St. Peter's next Saturday in New Orleans.

As Duke dribbled out the final seconds, guard Wendell Moore wrapped an arm around his coach's shoulder, and when the buzzer sounded the Blue Devils danced off the bench.

The players dumped a bucket of confetti on their coach and he climbed a ladder to snip the last strand of the net under one of the baskets.

Krzyzewski, 75, tells his players that reaching the Final Four is like crossing a bridge, and on the other side is an entree into an exclusive brotherhood with the Blue Devils' best teams, though he refused to compare this team to others. "Just like I don't rate my daughters or my grandchildren," he said.

He also intercepted a couple of questions directed at his players – one wondering whether they might secretly be rooting for North Carolina to get another shot at the Tar Heels, and another to Banchemo, who had said earlier this week that the players wanted to send Krzyzewski off with a title.

"Enough about doing it for the old man," Krzyzewski said.

While Duke had earned a high seed and had a roster again dotted with blue-chip prospects, this trip to the Final Four was hard to see coming when the tournament pairings were announced two weeks ago.

Krzyzewski, who called the Blue Devils' performance "unacceptable" in a home loss to North Carolina in the regular-season finale, realized he had some work to do to repair the psyche of an exceptionally young team – the top six rotation players are 20, 20, 19, 18 and 18.

"I had a good meeting with myself," Krzyzewski said on the eve of the game, emphasizing the leadership importance of being his own chief critic. "I said that I've got to do something. I've got to help in some way, and part of it was my approach with them."

He added: "If you don't put truth on the table and take responsibility, they you won't make the best out of the situation that you are in."

A team that looked fragile, even in advancing to the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament final, has gradually gained its footing in the N.C.A.A. tournament. It began with a comfortable win over Cal State Fullerton, and continued with late comebacks against Michigan State and Texas Tech, fueled by impeccable shot making. (The Blue Devils made their final five shots against Michigan State and their final eight against Texas Tech, the nation's top defensive team.)

Over the last two weeks, Krzyzewski – who was shaped as an Army point guard by the unyielding Bob Knight – has given the air of a coach in tune with his team. He put point guard Jeremy Roach into the starting lineup for the first time in a month to begin the tournament and he has been superb. Krzyzewski turned to a zone – which once would have been unthinkable – in the second half against Texas Tech, and then let his young players convince him to switch back to man-to-man in the final minute.

He even got down on a knee and slapped the floor late against Texas Tech – and his players followed suit, sending Duke fans here into a frenzy.

On Saturday night, with Roach being harassed by the Hogs defense, Krzyzewski turned early to Trevor Keels, who had been replaced by Roach in the starting lineup and played a season-low 14 minutes against Texas Tech. Keels, a freshman with a sturdy build, steadied Duke's offense and delivered a 3-pointer at the halftime buzzer to push the lead to 45-33.

When the Razorbacks surged in the second half, narrowing the gap to 53-48, Krzyzewski called timeout to calm his team. "We were getting ready to get knocked out," he said.

Krzyzewski made sure the offense ran through his best player, Banchemo, and signaled "1-2" from the sideline, instructing his defense to switch to zone. Banchemo, who would be named the regional's most outstanding player, scored in the post, passed to A.J. Griffin who drove for another basket and made two free throws and in a flash Duke had a working margin at 59-48. The Blue Devils also scored on their next two possessions.

Arkansas never threatened the rest of the way.

A year ago, Krzyzewski had left the impression that he had lost his iron grip on the program that he had become synonymous with: an N.B.A. prospect quit at midseason, he snapped at a reporter from the school newspaper, and his team missed the N.C.A.A. tournament for the first time in more than a quarter century.

No men's coach has retired after winning a national championship since 1977 when Al McGuire, who was 48, retired after Marquette won the title. Two years earlier, John Wooden told his team after a semifinal victory over Louisville that he would retire following the title game, which the Bruins won against Kentucky.

Krzyzewski, 75, gave himself a much longer runway. He took the rare step last June of announcing his retirement effective at the end of this season. He said he did not want to go out the way he did last season, when Duke was 13-11 and saw its chances of making the N.C.A.A. tournament vanish when it had to drop out of the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament because of a coronavirus outbreak within the team.

The decision to announce it – and assistant Jon Scheyer as his replacement – was to avoid misleading recruits who might have asked how long he intended to coach, he said. Still, the whole season has been something of a last waltz tour.

"It wears on you a little bit because everywhere you walk, everyone is taking a picture of you, they're watching everything," Krzyzewski said earlier this week. "Look, that gets old."

He added: "But I feel for my guys. They've had pressure on them that we're not putting on them. I tell them all the time, we're playing for us – for you – but then it just works out. No one – it's not a sinister plan against us or anything, but it just happens that way."

Duke won the A.C.C. regular-season title for the first time since 2010, but lost Krzyzewski's final game at Cameron Indoor Stadium, against North Carolina – which soured the postgame celebration that included 96 former players – and were trounced again in the A.C.C. conference tournament championship game by Virginia Tech.

"All season we've been dealing with it," Banchemo said earlier this week. "It's coach's last something every game."

The two late-season losses wiped away any opportunity that Duke would be a top seed – or the chance that the Blue Devils would head to Krzyzewski's hometown Chicago for the round of 16, as he had requested if they were a No. 1 seed.

Instead, Duke was slotted into the West region, which has been a graveyard for Krzyzewski's teams.

The Blue Devils had been placed in the West six previous times without reaching a regional final – even in 2011, when as a No. 1 seed they were tripped up by Arizona in the round of 16.

This trip, though, has been a stroll down memory lane.

Krzyzewski spent four six-week stints in the early 1970s living at the barracks at the Presidio, the former Army post that sits in the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge, when he was playing for the All-Army team that competed in an international military competition.

His team practiced this week at the University of San Francisco, on the same court where he had practiced regularly 50 years ago. His players surprised him by knowing the answer to a pop quiz: who was the best player on the Dons' back-to-back national championship teams in 1955 and '56. (Answer: Bill Russell.)

"I was ready to dig in on them, but they knew it," Krzyzewski said.

And when it came time to take the court, the Blue Devils had all the answers, too.

Powerful push to the Final Four has made Duke's players the big story

By Matt Norlander, CBSSports.com (March 26, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- There wasn't ever a second to waste. Every moment in every timeout was opportunity. There are only so many more days, minutes, hours and seconds Mike Krzyzewski has left to coach this team. This was for -- as Krzyzewski has referred to it this week -- a chance to walk across the bridge to the mecca of college basketball.

Final Four glory was on the line.

They know bridges well in this city. The most famous of them all stands in distinction -- "international orange" is its official color -- a mere seven miles from the Chase Center, looming over the Presidio and linking one part of San Francisco to another. In this metropolis of drastic slopes, where streets pitch and droop like ski pistes, and where the inclines and tablelands of its thoroughfares give incredible views around this beautiful slab of earth and water, everything was, instead, steady, level -- in balance -- for the second-seeded Blue Devils on Saturday night.

For as big as this Elite Eight matchup against No. 2 Duke and No. 4 Arkansas was, we were low on drama.

Duke was its unrelenting best here in a 78-69 victory. The Blue Devils grew again, proving their talent was as irrepressible as this storybook narrative itself. Can't be that Krzyzewski's going to the Final Four in his last season, can it? Is this really happening? It is. Passage has most definitely been earned.

"They were a close team before the NCAAs, but during these last four games they have been terrific," Krzyzewski said. "I'm so proud of you guys and happy for you. You crossed the bridge, man, and we beat an outstanding team."

Back to those timeouts. With a press row perch behind Duke's bench for this game, CBS Sports was able to eavesdrop on every huddle over the course of two hours. The Blue Devils briefly trailed 9-6 early, but otherwise held this game in its control. Krzyzewski had fire in his tummy and a classic coach's scratch in his throat as he bellowed out over the PA system and pep bands.

"You gotta go! We're going too slow!" he told his team at the under-16 timeout of the first half. He looked inflamed. The game had barely begun.

Krzyzewski didn't allow himself to show relief or triumph, not even when Duke was in command late and most of the building realized what was happening here. To wit on the rest of us: a Trevor Keels deep 3 at the first-half buzzer gave Duke a 45-33 lead going into the break. Moments later, one support staff member quietly dropped four golden pairs of scissors to the Duke side of the scorer's table. The regional-champion trophy, and the box it was stuffed in, was also not-so-inconspicuously tucked near the Duke bench as well in advance of the second half.

"Duke was phenomenal," Razorbacks coach Eric Musselman said. "Would be surprised if they're not playing to win a national championship."

Only with less than 30 seconds remaining and during a dead ball did Krzyzewski let out a "YES!!!" before returning to business-as-usual before the game hit triple zeroes.

The Blue Devils are still in this thing -- they may well win this thing. This story won't quit. The old man's done it one last time, breaking his tie with John Wooden for Final Fours, now sitting at 13 ahead of Wooden's 12. After doing it the hard way, Duke's season and Krzyzewski's career will end in in the Big Easy.

There was only one point in the second half where things got hairy. Arkansas managed to cut it to a 53-48 Duke lead with 13:13 to go. K wanted a timeout. It was the only time the entire night where he waited a minute to address his team. Duke's starting five -- Wendell Moore Jr, Paolo Banchemo, Mark Williams, Jeremy Roach and Keels -- all sorted matters out amongst themselves before K pulled up a chair once more and got to directing on the whiteboard, marker in hand.

Coming out of that timeout, Banchemo and Griffin made back-to-back plays to bloat Duke's lead to 57-48. Soon enough it was a 16-6 run, and Duke had a 69-54 lead.

"We were getting ready to get knocked out, and they the last 12 minutes they didn't get knocked out," Krzyzewski said. "They played beautiful basketball."

It was effectively over. Yet with 3:58 on the clock, Krzyzewski was still treating the game like Arkansas needed one 3-pointer to take the lead again.

The score was 72-57.

"Listen! LISTEN!!!" he commanded to his team. "No let-ups!"

He's coached his 75-year-old ass off the past two weeks in this tournament. The man has said over and over and over again that he's ready to retire, but to see him run a huddle, it sure doesn't look it. Almost every second of time given is methodical.

Duke never did let up. Because of that, the program is going to its 17th Final Four. The Blue Devils got 46 points in the paint against Arkansas, continuing a trend that has defined Duke's teamwork instincts. Duke's gotten by with 52% of their points through four games in the paint, according to ESPN research. It's one of the most dominant near-the-rim teams in tournament play ever. They'll get you from deep too, though. A mere 10 3-point attempts for the Blue Devils in this game, but four of them fell true. Toss in seven steals and 12 points off Arkansas turnovers while we're at it. A dash of deep-threat scoring combined with interior relentless, which turned this team into the No. 1-rated points-per-possession offense in the sport, per KenPom, as of Saturday night.

"We knew we were capable of this, and that's what we've worked for since June," Banchemo said. "So to finally be able to get to New Orleans and have a chance to play for a national championship is a blessing. I'm just proud of the way we came together."

Krzyzewski wants to make this about the players, and we should. Here's to them. This Final Four is theirs. So much of this season and the pressure around it has fallen on them. That was Krzyzewski's doing, of course, but he's said retiring this way was the only way he felt how to do it and be ethical with recruiting. He wanted one more year but didn't want to privately know the end was coming. With that, a burden of sorts was placed on Duke's players. They've handled it brilliantly, particularly after not winning the final home game vs. North Carolina, then getting run out of the ACC Tournament by a Virginia Tech team that rallied to win the ACC championship before going one-and-done in the Big Dance.

The four-in-a-row response to make it to the national semifinals amounts to one of the more impressive March showings a Krzyzewski team has ever put forth. My, how they've grown.

Williams must be singled out. He was outstanding again: 12 points, 12 rebounds, three blocks, and tangibly the most valuable player for either team.

"He is a hell of a defensive player," Roach said. "Love having him on the court. Makes it so much easier for the guards to really try to pressure the ball. So they really don't have to worry if a guy gets past you, you know big fellow is always back there to back you up. He is a huge part of this team. We wouldn't be here without him."

It's exceptional how Duke has seen every starter elevate his game -- even A.J. Griffin had a quiet team-high of 18 points against Arkansas. Yet again, Krzyzewski wasn't having much in the postgame press conference about what this means for him. His passion and gratitude was for the players. Program win. Players win. He's right. You can roll your eyes at Krzyzewski all you want about what's come of this season and how announcing his retirement nine-plus months in advance inherently makes him the story, but on this Saturday night, the story is the resolve and incredible evolution of Duke's team.

They have had a claim as the most talented one in the sport all season. Now that the talent is meeting potential, Duke has become the tournament's top team and favorite to win the entire thing.

"They did it for us, and enough about doing it for the old man here," Krzyzewski said. "We're not going to do it unless we all own it, and we all owned this. We all owned this moment together. That's what we're playing for."

This is not the same team, not by many measures, that was filleted by North Carolina at Cameron Indoor Stadium 21 nights prior. Was it really just three weeks ago that the Heels spoiled Krzyzewski's retirement party?

"But you really find out about character in those situations," Krzyzewski said. "It's not luck. It's them. That's what I'm trying to tell you, it's on them because they're the ones. No matter what you do as a coach, they have to show that level of character, and in this tournament it's really lifted them. They've been beautiful. They've been sensational. And they were really good. I loved them before, but now I respect them so much, how much they've done."

Krzyzewski is heading to his 13th Final Four in a fifth decade: three in the '80s, five in the '90s, two in the 2000s, two in the 2010s, and now this one to wrap an unparalleled career. His 42nd team at Duke has risen up to ultimately be remembered as one of his best. What's coming next is almost too outrageous to feel true. Are we sure this isn't a simulation?

A North Carolina win Sunday would put the greatest rivalry in sports on the biggest stage in college basketball. The Blue Devils and Tar Heels have played 257 times in their history, but never in the NCAA Tournament. Something phenomenal is heading down to Louisiana: either Duke will face its blood rival in a revenge game, with Krzyzewski's retirement on the line after UNC embarrassed Duke at home in K's last home game ever or ...

Well ...

Saint Peter's. Duke vs. Saint Peter's. It would be the greatest symbolic representation of David vs. Goliath in sports history. That's the other outcome. Either one is incredible. This Duke run has been incredible. The mere fact that it's going to play North Carolina or the first No. 15 seed in a Final Four is so outrageous it borders on fiction. What a universe we live in. We'll learn what our reality is soon enough. Duke's reality moves toward New Orleans all the same. Mecca awaits. These players are two wins away from achieving what would be one of the grandest championship-run stories in American sports history.

No matter who starts or finishes, Duke is finding ways to win in NCAA tournament

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (March 26, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- More often than not, by the time March rolls around, college basketball coaches have landed on substitution patterns with lineups and roles cemented.

That regimen is regularly a hallmark of successful teams.

No. 9 Duke, now one win away from the Final Four, represents a different approach.

The Blue Devils finished off NCAA tournament wins over the past week with one finishing five against Michigan State on Sunday, and a different group against Texas Tech on Thursday night.

They've alternated big men Mark Williams and Theo John regularly this season, but have also gone with their smaller "ball-handling" lineup with both of those centers on the bench.

Throughout all the changes, and some tough, late-game losses that dotted the regular season, the team is playing its best basketball when the highest stakes are in play here in the NCAA tournament. It's a testament to the cohesion this team – put together for one season that happens to be the last for their retiring Hall of Fame coach – has forged.

"They are really a good group of kids, and they're becoming men," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said Friday, the day before Duke faced Arkansas in the NCAA tournament's West Regional final at Chase Center. "They've been really good, and for me to have that group in this final year for me, I think I'm very thankful for that."

That togetherness and trust paid off last Sunday in the second round when starting small forward A.J. Griffin sprained an ankle in the second half against Michigan State with the game's outcome, and the fate of Duke's season, in the balance. He went to the sideline for treatment, replaced by part-time starter Trevor Keels. Instead of feeling uncertain, Duke closed the game on a 20-6 run, hitting its final five shots from the field to win 85-76.

Keels hit the 3-pointer that tied the game at 72 during that surge.

On Thursday night in the Sweet 16 against Arkansas, Griffin was healthy and back in the starting lineup. Once again, Duke needed a strong finishing kick. This time, Keels was on the bench for all but 12 seconds of the game's final 10:17.

Three guys who have started every game – Paolo Banchemo, Wendell Moore and Mark Williams – were joined by sophomore guard Jeremy Roach and Griffin. Duke made its final eight shots, not missing in the game's final 8:53 to rally and win, 78-73.

"It can be tough at times," Duke associate head coach Jon Scheyer said, "because we have more than five players who have won games for us, who can really help us down the stretch. If you look at the entire season, it's been different guys stepping out the different moments. And so when you talk about it as coaches, you always talk about everybody being ready. It's true for this group is any."

Krzyzewski and his staff have used three different starting lineups this season. The first 14 games, it included Banchemo, Moore, Williams, Roach and Keels. The next group replaced Roach with Griffin. A third lineup, necessitated when Keels suffered a calf muscle injury to his right leg in January, re-insterted Roach to go with Banchemo, Moore, Williams and Griffin.

That second lineup – Keels, Griffin, Banchemo, Moore and Williams – started Duke's three ACC tournament games. But Krzyzewski made a change for the NCAA tournament, removing Keels and starting Roach again.

The finishing group against Michigan State was Duke's original starting five. Against Texas Tech, it was that second lineup.

It doesn't seem to bother anyone on Duke's bench.

"The main thing is everybody who steps on the floor it's all about winning," Moore said. "None of us have our own personal agendas. When we're on the floor, we all just want to win. So that's really what's been showing in these close games these past five-minute games we've been showing, it's really just our will to win."

That chemistry began last summer when Moore, Roach, Keels, Williams and Banchemo twice made the four hour, 30 minute drive from Durham to North Augusta, South Carolina, to watch their former summer-league teams play at the Nike Peach Jam event.

But it didn't stop there. Throughout the season, the players regularly get together for meetings without their coaches. Moore and senior Joey Baker, the team's co-captains, did most of the talking at first. But that's changed as the season has progressed.

"Now everybody has a voice," Moore said. "That's something that we've been stressing all year. If you have something to say, say it in the moment because you never get that moment back to say it again."

That kind of real talk permeates up and down the 14-player roster. The Blue Devils believe, and their play of late shows, it has made them a better team no matter who is on the court and who is on the bench.

"It's a great culture," Roach said. "This is probably one of the best teams I've been on just camaraderie wise. We get along so well. Like coach says, we have six starters."

Just because one player starts one game, and another one helps finishes off a win, the Blue Devils have found ways for that not to cause a fractured locker room. The egos, it appears, are under control as everyone finds a way to be at their best.

It all stems, Moore said, from those regular team gatherings.

"Everybody's been I mean just growing ever since that," Moore said. "For A.J., it's been talking. For Jeremy, it's been his leadership. For Mark, he's been really just aggressive in a simpler way. For P (Paolo), it's been just playing instinctually and not thinking about too many things. Just everybody. It's made us become one of the better basketball teams in the country today."

How Duke discovered its mojo after earlier March losses left its direction in doubt

By Andrew Carter, Raleigh News & Observer (March 26, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- There was a time, not all that long ago, when Mike Krzyzewski could watch one of his younger players make a mistake – a not-smart foul, for instance, or a poor decision – and imagine how the experience of the blunder might one day prove beneficial. That's how it used to be, he said here on Friday, back when "you would have years" to build teams, little by little.

Krzyzewski was dressed for work, all activewear and sneakers, when he took a moment to reflect on how things were. It was the day before Duke's game against Arkansas here on Saturday in the NCAA tournament West Regional final; the day before his Blue Devils would be playing for the chance to go to another Final Four, which would be their first since 2015.

After 75 years on Earth and 1,201 college basketball victories and 42 years at Duke, none of this is all that new for Krzyzewski. He has been on this stage many times, on the precipice of the Final Four. This is the 17th time he has led Duke to an NCAA tournament regional final. Twelve times, his teams have won those games and advanced to the national semifinals.

And yet this feels different, too, in part because of the obvious storyline that this is Krzyzewski's final March but also because of how different this particular journey has been. Exactly three weeks ago Saturday, Duke lost at home against North Carolina – a defeat that's sure to be remembered among the most humbling of Krzyzewski's tenure given it came in his final game at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

And exactly two weeks ago Saturday, the Blue Devils at times looked flat and unresponsive in losing against Virginia Tech in the ACC tournament championship game. Those consecutive Saturdays raised all kinds of questions about the Blue Devils, ones about their capacity for defense and whether they'd hit a wall or what had happened to a team that looked so promising earlier in the season.

Perhaps the most pressing question of all, though, was this: Was Duke tough enough for March?

It all had to be grating for Krzyzewski, who has built his program and Hall of Fame career on the intangible and difficult-to-define grit at the foundation of his best teams, which were defined by the floor-slapping intensity of relentless man-to-man defenses, and the courage to rise to the occasion in the biggest moments. And now here he was, approaching the end, with a team that suddenly had to answer for its lack of toughness. But that was then and this is now, and now the Blue Devils have suddenly discovered some resolve.

The Duke of two or three weeks ago would have found it difficult, indeed, to muster the fortitude to overcome a five-point deficit with five minutes to play last Sunday against Michigan State. And the Duke of early March might've found a way to lose against Texas Tech here on Thursday night, when the pressure of the moment seemed to seep through every crevice of the Chase Center.

Both times, though, the Duke of now found a way to prevail. The turnaround – from an inability to rise from the mat in consecutive weeks against North Carolina and Virginia Tech, to now, on the verge of the Final Four after surviving the exact circumstances in which the Blue Devils melted just weeks ago – has to rank among the most improbable of Krzyzewski's trips to the NCAA tournament.

He has not had years to mold this team amid its challenges, after all, but weeks.

Krzyzewski on Friday thought back to his fourth national championship team, in 2010. That year, Jon Scheyer and Nolan Smith and others completed a transformation that had been a long time in the making, with the same players going through the same trials and, ultimately, experiencing the same euphoria when they were part of the last team standing on the first Monday night in April.

"They were able to have adversity help build them," Krzyzewski said, and it had long become more difficult to reap the benefits of such adversity in a time of constant roster turnover due to one-and-done NBA Draft entries and transfers. With younger teams that haven't had years together, Krzyzewski said, "you're trying to avoid as much adversity."

"But in the last 10 days or so of the regular season and the (ACC) tournament, we experienced a very deep level of adversity," he said, "and in some respects it really helped us. I would rather not have experienced it, but I think it helped us.

"It hurt. They grew together and we all took responsibility and figured out what was wrong, and then we tried to correct it. It was actually in some respects a good thing, but that usually happens over a – it used to be, over a decade ago, over a period of time."

It is not as if Krzyzewski has waved a magic wand during the past couple of weeks, or reached into a tattered bag of tricks that might be showing its age in his 47th year as a head coach.

Krzyzewski has been "the same old guy every day," sophomore guard Jeremy Roach said here on Friday, though Roach acknowledged that the Blue Devils have benefited from an attitude adjustment that Krzyzewski engineered.

After the defeats against UNC and Virginia Tech, Krzyzewski embraced the approach, as he does every year, of treating the NCAA tournament like a new season. He asked his players to deposit their baggage somewhere else and not carry it into the tournament where, Roach said, Duke has adopted a fresh motto: "We can, we will."

By now these Blue Devils have spent nearly a year living inside the college basketball version of an aquarium. Visitors step into their world a bit and look behind the glass and wonder how it might be in there, amid the swirl and drama of Krzyzewski's farewell season. Wendell Moore Jr., the junior forward, acknowledged Friday that perhaps he and his teammates might have been "a little distracted" entering the regular season finale against North Carolina, and one could pardon the Blue Devils if that were the case.

After all, that game became the main event in what seemed like an endless ESPN infomercial recapping Krzyzewski's career and accomplishments. The network's "GameDay" show set up outside of Cameron Indoor Stadium, where nearly 100 former Duke players arrived to see their old coach on the home bench one last time. Since then, though, it feels as though a weight has been lifted off of Duke – or at least as though the pressure of the tournament hasn't exceeded the sort of pressure the Blue Devils have already endured, and perhaps become acclimated to playing through.

"It's not only his last tournament, it's our last tournament," said Mark Williams, the sophomore center. "Like, it'll be the last time the 14 of us are going to be together, playing. Obviously, we know the stakes for Coach, but at the same time, for us, we're not going to get this back."

Williams revealed that he and his teammates had spent some time this week with Steph Curry, the NBA All-Star and face of the hometown Golden State Warriors. Curry shared some advice with the Blue Devils, Williams said, as did Grant Hill, the former Duke All-American who is in town to work the West Regional as part of CBS' lead college basketball broadcasting team. Both Curry and Hill shared the same sentiment, according to Williams, the message being about "just cherishing the moment."

If anything has become clear for Duke during its past two games, it's that the moment no longer appears too big. That wasn't the case on those back-to-back Saturdays earlier this month, but it has become so now, and the Blue Devils seem to have somehow managed to condense a yearslong growth process into a couple of weeks.

Their evolution now has them one game from the Final Four, and if they get there it'd be the first time since 1994 that Duke advanced that far without being a No. 1 seed. Of Krzyzewski's 12 Final Four teams, seven reached the national semifinals after earning top seeds, including the ones that made it there in 1999, 2001, 2004, 2010 and 2015.

Those five teams all entered the tournament as Final Four favorites, with the certainty that they belonged. This one, meanwhile, began the tournament with no shortage of questions. Before it began, Krzyzewski issued his team a challenge, said Moore, one of the Blue Devils' captains.

"We've just been playing with that immense intensity lately," he said, before describing how Krzyzewski has coached the potential out of this group. "He's gotten on a couple of us just because he knows we can play better. Everybody he's gotten on has responded in a positive way to what he's been saying.

"That could be his kind of way of using tricks to get us motivated. But it's been working."

Duke has responded with its two grittiest victories of the season, throwback performances to a different time, when teams grew up together and grew older and tougher as the years passed. The Blue Devils don't have that luxury now but they have this moment.

In bridge to past, this Duke team follows in the handprints of its predecessors

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 26, 2022)

SAN FRANCISCO -- In certain moments this season, when Duke's coaches felt like the players needed a reminder of the legacy they had sworn to uphold, the old clips would come out. Standard definition, converted-from-VHS, grainy archive stuff from the Duke teams that made Duke into Duke. Vintage stuff, literally not figuratively.

"Just the tough Duke teams, the floor-slapping, the together Duke teams," Wendell Moore said.

When the Blue Devils slapped the floor in the final minute of Thursday night's win over Texas Tech, they somehow tapped into a collective memory they didn't even know they had, in the handprints of their predecessors: Tommy Amaker, Steve Wojciechowski, Bobby Hurley.

But none of this current team was even alive when Wojo last slapped the floor in a Duke uniform, and they were infants the last time he did it as an assistant coach on the Duke bench. Whatever emotional connection they have to the teams that first saved and then made Mike Krzyzewski has been nurtured and cultivated. It didn't come naturally. It didn't come at all to some of their predecessors, who knew what it meant, but not what it means.

This team has figured out what it really means, resurrecting a Duke ethos that all but died in the one-and-done era, as players came and went before they could truly internalize it. It became a ghost story, told over the campfire in the summer at K Academy, something lost and unlikely to be regained, especially when the 2018 team was mocked for doing it while playing zone – just as its predecessors had been reviled by their detractors for doing it in earnest.

This team, in one night, in one game, brought it all back.

"Watching a bunch of older Duke games, Duke basketball in general, that floor slap is really just a symbol of locking in, let's get a stop right here," Duke's Mark Williams said. "Obviously, you can't use that every single possession. But certain moments, when you know you need a stop, you know you need that play, that floor slap just signifies like, this is where we're going to do. We're going to do it, like, right now."

The Duke teams that made Duke into Duke, forged over hard years in Krzyzewski's fiery crucible, became a myth when the players got younger, their tenures shorter. Somehow, this team has made it a reality. The adversity of losing to North Carolina in the game this team just couldn't lose, and the hangover Duke had in the ACC tournament, packed years of learning into 10 days.

This team got very old, very fast. It looks like the Duke of old. It now acts like the Duke of old.

"The slapping the floor, what the hell? Why not?" Krzyzewski said. "Our guys really wanted that because it's kind of like crossing the bridge to the brotherhood. They can now say they did that. Hopefully they can say that again, at least on Saturday."

This team, more than any other in recent Duke history, has lately been able to tap into the spirit of its forebears. Not the past decade of freshman-dominated teams, necessarily, although Thursday's switch to zone did recall the 2018 team, but the gritty, defense-oriented, never-say-die heart of the classic Duke teams.

This is, of course, a very recent development. But when Duke went out and slapped the floor against Texas Tech, it not only turned the tables on the country's best defensive team, there was a tangible, almost electric connection with the Duke teams of the past that, no matter what else, could get a stop when they needed one.

"Coach has his ways of getting it across in the preseason about what matters," Duke coach-in-waiting Jon Scheyer said. "And, you know, we simulate it at the end of practice. We need one stop to win a game, touch the floor. Let's get it. It actually means something. There's meaning behind it. And our guys did it. It's a bond that holds them together to dig deep to get that final stop."

Krzyzewski will be gone after this season. This team might actually live on, in high definition, for another generation to see.

Jeremy Roach and his takeover moment, leading Duke to the Sweet 16

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (March 21, 2022)

GREENVILLE, S.C. – Joe Roach needs two phones. Probably more.

One for the texts, obviously, popping onto his iPhone screen with the fervor of a furious concert pianist. One for the FaceTimes, from cousins and family friends and damn near everyone in the entirety of Leesburg, Va. Managing all those messages, in the waning minutes of Duke's second-round NCAA Tournament game, would be a full-time job in itself. But really, he needs a third more than either of the other two: for recording purposes. The better the camera, the closer the zoom, the better.

Joe wants to record this all. He will record this all. Just look at him there, in his aisle seat six or so rows off the court inside Bon Secours Wellness Arena, directly behind Mike Krzyzewski on Duke's bench. (His wife, Carole, has migrated to the middle of the aisle beside him, with more room for pacing and praying. Who can blame her?) They're not hard to miss, in their dueling Duke jerseys – Joe in conventional blue, Carole sporting the Gothic script – with the same number centered in the back: 3.

Fitting, huh?

The number. The play. And it all comes back to one person: their son, Jeremy. For much of this season, and especially of late, he's been a valuable cog in the Blue Devils' backcourt backlog. Now? Well, he's more than that. Much more. Because when Wendell Moore whipped a pass his way with 1:18 remaining in Sunday's game against Michigan State, Duke desperately clinging to a one-point lead, it was Jeremy Roach who wound up in the moment – shot clock at seven, six, needing to summon something, anything, to keep this season alive – with only two options:

Meet the moment, or melt from it.

That simple. There is no middle ground, no gray area. You make the play, or you don't. "I was wondering," Krzyzewski said later, "if we were going to stay young." And can you blame him? After amassing a nine-point lead early in the second half – and in the process, Duke looking every bit the dangerous, deadly, rolling ball of knives it can be – the whole damn thing came undone. Turnovers, forced shots, porous perimeter defense; Michigan State, makers of 15 3-pointers in their previous three games combined, suddenly turned into the Splash Brothers, draining 11 treys. With just over eight minutes to play, A.J. Griffin, Duke's designated sharpshooter, went down with an ankle injury and couldn't return. So, yeah, when Marcus Bingham Jr. made the second of two free-throws with five minutes to go, giving the Spartans a five-point edge? You better believe Coach K (and the rest of Duke's crowd) started to sweat. If anyone affiliated with that hue of blue tells you otherwise? Pssshh, they're lying.

It was all too real, all too fast. The end of the season, this team, Krzyzewski's career. Those threads are all woven so tightly together, there's just no separating stitch from stitch. It was a subtle terror, simmering in the stadium, but a terror nonetheless.

And then Jeremy Roach, with one dribble and a perfect parabola, erased it all.

"That's who he is," Carole told The Athletic. "That's who he's been all along."

"Since the fourth grade!" Joe interjects. "You can check the film on that."

So, let's. Only, start the cut-up at that 5:10 mark, when it all felt feeble and frail and on the fringe of falling apart. Yes, Roach put the punctuation mark on Duke's eventual 85-76 win, sending the Blue Devils to Mike Krzyzewski's 26th Sweet 16, but his teammates sure played their parts in even making that moment possible. Immediately after those Bingham foul shots, Paolo Banchemo imposed his physicality with a layup to bring things back to three. A small dent, but one nonetheless. "We were like, man, we got four minutes. We can either lay down, or we can turn it up. That's really all it was," Banchemo said. "Just fighting ... having heart, and just trusting each other." Next came a defensive stop, one of Mark Williams' team-high eight rebounds, and a nifty layup inside to cut it back to one with 4:17 remaining. Breathe. For the next three minutes thereafter, the two teams traded punches and the lead. Banchemo's driving layup with 2:05 left, and his subsequent block on Joey Hauser, then set up the aforementioned moment. Banchemo got blocked off at the elbow, tossed the ball back to Moore on the right side of the arc, and ... well, let the actors describe the scene themselves.

"The clock was winding down. Normally in that situation we call green, which means we have to get a good shot up," said Moore, Duke's junior captain. "I was just looking at the matchups and thought Jeremy had a good matchup."

So he whirled it across the court, to a spot right in front of his 75-year-old coach, the one clinging to the final few games of his Hall of Fame career. Seven, six seconds on the slot clock ... "The four-minute media (timeout), I was thinking to myself, if I get an open 3, I'm knocking it down," Roach said from the dais, his hair sufficiently soaked from a postgame water bottle shower. "The shot clock was winding down, and I knew I had to make a play." When he caught Moore's pass, his wrist already cocked, it was only a matter of how quick he'd get off the shot.

Five, four... One dribble, a step forward from the midcourt logo to the edge of the arc, and the rise-up.

Meet it, or melt from it, right?

Swish.

"Tears," Carole said, "almost came out my eyes."

"I'm just elated, man," Joe adds, shaking his head, not wanting to wake from this dream. "It's crazy. It's surreal right now."

From the 10,000-foot view, it doesn't quite make sense. On a team with arguably five future first-round NBA Draft picks, Roach is the sixth guy you'd think could play here. Except, Roach, after bouncing in and out of the starting lineup all season, has thoroughly stated his claim to being in the first five during the last month. "It's like he put the chip back in from (his high school days at) PVI," Joe said, hailing back to when Roach was a five-star recruit. "We plugged it back in, like, 'Do you, baby. Just do you.' He's clearly gotten his confidence back, and that's what it takes."

Call it confidence, cajones, whatever you please. But since Duke traveled to Charlottesville, Va., on Feb. 23 – a short two-hour sprint due south of Roach's hometown – he has been averaging 11.6 points and 1.6 assists per game while shooting 41.9 percent from 3. Twice, he has scored 15 points, his season-high. Heck, even before that, when Trevor Keels was still out nursing his ankle injury in late January, "Jeremy kind of carried us," Krzyzewski said, crediting Roach's consecutive nine-assist games. So when Duke rolled into South Carolina this week, Krzyzewski finally rewarded his sophomore guard by slotting him in with the starters. "(When) we started the week, we just said we need great ball pressure," Krzyzewski said. "He can do that, and he did that today, but also to lead us."

You know what leaders do? They deliver amidst the drama.

Bobby Hurley against UNLV. Tyus Jones against Wisconsin.

And now, regardless of how the rest of Duke's season turns out, Jeremy Roach against Michigan State.

"It will sound a little crazy to you," Michigan State coach Tom Izzo said postgame, "but their two best players, in my mind, were Roach and Moore. I love Banchemo, and Williams is hard to cover, but it was Roach and Moore that really took over."

You know why he'd say Roach. As for Moore, well, scan the stat sheet and focus your gaze on his free-throw percentages: nine makes in 10 tries, four of which came after Roach's 3. Roach provided the cushion, but Moore made sure there wasn't another undoing over the last 60 seconds. "I didn't see anything but me and the bucket," Moore said of stepping to the stripe late. "That's my routine. I really have to close my eyes just so I can lock in." And he did.

This brings us back to Joe, Carole, and their son – Duke's difference-maker Sunday. Thirteen of Roach's eventual 15 points came in the second half, through an array of drives Krzyzewski said were, "some of the best drives I've seen as a Duke coach, really, especially in a pressure situation." But none were bigger, or more memorable, than that 3. The one that cemented Roach's spot in Blue Devils basketball lore, and sent this team to San Francisco for a meeting with No. 3 seed Texas Tech. So damn right Joe's got his phone out, flipped sideways, panning throughout the stadium for every possible angle. He wants to remember it all, right down to the student section screaming a few rows back of him. And like any sports parent, no, he won't relax until it's finally final. "Oh my gosh," Joe said the second the final buzzer blared. "Just let it get down to zero, and let's be ahead."

At that point, at long last, right behind the bench, it all boils over. Keels, Roach's high school teammate who scored 12 points, comes over to embrace Joe and Carole. Mickie Krzyzewski, Coach K's wife, is clapping toward the center of all her grandkids, who are simultaneously pushing SEND on booking their flights to the Bay Area. Roach won't come back out until after his media obligations – uh, yeah, we'd like to talk to him, please – but that doesn't stop Joe and Carole from celebrating with all the other parents.

There's just one last question, then, about Jeremy Roach and his family and what this moment – the moment – means to them all.

What's Joe gonna do with his iPhone video?

"This is for right here," he said, pounding the place on his chest right where the heart is. "That's all I can tell you."

Duke stares into the abyss and, for the first time this season, likes what it sees

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 20, 2022)

GREENVILLE, S.C. -- Paolo Banchemo practically bounced back toward the Duke bench. There was pandemonium erupting elsewhere, around him and behind him and in front of him where the Duke families and fans were practically spilling out of the stands.

The arena seemed to revolve around him as he stepped toward Mike Krzyzewski, like they were in focus and everything else was blurry. They slapped hands as Banchemo practically yelled "yeah, coach!" in his face.

It was almost a primal scream, the sudden release of so much tension that felt like an explosion. Jeremy Roach followed, throwing his arms around Krzyzewski in some sort of hybrid chest-bump-hug.

"I don't have a chest to bump," Krzyzewski said later, the mood suddenly as light as it has been all season.

Whatever hangover Duke had been carrying around, whatever baggage the Blue Devils had been dragging around behind them, it evaporated in this cataclysm of relief and celebration that was perhaps a little excessive for this stage of the tournament – for a coach going to his 26th and final Sweet 16 – but not for these circumstances.

If Duke celebrated Sunday night like it was going to the Final Four, not San Francisco, a mere waypoint on a longer journey, maybe it was because it felt like that, not a second-round game but a regional final. Michigan State and Duke asked everything of each other, swapping leads and full-speed collisions, and this one last meeting between Krzyzewski and Tom Izzo delivered everything it promised.

And if, in six days, Duke does indeed get to the Final Four, this 85-76 win may be the game that got it there.

For two weeks, since the collapse in Cameron, the Blue Devils have been fighting themselves as much as their opponents. "The lull," Krzyzewski has taken to calling it, the four-game swoon that started with North Carolina ruining his final home game and extended through the three listless games in Brooklyn that Duke nearly lost, nearly lost and lost.

This was different. Duke could see the end coming, almost like a physical thing standing there in front of it, after blowing yet another late lead. The Blue Devils wilted under similar circumstances too many times this season.

From up nine in the second half to down five with five minutes to go, Duke was watching the same grim scenario play out, unable to make plays, unable to get a stop. A.J. Griffin watched from the bench after turning his left ankle. The vibe was grim.

This time, Krzyzewski wasn't ready to be done. Nor were Banchemo and Roach and Wendell Moore ready to let it happen. When the game paused for a television timeout with 3:43 to go and Michigan State headed to the foul line up one, the vibe changed for good.

"We were like, man, we got four minutes," Banchemo said. "We can either lay down, or we can turn it up. That's really all it was, man. Just fighting. Having heart. And just trusting each other, really."

And then the Blue Devils, with the end of Krzyzewski's career hovering over them, made every single play they needed to make to win the game – whether it was Banchemo driving on Hauser or Jeremy Roach getting to the rim and finishing in traffic or slumping Trevor Keels hitting his biggest 3-pointer of the season.

The Blue Devils did what they hadn't been able to do, in the "lull" or even before. They flipped the script. They took over. They took control of their own destiny and seized it with both hands like a rebound.

"I think they showed their truest colors," Izzo said. "They lost at home to North Carolina. They lost to Virginia Tech. Same kind of games. We came back and went up. An average team without much heart might have drifted into the sunset. I thought they reached down in Mike Krzyzewski fashion and did an unbelievable job of taking it at us."

Heart. This team has often been questioned just how much of that it actually has, frittering away late leads, losing on the final possession. And there it was, at the last possible moment, in excess. Krzyzewski teared up afterward, talking about it. His team had been put to the test, with everything hanging in the balance.

"It had nothing to do with coaching those last four or five minutes," Krzyzewski said. "It all had to do with heart and togetherness. They followed their hearts, and God bless them."

They'll follow their hearts to San Francisco now, a new chapter with new pitfalls and, potentially, a rematch with Gonzaga. But this looks like a different Duke team: one that stared into the abyss and, for the first time this season, liked what it saw.

Duke faced down the end of Coach K's career -- and grew up when it mattered

By David M. Hale, ESPN.com (March 20, 2022)

GREENVILLE, S.C. – Mike Krzyzewski looked down the dais at the five players who'd refused to let his last dance come to an end, who engineered a frenetic comeback to advance to the Sweet 16 with an 85-76 win over Michigan State, and he choked back tears.

For nearly a year, he has known the finish line was in sight. He chose this path, a farewell tour on which he might relive some of his classic moments and, perhaps, pen one final chapter worthy of his epic 42-year career. The finality of Krzyzewski's run has hung like a cloud over everything Duke has done this season, each game, junior Wendell Moore Jr. said, another "last something" for Krzyzewski, but always with the knowledge that more "lasts" awaited.

Sunday was different though. When Marcus Bingham Jr. drained a pair of free throws to give Michigan State a five-point lead with 5:10 to play, the end wasn't simply a point on the horizon. It had arrived.

As Bingham lined up for his first free throw, Paolo Banchemo was furious. Mark Williams was stunned. Trevor Keels hung his head. Moore clapped his hands, almost as if he was trying to wake his team from an unfathomable nightmare.

All season, Duke struggled to protect leads. On Sunday, the Blue Devils coughed up a nine-point cushion to Michigan State.

All season, Duke's players have shouldered the responsibility of scripting a fitting ending to their coach's legendary career, and too often -- in the regular-season finale against North Carolina or the ACC tournament vs. Virginia Tech -- it has seemed too heavy a burden. Now, that weight threatened to crush them entirely.

All season, the Blue Devils have worked to carve out their own space amid the overwhelming narrative of Krzyzewski's last dance. The NCAA tournament was supposed to be a fresh start, and yet the basketball gods conspired to provide one more compelling moment all about their coach. Krzyzewski vs. Tom Izzo was no doubt the NCAA's dream matchup when it placed Duke and Michigan State in the same region. It was only fitting, of course, that these two friends, who had faced off 16 times in their careers, should enjoy one last showdown, too. Now, Izzo had the upper hand.

In truth, the entire season had built to this, and if it had ended there, it might've almost felt fitting.

But it didn't end there.

Banchemo will be Krzyzewski's last truly elite prospect, and he looked the part late, driving to the basket and delivering a layup to stop the bleeding after the Spartans' 11-2 run.

Keels had struggled, but he buried a 3 with 3:24 to play to tie the game. It allowed a legion of Duke fans to exhale for the first time in what felt like an eternity.

Williams, who'd been a force of nature in the paint early on, didn't take a shot in the final 14 minutes of play, but on defense, he swallowed up the Michigan State offense, playing "like a hockey goalie," Krzyzewski said.

Jeremy Roach was the forgotten member of Duke's band of lottery picks, but he drove to the basket again and again in those final minutes, attacking the basket with such determination that even Krzyzewski was stunned. Those drives, Krzyzewski said, were some of the best he'd seen in his 42 years on the sideline. And then Roach delivered the dagger -- a 3-pointer that Krzyzewski insists found the basket not through accuracy but sheer force of will.

That's what had Krzyzewski's eyes watering after the game. This season has been about him, a celebration of nearly a half-century in college basketball, but when the end finally arrived, it was those players who reached out and pulled him back from the brink.

"I think they showed their truest colors," Izzo said. "They lost at home to North Carolina. They lost to Virginia Tech. Same kind of games. We came back and went up. They [could have] just drifted into the sunset. And I thought they reached down, in Mike Krzyzewski fashion, and did an unbelievable job of kind of taking it at us."

When it was over, Moore was asked whether he was thinking about a last stand for Krzyzewski in those excruciating seconds when Bingham stood at the free throw line to pad Michigan State's lead. No, he said. He never thought about losing. He was thinking about a road trip.

Actually, two road trips, Moore said.

Twice in July, Moore, Banchemo, Roach, Keels and Williams packed into a car and drove to Atlanta for the annual Peach Jam basketball games, a chance to witness their former grassroots teams face off while they watched from the stands.

"Ever since then, we just called ourselves 'The Road Crew,'" Moore said. "We knew it was going to come down to us at some point [this season]."

With five minutes left in Krzyzewski's career, the Road Crew huddled up.

"We looked into each other's eyes," Moore said, "and we knew we weren't going to lose."

Duke is on to the Sweet 16. Krzyzewski survived another trial by fire against a worthy opponent. In a game sold as a matchup of legendary coaches, Duke's players scripted their own mythology.

When Michigan State took the lead in the second half, Krzyzewski said his team looked young. It's a refrain he has echoed often this season, and he wondered if the bill had come due for packing a roster with potential lottery picks who hadn't quite found their sea legs.

"We were young for a while there," he said, "and I wondered if we were going to stay young."

Instead, this group grew up, and in doing so, the Blue Devils made their 75-year-old coach feel young once more, winning a game that belongs in the pantheon of Krzyzewski's greatest.

The end will come. It's waiting, out there on the horizon in San Francisco next weekend or in New Orleans at the Final Four.

But whenever the music stops, Sunday proved this group of Blue Devils were worthy of the dance.

How Duke's best five minutes of basketball this season saved everything

By Matt Norlander, CBSSports.com (March 20, 2022)

GREENVILLE, S.C. – This was it. The moment had truly finally arrived. A South Carolina Sunday was where and when Duke had to prove itself. If not, everything would come crashing down.

The second-seeded Blue Devils found themselves trailing 70-65 against No. 7 Michigan State with five minutes remaining in this feverish, meeting-the-hype second round NCAA Tournament game. Elimination was now on the table. The prospect of the end of Mike Krzyzewski's career had entered the room and hung in the air.

Michigan State hadn't come to play -- it came to bust Duke open. Tom Izzo's team looked hungry, opportunistic and alert. Deep into the second half, the Spartans were showing they could spoil matters for Duke and ship Krzyzewski off to retirement a couple weeks before he wanted.

"I thought when we got down -- we were young for a while there, and I was wondering if we were going to stay young," Krzyzewski said.

Making matters more problematic for Duke was its gimpy starting shooting guard, A.J. Griffin. He was reduced to a spectator after hurting what appeared to be his left ankle with 8:32 remaining and Duke up 63-61. So, here were these fun-but-flawed Blue Devils, their best shooter but a fan. MSU took its first lead since 11:11 of the first half three minutes after Griffin's injury, when Tyson Walker drained a 3-pointer to make it 68-65. A pair of Marcus Bingham Jr. foul shots grew it to a five-point gap for Sparty.

You've gotten to this point, you've seen the headline, you likely watched the game or caught highlights. There's no spoiler here. The result is not in doubt. The story of getting there is why we're here. Who knows where, when or how this Duke season will end? It could be on Thursday in the Sweet 16, in San Francisco vs. 3-seed Texas Tech. It could be in the ultimate game in New Orleans with a national championship on the line.

That mystery will solve itself in relatively short order. But it remains an unknown because of the five-minute stretch of play to close out Sunday's game.

"What a game," Krzyzewski said. "It was reminiscent of the Final Four games. Both teams were lights out with the effort today. We're so very proud of winning this game because we beat a heck of a team, obviously as well-coached as any in the country."

There's a chance the final five minutes of Sunday's 85-76 win over Michigan State winds up being the best and/or most important stretch of Duke's campaign. It saved it Sunday, and it might spur it to something much bigger. The Blue Devils responded to their largest deficit of the night by turning Michigan State upside down. From the moment the game got to 70-65 in favor of MSU, Duke had its best defensive stretch this season, all circumstances considered.

"My guys were so tough in those last six minutes of the game," Krzyzewski said. "The last four or five minutes, the defense was incredible."

How incredible? From the time the game was 70-65, here's how it finished from an efficiency standpoint:

Duke points per possession: 1.80
Michigan State points per possession: 0.67

The Blue Devils went on a 15-4 run, which also contained an 8-0 run, and overall finished the game on a 20-6 hammer-throw to vault themselves into the regional semifinals.

"We went to a little bit different coverage in the full court, like a soft, soft press, just so they didn't get a run because they can really run," Krzyzewski said. "Then we started -- we were going to switch 1 through 5. Mark (Williams) has improved so much during the year in his lateral movement that he can stay in front, and that's what he did."

Duke needed this. It had to be pushed. It had to have its toughness tested. They knew it was coming. One stop wouldn't do. Neither would two or three. It had to be consistent. MSU was too well-coached, too deep, too abundant with scorers and slashers who smelled some blood.

The situation inside Bon Secours Wellness Arena was immediate, urgent, and Duke knew it. But they didn't bring up the looming possibility this game, and season, could end.

"Losing didn't come up one time," Wendell Moore Jr. said.

Over the course of five minutes, Duke defended Michigan State to the tune of 2-of-9 shooting and a turnover.

"You're not going to talk about losing, or else you're going to lose," Krzyzewski said.

Paolo Banchemo showed some of his best on both ends. He started Duke's run with a layup. A few possessions later, Banchemo took Hauser off the dribble, backed him down. A move between bully-ball and top-pick-in-the-draft stuff, Banchemo gently kissed his shot off the glass to give Duke a 75-74 lead with 2:05 to go. It would never trail again. Hauser was blocked by Banchemo on a spin-to-the-left attempt on the ensuing possession. For Banchemo, a huge moment. A definitive block. Duke had snatched momentum.

"I knew once we got our foot in the door, there was no looking back from there," Moore said, later adding that once the team was together at the under-four timeout, "we just looked in each other's eyes, and we knew we weren't going to lose."

Banchemo had a block, Williams had a block, Moore had a steal. And Jeremy Roach hit the 3-pointer that gave Duke a four-point lead with 1:16 to go. That ball going in, as the shot clock was expiring, was the biggest shot of the second half. It put Duke up four and seemed to spook Michigan State. Roach was the guy once Griffin couldn't play. Stepped up. Shined.

"He willed that ball," Krzyzewski said. "He willed that ball in. They were some of the best drives I've seen as a Duke coach, really, especially in a pressure situation."

Another big defensive play materialized on the ensuing possession, as Moore stole an absent-minded pass from Christie. He was right there and Christie, the freshman, didn't even see Moore.

"The last five minutes, I think they made every shot," Izzo said.

He's right. Duke was 5 for 5 from the field in the final five minutes; its only misses came at the foul line. As the clock expired, Krzyzewski and his staff couldn't hold back their smiles, their relief, their joy. There was some easy breathing. A second win had come here in Greenville, which wasn't the case five years ago, when No. 2 Duke was upset by No. 7 South Carolina. Krzyzewski hadn't looked this joyous in weeks. It almost felt as though losing before the regional semifinals would have amounted to an embarrassing end to an unparalleled career -- and rightfully so.

"Look, I'm 75," Krzyzewski said. "To have moments like that, you've got to be kidding me. Really, how damn lucky can you be to be in that? And I want to share it. I don't want to sit down and say, 'You guys enjoy it.' I want to be in the party a little bit. That's the enjoyment I've got, I've had for 47 years. Today was one of the really good days."

What a way, by the way, for K to get career win No. 1,200. He's now one shy of 100 NCAA Tournament victories, too. Both records his, of course. And may prove to be forevermore. This is also his 26th Sweet 16 trip, another record.

Krzyzewski got emotional in his opening statement to the media, as Banchemo, Trevor Keels, Moore, Roach and Williams sat next to him.

"I'm incredibly proud of my guys," Krzyzewski said with a quiver in his tone. "This is -- this was -- you guys were terrific, man. I'm really proud to be your coach. It had nothing to do with coaching those last four or five minutes. It all had to do with heart and togetherness. They followed their hearts, and God bless them. We're in the Sweet 16."

The final head-to-head between Krzyzewski and Izzo played out in riveting fashion. Duke pulled away late, but it was a contest in doubt for 39 of its 40 minutes. The potential was there for it all to end for Duke and K, for Michigan State to spoil. Instead, Krzyzewski's players turned up and turned in a performance as clutch and convincing as they've had all season. To see them in that stretch was to be reminded that Duke, when it finds that zone, is as dangerous as any team in the country.

San Francisco awaits.

Jeremy Roach, not his more well-known teammates, extends Coach K's final season

By Mike DeCourcy, The Sporting News (March 20, 2022)

GREENVILLE, S.C. – It seemed as though every one of Duke's many stars touched the basketball on the possession that determined whether Mike Krzyzewski was finished coaching – all but the two on the bench, Coach K and injured freshman shooter AJ Griffin. No one on the court either wanted the responsibility or could concoct a way to fulfill it responsibly. So it fell to Jeremy Roach, the other Blue Devil.

On a team whose roster is spread across the first round of every media mock draft, Roach will not be a lottery pick. He will not be a first-round selection by any NBA team. He may or may not play in the league. He was benched multiple times during the regular season, until Krzyzewski chose to start him in this tournament to provide better on-ball defense following two losses in the past four games. Ostensibly the team's point guard when he did appear, which certainly was plenty, he ranked just third on the team in assists.

He will have this moment, though, whatever becomes of this Blue Devils team in the one or two weeks that now are promised to them. He forever will be the hero of their 85-76 victory over Michigan State in the NCAA Tournament West Region second round, which assures another Sweet 16 and at least one more game for Krzyzewski on the Duke bench.

"That last media timeout, I was just thinking to myself: If I get a 3, I'm going to knock it down," Roach told reporters. "So I think there was like a minute-thirty, something like that, the shot clock was winding down, I knew I had to make a play."

Retiring at the close of this season after 42 seasons as Duke head coach, Krzyzewski had been one or two plays from the final buzzer sounding on his career, and it happened that his guys made them and extended it, as well as securing the 1,200th victory of his career. The final score looks as though this had been a comfortable exercise for the Blue Devils, but it wasn't until 17 seconds left and MSU center Marcus Bingham's final shot deflected out of bounds, with the ball awarded to Duke, that Krzyzewski turned his back to the floor and pointed toward his assembled family in a gesture of joy.

A comfortable cruise toward his 26th Sweet 16 would not have left him nearly in tears, fighting them back just effectively enough as he talked about how much he loved coaching this team.

"You guys were terrific, man," Krzyzewski said to the players beside him on the press conference podium. "I'm really proud to be your coach."

"It had nothing to do with coaching in those last four or five minutes. It all had to do with heart and togetherness. They followed their hearts and God bless them. We're in the Sweet 16."

They will travel to San Francisco and its sparkling Chase Center, and they will go there for many reasons. All-American freshman Paulo Banchero tallied up 19 points and 7 rebounds, and center Mark Williams had 15 points, 8 rebounds and 5 blocks, the latter two categories coinciding when he snuffed Spartans guard A.J. Hoggard's drive with 2:16 left and MSU up a point. That was turned quickly into drive by Banchero that put the Devils ahead for good.

Veteran forward Wendell Moore greatest contribution might have been his massive interception of a Max Christie pass with 1:01 left, which led to a couple of free throws he converted to secure the Devils' late lead. His 15 points and 4 assists mattered so much, especially his last scoring pass, which was delivered to Duke's unlikely hero.

"(Roach) is a sophomore, you know. We've had guys we were playing against – not today – but guys who were in their sixth year," Krzyzewski told TSN. "Along the way, you're going to have ups and downs. He's had many more ups than downs."

"We needed great ball pressure, and he can do that. He did that today. But also to lead us. His scoring, though ... He made some big-time baskets. It wasn't just that three. Those drives to the basket were huge. And everybody got energy from it. We never stopped believing in him because he was believable."

Ahead by only a point with fewer than 90 seconds remaining, the Devils attempted to work the matchup that had generated so much success throughout the 40 minutes: Banchero against anyone MSU put in front of him. In this case, though, a switch matched him against 6-11 Marcus Bingham, who used his impossible length to even make an entry pass to wide-open Williams seem uninviting.

So Banchero moved right and dished it to playmaker Moore. Hoggard, concerned about Moore possibly throwing the ball inside, momentarily lost track of Roach coming up from the left wing. And what would it matter? It was Jeremy Roach. He wouldn't take a shot in that situation. Would he?

"Knowing that situation, we call 'Green.' Which means a person has got to get a shot up – got to get a good shot up," Moore told The Sporting News. "I was looking at the matchups, and I thought Jeremy had a great matchup. I took my one dribble, gave it to him, and he made it happen."

Roach's 3-pointer boosted the Devils to a 78-74 lead with 1:16 left, and they protected that cushion to the end. Roach finished 6-of-10 from the field and scored 15 points, but that was his only successful 3-point try. Given the distance, the angle and the consequence of the shot, anyone who was in the building on both occasions – and it might not have been many more than me, Krzyzewski, his wife Micki and their daughters – might have thought at least once about its similarity to the 3-pointer launched by Bobby Hurley in Duke's massive 1991 upset of UNLV in the national semifinals, the shot Coach K has called the most important during his career.

This one may not deliver a championship. But it could. And there might have been even more weight on Roach when it launched. The sudden proximity of Krzyzewski's retirement imposed a debilitating sense of pressure inside Bon Secours Wellness Arena, and Roach wanted every part of that.

"I'm proud of the fact that we've been there for four decades, that we're at least knocking on the door," Krzyzewski said. "Five times the door let us completely in. I got guys who want to win. And our goal is to win the whole thing all the time, even if we're young."

"It says a lot for the caliber of player that I've coached. These guys are good players, but they're really good guys. You don't go to those Sweet 16s just with talent. You do it with character. That's why my teams have had. But it's not like I've given them that. We've recruited that, and made use of it."

In search of 'verve:' How one of Coach K's favorite words is key to Duke's season

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 20, 2022)

GREENVILLE, S.C. -- The power went out, a circuit breaker blew, some server needed rebooting - no one really knew what went wrong. But the normally lockstep precision of the NCAA tournament fell apart Friday night after Duke's win over Cal State Fullerton, as Mike Krzyzewski and three of his players sat on an elevated dias under hot television lights and ... just sat there for minutes, whispering to each other in front of dead microphones.

As they waited for the sound to return, Krzyzewski joked, unamplified, about his "nervous anticipation for the quality of questions." Maybe, after a loss, he might have been steaming over the delay. On this night, he seemed unperturbed, as were his players.

It was an uncomfortable (and avoidable) situation handled, to use one of Krzyzewski's favorite words, with "verve," which also happens to be exactly what Duke will need against Michigan State on Sunday, and beyond if the Blue Devils advance.

Krzyzewski may not have his own Roycabulary like his former counterpart from down the road, but there are a few words and phrases that pop up more than others, that over four decades have become shorthand for various moods and frustrations and joys. A player who gets hot or a team that goes on a run has a "spurt." Experiencing almost any kind of adversity is being "knocked back." Superlative teams and players and events are "not good - great." Occasionally, things are "amazing," with the sibilant Z of Chicago's West Side.

But the king of them all, the one that speaks most to how Krzyzewski is really feeling, is *verve*. When he says it about his team, it signifies a certain confidence in it and approval of it. When he, rarely, says it about an opponent - Syracuse, without Buddy Boeheim, played with "great *verve*" in Brooklyn - it is the highest of praise. It even made it into Duke's game notes, on Jeremy Roach's "Verve at Virginia."

Krzyzewski often says it after games when Duke is particularly fluid on offense, connected on defense, engaged on the boards, talking on the bench, diving for loose balls. Or when a player has been particularly engaged on defense, perhaps locking down an opposing star.

"To me, it means like, a certain level of energy, a certain - not just energy, but cockiness with energy," Krzyzewski said. "So that's how I've used it. Just don't look up my SAT verbal. It's a one-syllable word, too, so that helps me."

The word, and everything it represents, is particularly applicable in this postseason, given Duke's perpetual search for the *mojo* it lost against North Carolina and in Brooklyn, the quest to get back where it was against Kentucky and Gonzaga. There are countless moving parts in that dynamic, from expectations to fatigue to inattention to the inexorable pressure of these circumstances, obvious to everyone.

"The Duke guys might feel burdened that it's Coach K's last whatever they do," said Michigan State's Max Christie, a rare Duke recruiting loss. "For us, we're just going out there to win the game."

But it still all boils down to Duke reaching its full potential and playing with energy, connection, aggression and swagger.

There's a word that captures all of that.

How far Duke goes in this final Krzyzewski season may depend on just how much *verve* it can generate, just how many of those conditions it can fulfill.

The curious part of it, considering how often he uses it, is that his players have apparently never heard him say it. Asked about it Saturday, they exchanged baffled looks and shrugged shoulders.

Mark Williams turned to his right, to ask Roach: "Verve?"

"I never heard that," Paolo Banchemo said.

"He hasn't said that one," Wendell Moore said.

Krzyzewski, however, insists they've heard it, although acknowledges it may not be as much a part of vernacular as it is his.

"They've probably heard me say it," Krzyzewski said. "They just only listen to a certain amount of things that I say, and maybe they haven't heard that. Sometimes when I talk to my players, afterwards I ask my staff, 'Do they still do that? Do they know who the hell I even mentioned?' So I don't think 'verve' is on Instagram very much, or whatever they're on."

They may not have heard it. Their season may depend on whether they can achieve it.

A mother's memory, a son's tribute: Coach K's legacy beyond basketball

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 19, 2022)

DURHAM -- As 4 p.m. approaches, the gym starts to fill up with grade-schoolers chasing each other around and dribbling basketballs. This is the blowing off of steam, the storm before the calm.

It takes only a few minutes for chaos to give way to study as these young students find their way to desks in classrooms, past tables full of Goldfish crackers and clementine oranges. The volume level drops. Laptops are handed out and opened. Another afternoon of study has begun at the Emily K Center.

Later, the high-school students who are the Emily K Center's most important clients will replace their younger predecessors for tutoring and meetings with college counselors. The biggest entry point for the center is in ninth grade, with students who spend four years in the Scholars to College program and then ideally remain in the Scholars on Campus program, which helps kids stay in school.

The work goes on, for a full-time staff of 28 and a dozen core volunteers, day after day after day.

Since opening in 2006, the Emily K Center has helped hundreds of Durham students attend college who might not have otherwise. There are several nonprofits and organizations that do terrific work alongside Durham Public Schools to improve access to higher education. The Emily K Center is the only one that shares a name with Durham's most famous current resident.

As Mike Krzyzewski has gone through his final season of basketball at Duke, Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton, Boston College and Clemson commemorated his departure with donations to the Emily K Center upon his final visits, and encouraged their fans to do the same. As gestures go, it was more meaningful than any physical item, as much as Krzyzewski appreciated those.

Contributing to the Emily K Center, named after the coach's late mother – that was truly personal.

"We've been in existence for 16 years," Krzyzewski said. "Really have touched thousands of youngsters. Hundreds have gone through our program and have gone to college, and a number of them have come back into the community and made the community better."

LEGACIES, TANGIBLE AND EPHEMERAL

Basketball stars Pau Gasol and Shane Battier are both distinguished fellows at the Coach K Center for Leadership and Ethics at Duke's Fuqua School of Business, which tries to teach first-year MBA students the same principles of leadership Krzyzewski learned at West Point, sharing that title with a retired general and admiral.

It's one example of Krzyzewski's attempts to leave an enduring mark outside of the world of basketball, and the COLE program codifies his belief that leadership is a teachable skill, not a gift. His reinvention of USA Basketball will linger as well, ending a pattern of Olympic embarrassment by getting NBA stars onto the same page.

There are also openly intentional attempts to reach out into the future: Duke's basketball fundraising arm is called the Legacy Fund, overseen by one of his three daughters. The transition to Jon Scheyer was orchestrated to ensure continuity in the program.

These are all, unavoidably, ephemeral legacies. Both Duke and Duke basketball existed before Krzyzewski and will exist after him, still a nationally prestigious academic institution, albeit one perhaps slightly better known for its basketball team than it was 40 years ago.

No matter what high moral principles one may ascribe to sports, whatever personal growth individuals may derive from it, in its highest forms it's still an entertainment industry at the core – and a venal and corrupt one at that, especially at the international and collegiate levels where Krzyzewski made his mark.

But at the corner of Main and Buchanan, just west of downtown Durham, on a plot of land owned by the neighboring Immaculate Conception church where Krzyzewski ritually attends 7 a.m. mass when able, the Emily K Center is a concrete and physical contribution to the community where he made his home, one that can outlast anything Krzyzewski has achieved in the game of basketball.

"I don't think basketball is his gift or his legacy," said his daughter Jamie Spatola, the Emily K Center's vice chairman. "Basketball was the vehicle."

The Emily K Center isn't exactly what Krzyzewski imagined when his parish priest first presented the idea to him. It evolved into something far more representative of what he once was, and evocative of what he became.

"You know how emotional Mike gets when he talks about his family and his upbringing in Chicago," said retired Gen. Martin Dempsey, a close Krzyzewski friend. "It is interesting how he's built, I'm not sure he would call it his legacy, but how he's built this foundation of what's important to him in his life. And it's reflective of what's important to him in his life."

A PRIEST AND A BASKETBALL COACH

The distance between St. Francis of Assisi, nestled among the leafy cul de sacs of north Raleigh, and Immaculate Conception is merely a few dozen miles, but a pastoral gap of light years. Fr. David McBriar, a Franciscan friar, made that jump in 1996, landing among the hard edges of Durham's West End. Krzyzewski was his most famous parishioner, sitting in the back pews and leaving after communion to avoid gathering a crowd.

McBriar believed then, and believes now, that his calling was to serve the needs of his community as much as the spiritual needs of his parish, or perhaps merely that the two were inextricably linked. Even now, in semi-retirement in Manhattan at age 87, he oversees a soup kitchen that serves breakfast to 200 people a day. Upon his arrival in the West End, he could sense many unfilled needs, especially in the Burch Avenue area that sits in the shadow of the Durham Freeway, that Immaculate Conception could help fill.

One of those needs in particular needed the help of someone powerful and connected, with access to people of wealth. Someone like Krzyzewski, who at the time was trying to delegate and consolidate his commitments outside basketball in the wake of the disastrous 1995 season he now admits was a collapse of both his physical and mental health. The timing, actually, was not great. Any other idea, from anyone else, might not have landed as softly.

McBriar secured an appointment to visit the coach in his office and made his pitch: The students in that part of Durham lacked anywhere to go after school, a place where they could safely hang out, away from the streets. Immaculate Conception would throw open the doors to its own small gym, but McBriar imagined a larger one, perhaps a manufactured building on vacant land next to the church.

Krzyzewski listened. If he was going to help with that, his ambitions ran higher, rooted deeply in his own past. There had been a community center where he grew up on the West Side of Chicago. He and his pals – "The Columbus," after the nearby Christopher Columbus elementary school – would gather there after school, not just Polish kids like himself, but second-generation children of many nationalities.

This was something he knew and believed in. He had a vision, and if the ties to his own past weren't clear enough, naming it after his mother left no doubt. Krzyzewski put together a board of trustees and started raising money for a much grander facility, with a gym and classrooms and an entire infrastructure of programs that went beyond merely being a safe space.

"The design of it was something I never expected would take place," McBriar said. "He was not settling for second best."

A mother's memory, a son's tribute: Coach K's legacy beyond basketball (cont.)

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 19, 2022)

In 2006, a decade after McBriar first had the idea, the Emily K Center threw open its doors to Durham. The early years were tenuous, both financially as a fledgling nonprofit, and spiritually as a community asset finding its niche. Like any new endeavor, it took the Emily K Center time to find its greatest value. That it turned out to be primarily educational was fitting, but not inevitable.

'IT'S THE BEGINNING FOR SOME OF THAT'

Emily Krzyzewski cleaned office buildings at night. William Krzyzewski was an elevator operator who later ran a bar. Their older son, a Chicago firefighter, never went to college. Only Michael, their younger, went to West Point, opening a world of opportunities not only for Mike Krzyzewski but for his children, and their children.

Increasing access to higher education for Durham high-school students was part of the original program at the Emily K Center, but it soon emerged that there was no greater need to fill, and the greatest allocation of resources pivoted that direction. As the mission evolved, it circled closer and closer to issues that touched on Krzyzewski's past, touched at his core.

"Once that seed was planted, then it was an easy connection for my dad, a first-generation college student," Spatola said. "He didn't say, 'I have a passion for college access, let's build a program.' It's a nice story but it's not the story."

The first educational program at the Emily K Center served 38 students. Now, between the students who come to the center and those who interact with it within their schools, there are about 2,000 who benefit in some way from the center's programs, whether they're going to college or not.

About 1,700 of those are enrolled in Game Plan: College, which is a mentoring and assistance program that works in the schools themselves, outside of the center, an attempt to cast a wider net. Many of the students speak English as a second language; all of the signage at the center is in English and Spanish.

"What the center is, as much as it is programs and tactics and commitments to students and families, what it's ultimately about is economic opportunity for students and opportunity for young people and social mobility for young people," said Adam Eigenrauch, who started as the center's director of academic programs and has been its executive director for the past 12 years.

The embrace of that vision over the next decade meant that what the center became wasn't necessarily what the center was built to be. There quickly developed a dire need for more classroom and meeting space as the college-access programs bloomed. In 2018, the center launched an \$18 million capital campaign to fund expansion and an operating endowment, starting with \$3 million from Krzyzewski himself.

Last November, the center opened the doors on 7,500 additional square feet of classroom and meeting space that wrapped around the original building like a hug. The old part feels like a neighborhood school, with cinder-block walls and low ceilings. The addition feels like an art museum, spun out of glass and exposed concrete and light.

THE FOUNDER AND THE FUTURE

Duke won the national title in 2001 in Minneapolis, Krzyzewski's third. As most champions do, the school purchased the floor on which the game was played. That is now the gym floor at the Emily K Center. A few new lines have been painted for more courts and more sports, like any school gym, but the giant Final Four logo at the center leaves little doubt of its origins.

And just as every day, the students move from the gym to their classrooms as a studious quiet settles over the hallways, the center itself spiraled out of basketball and into education. At this point, to a degree, the center has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Students graduate, attend college and return as counselors. The cycle continues. Set in motion, funded and grounded for the long term, it will endure. It will outlast.

In his retirement from coaching, Spatola expects Krzyzewski to take an even more active role, leveraging all the networking he'll be doing in his free time into more resources, more money for the Emily K Center.

"Most boards I've served on, people do their homework," Spatola said. "You hear stories about people who don't. My dad is not one of those people. He's up on the finances. He's a very involved board chair. You talk about this being the end of certain things, but when it comes to the Emily K Center, his legacy beyond basketball, it's the beginning for some of that. There are new opportunities that open up as a result of not being the head coach of Duke men's basketball every day."

What, of Krzyzewski, will resonate with the next generation? The 1,000-plus wins? The five national titles? The most polarizing college basketball program in the country, for better or worse?

Or this building and these programs, next to his church, close to his heart?

"It's not what people are going to say first," said ESPN's Jay Bilas, a former Duke player and former Emily K board member. "Maybe we should."

Krzyzewski attends the graduation festival every May, giving the keynote speech. His likeness is painted on the walls alongside the students the center helps. His last name is on the building. His personal history propels it forward. His true legacy lies within.

Ahead of NCAA tournament, Blue Devils work 'to get back to playing Duke defense'

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (March 15, 2022)

DURHAM -- Duke's most important games have arrived, the ones that will define how coach Mike Krzyzewski's final season is looked upon from this point forward.

So when the Blue Devils start NCAA tournament play Friday night against Cal State Fullerton in Greenville, South Carolina, they desperately need someone, anyone, to step up and be a defensive stopper on the perimeter.

For all the success No. 9-ranked Duke experienced this season, placing first outright in the ACC regular season since 2006, picking up wins over Gonzaga and Kentucky back in November, none of that matters if the Blue Devils don't fix their ailing defense and advance through the NCAA tournament.

Krzyzewski himself made that clear on Sunday, after his team was seeded No. 2 in the West Region behind the tournament's top overall seed, Gonzaga.

"I think our group overall had a terrific year," Krzyzewski said. "The thing that waned at the end was a lack of practice time. I thought our guys got worn out and we compensated by trying not to wear them out as a result. I thought our defense really took a dip. Before this next game, we have to get back to playing Duke defense. We'll have a better chance of winning if we can do that."

The numbers are stark as Duke went 2-2 over its last four games, losing 94-81 in the regular-season finale before reaching the ACC title game where it lost 82-67 to Virginia Tech.

Per Ken Pomeroy's defensive efficiency statistics, Duke's worst games were the UNC and Virginia Tech losses, where the Blue Devils allowed the Tar Heels to score 1.25 points per possession while the Hokies scored 1.24.

It's a continuation of a late-season slump where the Blue Devils lost their edge, their grit and their effectiveness on defense.

In nine of their last 12 games, they've allowed teams to score 1.03 points per possession or better. Duke's season average is .957 points per possession, which has fallen to No. 44 nationally.

Just nine games ago, on Feb. 14, Duke sat at No. 18 nationally allowing .909 points per possession. But they've allowed teams to score more than a point per possession in eight of nine games since then.

Duke has the players to be good on defense, as evidenced by their play earlier in the season. After Duke won 57-43 at Notre Dame on Jan. 31, Irish coach Mike Brey marveled at how Duke 'swarmed' in limiting his team to 27.9% shooting.

"We've had Kentucky come through here, we've had Carolina come through here with bodies," Brey said that night. "Ain't nobody got bodies like these guys. And so how do we combat that? We make 3s. We couldn't do it and I think I got to give them a lot of credit. They were just on us."

Krzyzewski's plan is to use practice time this week to shore up his team's recent shortcomings. Duke didn't have that luxury at the ACC tournament, playing three games in three days.

But the Blue Devils did have time between that UNC loss, where the Tar Heels shot 59.4% in the second half to ruin Krzyzewski's final home game at Cameron Indoor Stadium, and the ACC tournament.

Even that loss to a bitter rival, in front of nearly 100 former players and managers, didn't spur the team to improve its defense for its ACC tournament title chase that fell a win short.

Leaving Virginia Tech guard Hunter Cattoor open for far too many shots on the perimeter, where he made 7 of 10 3-pointers to score 31 points, doomed Duke in its ACC title game loss.

The Blue Devils have a solid rim protector in sophomore center Mark Williams, the ACC defensive player of the year who led the league in blocked shots at 2.8 per game.

The problems are occurring on the perimeter, which includes situations where Duke's strategy of switching defenders all over the court to mitigate screens leaves Williams 20 feet from the basket guarding a strong ball-handler.

That's not the biggest problem, though. The issues Krzyzewski and his staff are working to correct include guards like Trevor Keels, Jeremy Roach or Wendell Moore, Jr., not closing out on shooters to make them uncomfortable. It's those same players getting caught up in screens despite the switches.

"I think our communication has been a little off," Moore said. "I definitely feel like the effort is there from all of our guys. I feel like we're a little late on talks, a little late on the switches. So again that's all little things we can clean up, so we have a couple days to prep for it."

Working on it and producing it have proven problematic lately.

Duke's opponents have made 41.3% of their shots this season, which has the Blue Devils No. 90 nationally in field goal percentage defense. They built that ranking with strong defense early in the season, like when Kentucky hit only 37.7% of their shots when Duke won 79-71 on Nov. 6 at Madison Square Garden in New York.

In nine of Duke's 20 ACC regular season games, its foes shot 41.3% or worse. But that's only happened once in the Blue Devils' last nine games, including the ACC tournament, as they enter the NCAA tournament.

Can Duke regain that edge, particularly as it faces veteran teams in tournament play? Krzyzewski and his staff are stressing this in practices this week. But only the players can answer that question.

It starts against Big West Conference champion Cal State Fullerton, whose starting lineup is packed with juniors and seniors. Though the Titans have only hit 44.7% of their shots this season, they shot 52.1% while beating Long Beach State, 72-71, in the Big West tournament championship game on Saturday.

Moore, a Duke team captain along with senior reserve Joey Baker, still believes his teammates have the hunger they need to play at their best.

"Extremely hungry, extremely motivated," Moore said. "We definitely feel like we have something to prove every time we step out on that court, so now we get a chance to prove it for one last time."

We're about to find out what this Duke men's basketball team is truly made of

By Evan Kolin, Duke Chronicle (March 15, 2022)

When I visited Duke after getting accepted as a high school senior, the first building I walked into was the Duke Basketball Museum & Hall of Fame. Sports—specifically basketball—served as one of the main draws of the school to me, so it seemed like a natural place to start.

After stepping inside, I was in awe of the countless memorabilia commemorating such a historic program. But one thing stood out above everything else—a video in the back right corner showing highlights of the Blue Devils' 2014-15 championship season, with Celine Dion's "Incredible" playing in the background.

I quickly realized, however, that the highlights on the screen weren't from across the entire season. They were strictly from the NCAA tournament. First the team's game against Robert Morris, then San Diego State, followed by Utah, Gonzaga, Michigan State and finally Wisconsin, before the video ends with the team celebrating its title under a wave of confetti.

Duke won 35 games that season. But the video commemorating the team in the Hall of Fame only felt the need to highlight six. Why? Because that's the foundation this program is built upon. Everything that happens from November to mid-March is simply the lead-up to the real season: the NCAA tournament.

My freshman year on campus was the 2018-19 season, host to perhaps the most talented roster head coach Mike Krzyzewski has ever had in Durham. And from November until mid-March, they certainly played up to that billing. From their memorable obliteration of Kentucky in the season-opener to their regular-season sweep of Virginia to the ACC tournament championship, Zion Williamson and company dominated the field (at least when fully healthy).

But by the time the NCAA tournament came, their peak had passed. In the Round of 32 against Central Florida, the Knights came within inches of a monumental upset. Then, another missed layup clinched Duke's win against Virginia Tech in the Sweet 16. And finally, the Blue Devils' luck ran out as they fell to Michigan State in the Elite Eight.

Now, there's no shame in an Elite Eight appearance, but it's safe to say that the most memorable moments from that squad came before the weeks that mattered most. Even disregarding the fact that it didn't win the title—which always requires some amount of luck—the moments that Duke team made during the NCAA tournament were forgettable ones, not the ones that come to symbolize a team and a season.

I remember taking the NCAA tournament for granted back during that 2018-19 campaign. I watched each of Duke's four games, but I almost assumed a Final Four berth was a given based on everything that led up to March Madness.

This team is destined to make the Final Four, and probably to win the whole thing. These games are just a means to an end.

But in the three years since then, I've realized that NCAA tournament games are never a means to an end, never ones to be taken for granted. They are the games that define the entire season, the moments that get commemorated for years to come, from pregame on the Jumbotron to the corner of the Hall of Fame.

There's no single video that demonstrates the meaning of this better than Duke Blue Planet's "Moments of Madness." The video highlights 30 years of Duke men's basketball moments from strictly the NCAA tournament, and from these moments you pretty much get the full story of the Coach K era up until the video was released. And it all begins with a classic quote from Krzyzewski himself: "You become 0-0, and now who are you?"

I referenced this concept in my column last week, but now—after another disappointing loss in the ACC tournament final to Virginia Tech—it carries even more weight. Whether you're coming off of a dominant regular season and conference title, or a couple of the most disappointing losses in recent program history, these next four weeks will define who you are.

We've spent the last several months trying to dissect whether this year's Duke team has the fire to give Krzyzewski his storybook ending. But now, a new season begins. Everyone is 0-0, and—as Coach K said himself—it's time to truly answer the question of "Who are you?" What is this Duke team truly made of?

We're about to find out.

As Duke tries to win 16th ACC title under Coach K, he doesn't want to be 'distraction'

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 11, 2022)

NEW YORK -- It's going to be hard to get this toothpaste back in the tube, having been allowed to flow and flow and flow ahead of Mike Krzyzewski's final Cameron home game, to the point where his team seemed to get their feet stuck in it.

Duke will try to deliver Krzyzewski's 16th ACC and final title on Saturday, and he's back to hoping no one will notice the second part of it.

"I'm trying to get away from all that," Krzyzewski said after Friday's 80-76 win over Miami. "It's really too much. It's their season. So it's all about them. It really is. I don't want to be a distraction to them. This is their season. Especially now."

That Duke is even still around to play for a title served to reinforce two different notions: Not only has Duke started to figure out some of its late-game issues, Duke may also have shook off the emotional hangover of losing a game it couldn't possibly afford to lose. And really, it's probably hard to separate the two.

Duke seemed to wilt under the pressure of that moment, and hadn't yet recovered by the time it arrived in Brooklyn. After Mark Williams admitted Thursday that thoughts of the UNC loss were crossing his mind as Duke struggled against Syracuse, Krzyzewski tried Friday to again dial back talk of his impending departure, as he had early in the season but not in the run-up to his final home game at Cameron. Perhaps, under those circumstances, it would have been impossible.

But there's no question there had been a change in tone as that night approached. After downplaying all of this all season, Krzyzewski was more willing that week to openly entertain the emotions of the moment and permit all the planning that went into a ceremony that ended up with a very different timbre and mood than anyone had expected. There was no contingency plan for failure.

It was an indulgence he now appears to regret. As the championship now looms, perhaps even the rematch against the Tar Heels that Duke so desperately wants in this season that pivoted so suddenly from acclimation to atonement, Krzyzewski is now trying to get his team back in the moment, to borrow from his own parlance.

It's difficult to imagine the spotlight being more on him than it was last Saturday, but it's equally a reality that it's only going to get more intense the more Duke wins.

"Especially towards the end, it started being my farewell thing, which I don't want," Krzyzewski said. "It comes about. It sells tickets, but I don't want it. I just want them to win because it's my only shot with them."

However that plays out Saturday, his team certainly seems to have recovered at least some of its mojo. It did avoid disaster against Syracuse with a furious rally in the final two minutes, and the Blue Devils had absolutely no room for error against a fearless Miami team that asked everything of Duke and constantly found ways to maroon Williams in bad matchups on the perimeter.

When pressed, Paolo Banchemo and AJ Griffin and Wendell Moore all took opportunities to take control of the game, imposing their considerable talent on the proceedings in turn. And in the end game, Duke made all the right plays, whether that was Banchemo grabbing the crucial rebound of a missed free throw or not fouling Miami's shooters with a lead late, the error that tripped up the Blue Devils at home in January.

"Plays like that show our growth as a team," Williams said. "There were those moments where we didn't make those plays or didn't convert, but now later in the season, we're making those plays, making the right decisions or whatever it may be."

"A couple weeks ago, I said I wish they would be smarter," Krzyzewski said. "The last two games they've been very smart. They've been really smart."

Given the uncertainty in which Duke has floated aimlessly since losing the one game it absolutely could not lose, these are all positive developments for the Blue Devils. And whether it's against North Carolina or Virginia Tech, winning an ACC championship is their first chance at redemption.

Duke won against Syracuse but can't play that way again and expect to advance

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (March 10, 2022)

BROOKLYN, N.Y. – Maybe Mark Williams just doesn't let go.

He can, obviously. With 37.5 seconds left in Thursday's ACC tournament quarterfinal against Syracuse, and Duke nursing a 10-point cushion, he knew the Blue Devils had the game in hand. Maybe not earlier, but then? It was settled. Set in stone. Sharpie, as a certain college basketball expert employed by The Athletic (hi, Seth!) would say.

And yet, Williams wasn't letting go of that ball. Consider his football form, tucking the rock into his armpit like a running back ready to hit holes. He'd wrapped his abnormally long appendage around the basketball, maybe two or three times over. Like rubber bands around a watermelon, hug any harder and the whole thing might burst. So, no, it certainly did not appear Williams was letting go.

We're talking about the ball, of course, but what if you zoom out that lens?

The truth is the wound from Saturday's loss to North Carolina still stings. Badly. And as much as Mike Krzyzewski wants to move on from that failure, and the rest of the regular season, more than just Duke's optics were damaged that night in Cameron Indoor. Since November, when Duke planted its proverbial flag with nonconference wins over Kentucky and Gonzaga, the Blue Devils have been billed as verifiable national championship contenders. Winning the ACC regular season did nothing to tarnish that trajectory. But Saturday? Even for as lopsided as the stakes were – and with the disproportionate pressure placed on Krzyzewski's young team – the aftermath of that loss left cracks in Duke's veneer. Is Duke overrated? Is Duke backsliding? Is Duke worse now than it was in November? Takes flew. The spotlight brightened. Suddenly, a top-10 team's entire season was being re-litigated in real time, with folks looking for flaws at a fever pitch.

"We just need to get back," Paolo Banchemo told reporters Monday, "to playing how we were."

Which is: elite, dedicated defense; smart shot selection, with a healthy dose of post touches and transition offense; and finding ways, late in close games, to step on the neck of any opponent.

Uh, yeah. About that ...

Against Syracuse, did Duke do any of those things? It's questionable, at best. And considering the circumstances Thursday, that's why it's hard to feel too terrific about Duke's eventual 88-79 win.

Both of Duke's previous wins over Syracuse were by at least 20 points, and that was with the ACC's leading scorer, Buddy Boeheim, in the lineup. (He was not Thursday, following a controversial one-game suspension for punching Florida State's Wyatt Wilkes in the stomach during Wednesday's game.) Instead? Jimmy Boeheim, Buddy's older brother, seemingly sapped his sibling's shooting superpowers, draining a career-best six 3s and running circles around Duke's defense. As for the Blue Devils' shot selection, well, you probably shouldn't be hocking up 32 (!) 3s when you're making only 34.4 percent of them, even against Syracuse's zone. (Those 32 attempts tie for Duke's second most this season, behind its first game versus Syracuse and tied with its second game versus Syracuse.)

"We started the game well, then fell in love with the 3-point shot," Krzyzewski said. "(Our team) thought it was going to be easier, and (Syracuse) got momentum. We started fouling, and they saw the ball go in a lot, and then it was a helluva game."

It was, which is partially the problem. No offense to Syracuse, but a tied score with three minutes left – again, without the ACC's leading scorer – against this version of the Orange, which just sealed Jim Boeheim's first losing season? On the heels of that North Carolina loss? The vibes are not great, as the kids say.

There's no reason for Duke's struggles in staving off a short-handed Syracuse. It was Jimmy Boeheim getting hot, of course, but Duke let him. It was taking ill-advised 3s, including one stretch of nine consecutive misses in the first half, but Duke refused to drive, dish or poke holes in the zone. Against better teams, those things simply cannot happen. Deeper into March, feistier foes – read: ones with, you know, winning records – will punish Duke for those decisions in ways Syracuse simply cannot.

But – and this is a big "but" – the last thing on that aforementioned list? Of what made Duke not just good but deserving of being a national title contender?

Stepping on throats late. Finding ways to win.

And that, at least, Duke did.

"That look I saw in everybody's eyes," Wendell Moore said of Duke's intensity late, "it just looked like we're not losing this game."

That's the look that was missing Saturday. (No, we're still not done talking about it.) But that it's still there at all? That's all that matters, especially in this survive-and-advance season that is March. Period. The end. When it mattered most, when Duke had to make plays, had to get contributions from whomever it could. It did. And Blue Devils fans have three main players to thank for that: Moore, Williams and Jeremy Roach.

Start with Moore, Duke's mercurial captain, who looked headed for an All-American junior season in November. Maybe that never materialized, but for Duke to do the things it dreams of, he has to be that clear captain. And Thursday, he was; his 26 points, despite coming on 20 attempts, were a career high, including two free throws late that kicked off Duke's 10-0 closing run. "Everyone stepped up. Started with Wendell hitting the two free throws," Krzyzewski said. "You can't practice those things. ... For next week, being in those situations really, really helps us."

As for Williams, he went scoreless in the first half, mustering only two attempts. "His coach played defense on him. I didn't get him the ball," Krzyzewski joked. "My staff at halftime said, 'I think we should get Mark the ball.' So that was a great suggestion." Clearly, considering Williams finished with 15 points in the second half, to go along with a season-high 16 rebounds. (The three blocks and career-high four assists on top of that were just gravy.)

And lastly, Roach, whose playing time and place in the rotation have varied in this precarious season. But of late – versus Wake Forest at home, at Virginia – he's stepped up off the bench, bringing poise and necessary scoring chops. Same deal against Syracuse: Roach canned five of his 10 3-point attempts, including a dagger from the left arc with 1:07 remaining, en route to a season-high 19. "The guy who really turned it around for us was Jeremy," Krzyzewski said. "Jeremy had a sensational game."

Put it all together and what do you get? A not-great game, but a necessary ending. So, yes, Duke showed its shortcomings Thursday. No, maybe it didn't put to rest any still-lingering doubts about its desire or focus. The team that took the court Thursday by no means imposed its will, letting off the gas after an early double-digit lead and clawing back thereafter to avoid an epic collapse.

Yet, it still won.

What lies ahead? A semifinal matchup against Miami, the only ACC team Duke didn't beat this season. I'm going to go out on a limb and say Duke can't play the way it did Thursday and expect to advance to Saturday's championship game. It just can't.

If there's one good thing Duke can take away from Thursday, though, it's this: The North Carolina loss – the overwhelming weight of defeat, of finality, and the emotions it entails – is still ripe in its mind. Maybe not the result, per se, but the feeling.

"Obviously, versus North Carolina, we got that feeling of defeat, knowing there's not a second chance to play in Cameron again," Williams said. "For me, personally, that's what was going through my mind (late Thursday). We lose that game, we're done – like, we're not playing in the ACC tournament again. So honestly, that was probably the biggest thing. Just surviving and advancing."

And just as Williams held so tightly to the ball in the waning seconds, so too must he and his teammates cling to that feeling. At the very least, Big Fella wasn't letting go. Nor was Moore, nor Roach. And we already know Krzyzewski isn't.

But how far does that sentiment carry? Hopefully, for Duke, at least through Saturday.

And if not, get ready to go back under the microscope.

'It's hard for me to believe this is over': K reflects on career after final home game

By The Athletic Staff (March 6, 2022)

Longtime Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski is focused on the postseason after the Blue Devils lost to rival UNC in his final home game at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

"(My family has) loved being a part of the Duke family," Krzyzewski said in a postgame ceremony. "It's hard for me to believe this is over. I'm just going to say the regular season is over."

Unranked UNC bid farewell to "Coach K" by beating the fourth-ranked Blue Devils 94-81. The defeat marks Krzyzewski's 47th career loss to the Tar Heels in 97 games he's coached against the in-state rival.

Four UNC players put up 20-plus points each in the rivalry win, with Armando Bacot leading with 23 points and seven rebounds. Duke's Paolo Banchero matched Bacot's performance with 23 points, five rebounds and five assists.

The Blue Devils entered halftime ahead 41-39, and the game remained close for much of the second half until UNC's Brady Manek's two-point tip shot at 8:59. The Tar Heels began pulling away and later added six free throws in the final 31 seconds to cement their win.

"I'm sorry about this afternoon," Krzyzewski said in his first address to the crowd postgame. "Today was unacceptable. But the season has been very acceptable. ... The season isn't over."

After presentations to Coach K and his family, the coach reflected on his career while addressing the crowd for a second time.

"I've done what I've loved my whole life. I didn't realize that I would be doing it for 42 years at the place that I loved," he said. "And when you combine the coaching and the place in the city of Durham altogether, you can't be any luckier than me."

Before the game, the school honored Coach K in a jam-packed arena filled with celebrities and former Duke basketball players including Shane Battier, Grant Hill, JJ Redick, Christian Laettner and Steve Wojciechowski. The legendary coach was emotional during the national anthem.

Krzyzewski, 75, will retire at the conclusion of the season after 42 years at the helm in Durham. Coach K has led the Blue Devils to five national championships, 15 ACC tournament championships and 12 Final Four appearances heading into this season. His 1,196 career wins are the most of any coach in college basketball history, men's or women's.

The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame coach started his career at Army (1975-80) before heading to Duke, where he built one of the most elite college basketball programs in the nation. Krzyzewski won back-to-back national titles in 1991 and 1992, then added championships in 2001, 2010 and 2015.

The Blue Devils finish the regular season at 26-5 ahead of the ACC Tournament, which starts on March 8. The team is ranked as the No. 1 seed in the conference tournament.

What's Coach K's legacy in college basketball?

Brendan Marks, Duke basketball writer: You mean other than the five national championships and having more wins than any other college coach ever? In all seriousness, if the conversation starts there, it should give you a good idea of Coach K's place in the all-time college hoops hierarchy.

John Wooden obviously has more championships, but that was a different era altogether. Krzyzewski has shifted from four-year stars like Christian Laettner and Grant Hill to one-and-dones like Zion Williamson with relative ease, and perhaps his adaptability is his most impressive trait.

Plus, 42 years in one place? We very well may never see anything like him again.

What does he mean to Duke?

Marks: His name's on the court for a reason. Seemingly every significant fundraising operation Duke has undertaken the last 42 years, Krzyzewski has been at the center of it.

While Duke was a fine program before he arrived in 1980, he not only put the Blue Devils on the national map, but he built a program with the necessary infrastructure to survive and thrive beyond his departure.

Coach-in-waiting Jon Scheyer has the nation's No. 1 recruiting class for next season, which is as great a testament to what Krzyzewski has built as anything: the fact that it doesn't necessarily need him to endure moving forward. Arguably, he's the single most influential person in modern University history.

What's the scene at the game?

Marks: It's a zoo. A 90,000-degree, nonstop concert, with a basketball game going on in the middle of everything. Seriously: This entire day has been an event, a spectacle, and the game is just one piece of it, as wild as that sounds.

Former players formed a human tunnel for Krzyzewski to enter through pregame, and they've been standing four rows deep behind the bench all game. Even in terms of how crazy Cameron Indoor normally is, this is ratcheted all the way up to 10.

Once 'like a gated community,' Coach K has improved access to Duke basketball

By C.L. Brown, Raleigh News & Observer (March 4, 2022)

Dean Smith had Durham on lock.

North Carolina's legendary head coach was beloved in the Black community in Durham, and it wasn't just because the Tar Heels won a lot of games. Smith's recruitment of Charles Scott as the first Black scholarship men's basketball player at UNC and Smith's efforts to integrate the town of Chapel Hill put him in high regard.

With a parade of star players who were Black marching through the program, it was, frankly, a lot easier for Black people in Durham to identify with, and root for, Carolina. Duke was still viewed as a "white" program. Danny Ferry and Christian Laettner were viewed as the prototype players for the Blue Devils more than players like Johnny Dawkins.

Even Black players like Grant Hill, as evidenced by "The Fab Five" 30 for 30 documentary on ESPN, were viewed with a skeptical eye because of his privileged background.

"When I got to Duke, the stigma was still there – you know, the white guys that could play like Christian Laettner, Bobby Hurlley," said Ricky Price, who played small forward for Duke from 1994-98. "Then you had Grant Hill, who they questioned, 'Is he really Black?' because of his circumstances and what he came from."

Mike Brey, who was an assistant coach at Duke from 1987-95, recalled throughout the early part of coach Mike Krzyzewski's tenure at Duke, his teams, if not the university itself, received only a lukewarm reception.

Brey, who has been Notre Dame's head coach for 22 seasons, intimated that the public, state school down Highway 15-501 seemed way more attainable than the private school in their own backyard.

"My time there, the Black community of Durham – and I was there eight years – was all Carolina," Brey said. "And maybe I think at that time, Duke was a little bit, we have fought it here, a little bit in our town. That Notre Dame or Duke, they're like a gated community that maybe that part of Durham or South Bend (Indiana) aren't able to have as much access."

That Krzyzewski changed that dynamic is one victory that shows his legacy stretches well beyond the national championships, Olympic gold medals and NBA first-round draft picks.

Krzyzewski will leave Duke after 42 years when the season comes to an end. And with it, he'll leave the Duke brand in a much better place than when he started.

"I don't think there's one thing, I think we've embraced Durham," Krzyzewski said. "Whether it be – whatever race, whatever gender, whatever part of Durham, we've embraced Durham. So has Duke."

LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT

The school's connection with the Black community in Durham started to resonate from some of Krzyzewski's small gestures.

When Krzyzewski reached his first Final Four in 1986, Duke commissioned Durham native Ernie Barnes to commemorate the feat. Barnes was best known for painting "The Sugar Shack," which Marvin Gaye used as the album cover for his 1976 release, "I Want You." The popularity of his work grew when it was featured as the background when credits rolled on the '70s television show "Good Times."

Barnes created "Duke fastbreak," which was a limited edition print of 300 copies. The painting depicts Duke playing a nameless team wearing Carolina blue uniforms in Cameron Indoor Stadium. Former Blue Devils guard Johnny Dawkins, who is the head coach at Central Florida, currently owns the original painting.

Former N.C. state senator Floyd McKissick Jr., who was also once the chairman of the state's Legislative Black Caucus, said Krzyzewski earned respect from the community in a different manner than Smith.

"Everybody was aware of his (Smith) outreach efforts, particularly in terms of trying to groom African-American players, being involved socially in the Chapel Hill community, and being out there supporting efforts involving civil rights," said McKissick, who was in law school at Duke when Krzyzewski first arrived. "I commend Dean Smith for all that he did. The era at the time was a bit different when Coach K was coming along. I think Coach K helped in ways that he could."

HBCU CONNECTION

Krzyzewski regularly scheduled Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The Blue Devils played South Carolina State for a six-year stretch from 1993-94 through the 1998-99 seasons. They also played N.C. A&T for a six-year term from the 1997-98 to 2002-03 seasons and twice played in Greensboro.

That morphed into Duke playing a team from the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) as an exhibition game for the better part of this century. N.C. Central, when it was still competing in the Division II conference, Winston-Salem State, Shaw and St. Augustine are among the HBCU's Krzyzewski has welcomed into Cameron Indoor Stadium.

Duke and Central have been linked in basketball since The Secret Game in 1944 when students from Duke's all-white medical school team played the Eagles while collectively thumbing their noses at Jim Crow laws.

Krzyzewski and N.C. Central coach LeVelle Moton built quite the friendship to where he spoke for free at the Eagles tipoff banquet back in 2017.

Moton said his biggest regret as Central's head coach was losing to North Dakota State in the 2019 NCAA Tournament's First Four. Had the Eagles won, they would have faced Duke in the first round in Columbia, S.C.

"If we were able to play Duke, it would have set the city on fire," Moton said. "And even after that game, he texted me, 'Hell of a job, I'm so proud of how you represented your school and your city.'"

CLASS OF 1997

Price pointed to the 1997 recruiting class that included Elton Brand and William Avery as when things started to change. Up until that point, Duke differed from most elite programs because its best players stayed four years. Brand and Avery left after their sophomore seasons, and Corey Maggette left after just one to enter the 1999 NBA Draft.

"The narrative started to change and then Duke became cool," Price said. "It wasn't cool to go to Duke, it was always cooler to go to Carolina up until that point. But late '90s, early 2000s. It was cool to go to Duke. Then after we got Kyrie (Irving) and then we entered into the one-and-done era, it officially took over where Duke is the place to go."

Len Lilly agreed with when the change started. Lilly, the owner of 40 Below barbershop, has been cutting hair in the Lakewood Shopping Center located about two miles from Cameron Indoor Stadium since 1993. He said the majority of his clientele used to be Carolina fans, but now it's more of an even split.

"(Duke) started to get a different kind of player," Lilly said. "They became more athletic and they were getting the kids that had that real struggle."

Lilly added that it helped seeing Krzyzewski hire former players Dawkins and David Henderson, who are both Black, to his staff.

That made the program feel more accessible, which was a far cry from when McKissick grew up going to games. McKissick won Duke season tickets for selling the most magazine subscriptions at Carr Junior High School as a kid.

"There were very few blacks there," McKissick said. "Hardly anybody."

EMILY K CENTER CHANGED THE GAME

All those basketball-related reasons were certainly enough to sway a generation of Black Durham whose parents probably preferred Smith and Carolina over Duke. But when Krzyzewski established the Emily Krzyzewski Center, which is named after his mother, he reached a different stratosphere of respect.

The Emily K Center is a nonprofit founded in 2006 that "implements four distinct programs designed to build on the academic, career, and leadership potential of students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education," according to its website. They serve more than 2,000 students annually.

"For me, the single biggest thing that's been done for not just the Black community, but for low income is the Emily Krzyzewski Center," Mike Krzyzewski said. "I mean, we've been in existence for 16 years and really have touched thousands of youngsters. Hundreds have gone through our program and have gone to college. And a number of them have come back into the community and made the community better."

Bill Bell served as mayor of Durham from 2001-17 and prior to that was on the Durham County Board of Commissioners for 26 years starting in 1972. Bell, who is Black, said the center will continue to win hearts long after Krzyzewski leaves the sideline.

"If you go there, and you see the kids that attended the schools and know the type of environment they've been exposed to that will last a long time when he's gone," Bell said. "If we talk about where his legacy will be in terms of the community outside of sports, and what he's done in a civic way, it's got to be the Emily K Center."

Duke often plays games where it has everything to gain. Against UNC, it can't lose.

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 4, 2022)

DURHAM - Perhaps not since 1992, when Duke went to Minneapolis with a chance to be the first repeat champion since UCLA, have the Blue Devils played a game like Saturday where the consequences of losing so vastly outweighed the rewards of winning.

That team already had a national championship to its credit, and played the entire season facing expectations rarely seen in college basketball, but had survived the season to reach the Final Four with history within its grasp.

By the time the Blue Devils reached the title game, they had survived one of the greatest games ever played with one of the greatest shots ever made – Christian Laettner against Kentucky in the regional final – and dispatched Mike Krzyzewski's mentor Bobby Knight in the first game at the Metrodome.

One last hurdle remained: Michigan's Fab Five, representing the new wave of college basketball that Duke would eventually, some two decades later, fully adopt. A win would cement the Blue Devils' place in the college basketball pantheon. A loss would not only deprive them of their season-long quest at the final moment, but wipe them from the public consciousness as Chris Webber and Jalen Rose and Juwan Howard celebrated their ascension not only as champions but trendsetters.

The pressure not to lose was stifling.

"Duke could be its own biggest opponent right now," Billy Packer said.

Duke won by 20.

Duke has played plenty of games with high stakes since then, but this one stands out. The ACC regular-season title and No. 1 seed in Brooklyn are already secured, but who wants to be the team that ruins Krzyzewski's final home game by doing the unthinkable ... and losing?

There are going to be plenty of emotions afterward, but anger isn't supposed to be one of them.

"I don't want them to feel – there's so much about me, the moment is about us," Krzyzewski said Thursday. "And so I want them to understand it's our moment. It just happens to be in this situation. And for them not to play because it's coach's last game but to play because we should want to win. So I'll try to get that message across to them."

Pressure is nothing novel at Duke, a program that enters every season thinking about national championships and plays in the glare of a spotlight few schools ever even see. Expectations are always high, regardless of circumstances, especially against North Carolina, especially at Cameron.

But even the 2018 and 2019 teams, which each missed the Final Four by a single possession, did not face the same historical ignominy that losing Saturday would (although there are certainly UNC fans who never miss a chance to remind anyone that Duke didn't make the Final Four with Zion Williamson on the roster).

The thing is, North Carolina is as capable as it is mercurial. It's not out of the realm of possibility to imagine Caleb Love and R.J. Davis getting hot from outside, of Armando Bacot pounding Mark Williams and Paolo Banchemo into foul trouble, of the Tar Heels taking the air out of the building and keeping it that way.

It's also easy to imagine the Tar Heels missing their first six 3-pointers, Bacot picking up two early fouls and Duke going up 30-4, which would make for a much different atmosphere.

"Obviously we have motivation," Duke's Joey Baker said. "We want to send him out the right way. We still have to stay focused and play for each other and stick to what got us where we are now. It's a balance, because obviously we want to play for him and send him out on that high note, but we've got to stick to what got us here."

There may be some thin evidence that Duke has felt this pressure at times during the season. With the caveat that these are very small sample sizes and differences between home and road performance have not historically been predictive of future results, Duke has been both subjectively and objectively better on the road than at home this year.

Duke, judged on road games alone, would be behind only Gonzaga – home and road – in terms of efficiency margin nationally, while Duke only at home would be 14th. That's a huge discrepancy for a team that's fifth overall in all games, according to stats guru Ken Pomeroy, who provided Duke's home/road splits.

In terms of raw scoring margin, it was Duke's second-best season on the road in the entire Krzyzewski era, per ESPN. The Blue Devils opened with a road loss at Ohio State in their only true nonconference road game, then went 9-1 in the ACC, winning eight straight to close out the season including wins over the No. 2, No. 3, No. 5, No. 7 and No. 9 teams in the standings. (Duke did not play at Miami or Virginia Tech.)

Then again, when it comes to dealing with pressure, this team has already surmounted the first hurdle. Duke had not been the No. 1 seed in the ACC tournament since 2010 or won the outright regular-season title since 2006. Think about the teams and players that have come through in the past 12 years without doing that: One national and three ACC champions, two No. 1 overall NBA draft picks, a procession of lottery picks.

This team's five potential first-round picks may have been knocked back at times – to use a favorite Krzyzewski expression – but they still managed to accomplish something their predecessors had not while facing internal and external pressure no Duke team has faced in probably 30 years, and did it while talking openly about it.

On the other hand, they've done it against one of the weakest fields of ACC competition in that period of time, the league's backhanded farewell gift to Krzyzewski. Only 2009, 2012, 2013 and last season even really compare. Nevertheless, Duke didn't win the regular season in any of those four years either, finishing second in all three other than last season's debacle.

"It's different than playing for a championship or anything like that," former Duke player and ESPN analyst Jay Bilas said. "It's a standalone game that has significance beyond the game itself. I don't know that 50 years from now people are going to necessarily remember the result as much as they remember the significance around the game."

But should UNC win, Krzyzewski would remember. These players would remember. And Tar Heels fans would certainly remember. They'd never let Duke ever forget.

Dean Smith got the best of Coach K, then he got the best from him

By Andrew Carter, Raleigh News & Observer (March 4, 2022)

DURHAM - There are moments, still, when Mike Krzyzewski walks into his top-floor office that overlooks part of Duke's campus and wonders, as he put it one day last summer, "How the hell did this happen?"

"No, really," he said.

He was surrounded by reminders of his life's work, in a building that didn't exist when he arrived in Durham 42 years ago. Now there was a Duke basketball museum on the first floor and here, five stories up, a museum of a different kind, one Krzyzewski personally curated.

Five large photographs of his teams celebrating five national championships hung high behind his desk. Old game balls and magazine covers lined the walls, along with honors from West Point and snapshots of his wife and daughters and grandchildren.

All around were odes to his most cherished people and moments, the things he loved, and for almost two hours he'd been reflecting upon some of them while attempting to keep a distance. The season was then months away and Krzyzewski insisted that once it began he'd stay in the present. There'd be no talk of the last of this or the last of that, he said. Even then, in mid-August, without a game to worry about or a practice to plan, he said he'd rather not look back.

Then he felt the pull of history.

"One more thing from me," Krzyzewski said, just as a long conversation wound down, and it was as if he had a secret to share. Perhaps he just wanted people to know that things could change, that he could change – that an old rival or nemesis could become something much more meaningful. His tone changed, too, as if he was even surprised at what he was about to say.

"Being in this area, with North Carolina State, but especially North Carolina, and our rivalry, relationship or whatever ... The friendship I eventually developed with Dean was kind of nuts."

It was an unprompted addendum to a long interview, and soon Krzyzewski was on his feet, walking to the other side of his office. He didn't fight the past now, memories of when he was much younger and attempting to build something in the shadow of what Dean Smith had built at North Carolina. Theirs was not an especially warm relationship in the beginning. Smith's UNC teams beat Duke again and again during Krzyzewski's early years. Sometimes Krzyzewski bristled.

"I needed to go through all that," he said, and he made his way to a wall where he'd hung photos of himself with some of his closest friends – one with Jim Boeheim; another of Krzyzewski and Jim Valvano, both young, in the prime of their lives. That was a long time ago now. And then above, in the middle – "let me show you," Krzyzewski said, "this is a cool picture" – was one of Smith and Krzyzewski in Smith's later years.

They were sitting beside each other, suit jackets and ties, at a function at the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame. They appeared to be sharing a laugh, or maybe only a smile. The scars of their old battles had faded away; one of the fiercest coaching rivalries in ACC history had become something more tender, something Krzyzewski still had difficulty articulating, years later.

In the photo, Smith and Krzyzewski looked like old friends. They'd become that, Krzyzewski said.

"And to me, that's like one of the hidden things in the history of our league," Krzyzewski said of his relationship with Smith, one that evolved into something meaningful, for both men, before Smith died in 2015. "Is how the hell could that happen?"

Krzyzewski will coach his final home game on Saturday. For 42 years he has made the short walk from the Duke locker room to the home bench on the opposite side of Cameron Indoor Stadium. It has become one of the most reliable constants in American sport, Krzyzewski's presence, and no one born after March 17, 1980, has known a world without Krzyzewski as the head coach at Duke.

The game Saturday will not only be the last one he coaches at Cameron Indoor Stadium, but also the last one he coaches in North Carolina, which hosts neither the ACC tournament nor an NCAA tournament site.

And it might be the last one he coaches against North Carolina, the school, the one Krzyzewski has most often been measured against over the past four decades.

The UNC-Duke basketball rivalry has long needed no explanation. It simply exists, a product of the schools' shared history and tradition and often successful pursuit of the same things; a product of their proximity and the whole "separated by eight miles of pine trees and two shades of blue" dynamic that ESPN dramatized in the old promos leading into the broadcasts.

The rivalry has been what it is for so long that it's difficult to consider a time when it wasn't that way, though that time existed, too. When Krzyzewski arrived in Durham in 1980, Duke hadn't defeated UNC in Chapel Hill since 1966. The Blue Devils had experienced national success – they'd been to three consecutive NCAA tournaments, including a regional final – during the previous three seasons under Bill Foster, but not sustained national success.

The ACC was much smaller then, more regionally confined and perhaps more contentious, every coach fighting for the limited opportunity to break through the grind of the regular season and reach the NCAA tournament. Terry Holland had built something lasting at Virginia. So had Lefty Driesell at Maryland. Dean Smith was already a beloved figure in this state, even if he had yet to lead UNC to a national championship.

Smith was 49, and a refined and accomplished presence when Krzyzewski entered the league. Krzyzewski then was 33, and he looked a little nervous at his introductory press conference, smiling sheepishly and spelling his name for the reporters who didn't yet have a chance to know how to pronounce it. They coached against each other for the first time on Dec. 5, 1980, in the last year of the old Big Four Tournament in Greensboro.

"I'm worried about Duke," Smith told reporters before the game. "They've got a great young coach."

Perhaps he was just being kind. Perhaps he really saw greatness in Krzyzewski, who arrived from Army relatively unknown. Either way, Smith led UNC to a close two-point victory in the Greensboro Coliseum, and Krzyzewski was 0-1 against Smith.

The teams met again about a month and a half later in Chapel Hill. Unlike their first game that season, this one counted in the conference standings.

These days, ESPN builds its college basketball television inventory around the two annual UNC-Duke games. They're always among the most watched of the season. But back then, in early 1981, Krzyzewski's first ACC regular-season game against UNC was not televised live. Locally, it aired on tape delay on WTVD at 10 p.m. The Tar Heels won by 15, and the headline in The News & Observer the next morning said: "Heels crush Blue Devils."

Krzyzewski was 0-2 against Smith, but not for long. He guided the Blue Devils to a 66-65 overtime victory against UNC about a month later, in Krzyzewski's first game against UNC in Cameron Indoor Stadium. Down two at the end of regulation, with two seconds remaining, Krzyzewski drew up a play to get the ball to mid-court and then, after another timeout with one second left, he set up the play that sent it into overtime.

"Hectic, feverish, spine-tingling, nail-biting," went The N&O game story the next day.

It was considered then one of the great finishes in the history of the series.

Krzyzewski was 1-2 against Smith. And then: 1-3, and 1-4, and 1-5, and 1-6, and 1-7, and 1-8.

More than three years passed before Krzyzewski beat Smith and the Tar Heels again.

During that span, Smith won his first national championship in 1982. Valvano, who arrived at N.C. State the same year that Krzyzewski did at Duke, led the Wolfpack to that improbable national championship in 1983. That same March, meanwhile, some wondered whether Krzyzewski might be fired after an 11-17 finish.

Even amid the losing, Krzyzewski developed little taste for deferring to anybody, least of all Smith. Roy Williams, then a young assistant coach under Smith, sensed that from the beginning.

"Mike came in, and the first couple years were tough," he said recently. "And Mike needed to stand up to anybody and everybody. ... He had to make sure that people didn't think he was going to give in to anybody. And so he was very competitive. And Coach Smith was very competitive."

"And, you know, some of the things that people thought about or people saw or people heard, made it feel like it was a very adversarial relationship."

It was intense from the start. More than 40 years later, Williams can still see the final seconds of UNC's victory against Duke in the 1980 Big Four Tournament, in Krzyzewski's first game against the Tar Heels. Smith began walking toward Krzyzewski to shake his hand, Williams said, "but there were still a couple of seconds left."

Krzyzewski, as Williams remembers it, offered a terse response:

"The game's not over yet."

"And that irritated some people, too," Williams said. "But again, it's in competition. So it was something that made me realize that guy really is a competitive guy. And that was OK."

Williams became UNC's head coach in 2003 and spent 18 seasons going head-to-head against Krzyzewski, himself, until Williams retired last April. Their relationship was different because they were more peers, men of roughly the same ages and ones who established themselves throughout the 1980s and 90s.

Once in the early 1980s, Williams said, he took the junior varsity team he coached at UNC to Durham to play against Duke's JV team. Krzyzewski, fighting to build something in those years, had just wrapped up the varsity practice. Williams walked onto the court at Cameron Indoor Stadium and met Krzyzewski and the two shared a conversation in the quiet of an empty arena.

"They only had a (JV) team for a couple of years, but Mike and I are sitting there talking for 20 or 30 minutes while my guys are getting dressed," Williams said. "So we had some opportunities to do those kinds of things that Coach Smith and Mike did not have."

In those years, Smith and Krzyzewski knew each other only as obstacles to what the other wanted. Smith had established himself as one of the nation's great coaches, and his program could not be the best in the country if it was not the best in his own backyard. Krzyzewski, meanwhile, looked at everything Smith had created and spent years trying to build his own version of it.

"I never, like, wanted to copy him," Krzyzewski said, recalling what Vic Bubas told him when he arrived at Duke: "Don't look eight miles away. Respect eight miles away. You develop what you're going to do."

Dean Smith got the best of Coach K, then he got the best from him (cont.)

By Andrew Carter, Raleigh News & Observer (March 4, 2022)

"And that was great advice," Krzyzewski said, though as a lot of good advice it was difficult to implement. How could Krzyzewski not look eight miles southwest, after all? In his early years, his frustration simmered, then erupted after a 78-73 defeat against UNC in Durham on Jan. 21, 1984.

The week before, the Duke student section received national criticism for its heckling of Herman Veal, a Maryland player who'd been accused of sexual assault. Then, during the UNC game, Krzyzewski became angered when Smith approached the scorer's table, twice, "to dispute developments," as a writer for the Durham Herald-Sun described it the next day.

"Both times he lingered and argued," the story went in the paper.

After a close loss, Krzyzewski chided reporters and called out Smith, which to many in North Carolina was something like sacrilege.

"When you come in here and start writing about Duke having no class, you better start getting your heads straight," Krzyzewski said then. "Because our students had class and our team had class."

He continued, taking a direct shot at Smith:

"There was not a person on our bench who was pointing at officials or banging on the scorers' table or having everybody running around on their bench. So let's get some things straight around here and quit the double standard that sometimes exists in this league. All right?"

Almost 40 years later, Krzyzewski recently considered those comments.

"Competitive bullshit," he said, but not without adding that "I needed to go through that," and "if you were me, you would feel the same way," and "there probably was" a double standard, and how now "they probably feel the same way with me" though Smith "probably had a better one than me," Krzyzewski said with a laugh.

"But no," he said. "It wasn't calculated. Spur of the moment. ... Then I got it. I got it.

"And that was really good. I'm so happy that I got it. Actually, we became friends."

The last time Krzyzewski and Smith coached against one another was exactly 25 years ago Wednesday. It was March 2, 1997. A match-up of top-10 teams in Chapel Hill. Ed Cota dribbled out the clock during the final seconds of the Tar Heels' 91-85 victory. Brent Musburger and Dick Vitale wrapped up their nationally televised broadcast on ABC.

Smith and Krzyzewski shook hands near midcourt. It was a brief exchange. Before it ended, their right hands still touching, Smith leaned in closer and placed his left hand on Krzyzewski's back, almost a half hug. Smith shared a quick word, moving in to speak into Krzyzewski's ear, and then the two men went their separate ways.

It was the last time, as head coaches, that their paths crossed on a basketball court. Nobody could have known then that it was Smith's final game inside the building named after him; that he'd lead the Tar Heels to one more Final Four before retiring about seven months later. And nobody could have known that Krzyzewski, then 50, had 25 more years of coaching in him.

Smith retired having won more games than anyone in the history of the sport. Krzyzewski will do the same whenever Duke's season ends. He has won five national championships. He has won 15 ACC tournament championships. He has won 1,196 games, more than enough for some of those victories to run together.

The losses are much fewer, and so they stand out more. And Krzyzewski lost against no coach more often than he lost against Dean Smith. Krzyzewski will retire with a winning record against UNC – he's 50-46, entering Saturday – but he was 14-24 against Smith, who often seemed so far ahead and out of reach during Krzyzewski's early years.

"When we went to Final Fours, and won, I knew him," Krzyzewski said. "I didn't know him until I did that. And he knew then that I knew him. And then I could appreciate his genius, just how damn good he was. And he recognized that, eventually, in me.

"And I love Dean Smith. And I respect the hell out of him."

In a way, Krzyzewski has become what Smith was, but "I don't want to say it that way," he said, "because nobody can be who he was." He understands the differences. Smith's legacy is clear beyond basketball, most notably as a Civil Rights advocate in the South when it was uncomfortable for a white man of prominence to take the stands that he did. They're different in personality and demeanor, and yet these dissimilar men, once fierce adversaries, eventually formed a bond.

"That's why his picture's up there," Krzyzewski said, and he shared a story he'd rarely shared before. It was the story the last time he spent time with Smith, when Smith was suffering from a dementia-like condition that robbed him of his mind and his memories.

"He only got so much," Krzyzewski said. "God bless him – you know, sad.

"But Linnea let us come over, and visit with him."

This was at the beach, on Figure Eight Island. Krzyzewski had rented a house there for his family, and by chance it so happened to be close to a house where the Smiths were staying.

"Serendipity," Linnea Smith, Dean's widow, said during a recent phone interview. She values her privacy and rarely speaks publicly, but she agreed to talk about this, about one final long meeting between two of the greatest coaches in American sports history, who did some of their most memorable work against one another.

Linnea could not remember the year, only that it was toward "the very end" of her husband's illness. Occasionally, she said, the family would take him to the beach. It was difficult, she said, because he was confined to a wheelchair and he had trouble eating and "he couldn't articulate much at all."

"You wondered how much he was processing of what was happening around him," she said. "But he would be in the wheelchair, and we'd take him out on the deck. And I think the beach and the surf was calming."

One day, after a chance encounter between the families, Krzyzewski asked Linnea if he and Mickie, his wife, could come over and spend time with Dean. At first, Linnea wasn't sure, she said, "Because I wasn't sure how helpful that would be." After some thought, Linnea, who'd long been friendly with Mickie and some of the other old coaches' wives, Pam Valvano included, agreed and invited the Krzyzewskis over.

She tried to prepare them for Dean's condition. Mike Krzyzewski wanted to visit him for a couple of reasons, but most of all to tell Dean Smith what Krzyzewski had known all along, even when they did not like each other very much. He wanted to tell him that, "I knew that there wouldn't be anybody ever like him."

"And I wanted to let him know that I knew."

Krzyzewski paused briefly, recounting the moment.

"I can't even put it into words, really," he said. "It's a hell of a thing."

And so the two men met out on the deck, overlooking a beach with the sound of the waves crashing in the distance. Krzyzewski could not be sure that Dean could understand him and Linnea did not know, either. Yet "even in the end stages," she said, she knew that "he could feel the caring."

"Up until the end he could sense that," she said. "And that gave him, I think, comfort, or some peace. So he sensed it. He sensed the caring, and that came across."

Linnea knew what that final meeting between two old rivals meant to her husband, even if he couldn't articulate it. Earlier this week she wondered what it might have meant to Krzyzewski, and she figured she had a good idea from the time he visited her husband that day at the beach, and her experience being by Dean's side through two national championships, hundreds of victories, retirement and then his long goodbye.

"Mike talks about the rivalry and the intensity and the fierceness of the rivalry," she said, "but I think seeing (Dean) so vulnerable would force you to (realize) – no matter how many games you win or what power you perceive you have or how successful you are, that life is finite. That life is fragile.

"Oftentimes we're in denial that you don't have as much time as you thought you did."

It wasn't too long ago, really, that Krzyzewski and Dean Smith were coaching against each other for the final time, or even the first. It wasn't so long ago that Krzyzewski was a young man, trying to prove himself against the old guard; trying, in his own way, to emulate Smith. Now that was all in the past. Krzyzewski, like Smith before him, had come to set a standard.

When Duke's season ends, it'll be the first time since 1960 without Smith or Krzyzewski as a head coach at two schools eight miles apart. For more than 60 years, one or the other remained constants. Back in his office last summer, Krzyzewski again wondered how all of this happened.

His career. The building he was standing in. The peace and friendship he found with Smith toward the end of his life. There was a significance that Krzyzewski's final home game would come against North Carolina, beyond the routine familiarity that every other regular season ends that way, with a home game against the Tar Heels.

"There's a level of security there," he said, "because you're in this penthouse of excellence. But you don't get all of it. You've got to fight like hell for some of it. And then you respect how the others have fought like hell for it."

It took him years of defeats to learn that. It took his earliest Final Fours to earn that kind of respect. Now after all these decades, all these games against UNC that taught him "to fight like hell," he'd reached an endpoint of his own.

Mike Krzyzewski never lost his fire

By Dan Wetzel, Yahoo! Sports (March 3, 2022)

On Oct. 22, 2009, Mike Krzyzewski sat in his office at Duke watching an ESPNU feed emanating from New York, where a young prospect named Kyrie Irving was about to make his college decision.

Irving was, of course, a ridiculous talent. He was also a near certain one-and-done player, the kind of recruit Krzyzewski's Blue Devil program had either avoided or failed to lure to campus.

Krzyzewski was 62 years old at the time. He had been to 10 Final Fours and won three national titles. He'd been enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame back in 2001. He was rich and famous and respected. He had nothing to prove.

Times were changing though.

Krzyzewski had won with players who almost exclusively stayed at Duke for three and four years. Grant Hill, Christian Laettner, Jay Williams, Johnny Dawkins, J.J. Redick, Shane Battier, Shelden Williams, Carlos Boozer, Bobby Hurley, Danny Ferry and so on.

Now top recruits were unapologetic about trying to get to the NBA after a single season in college. They wanted a place that accepted that. They wanted to be showcased.

Duke, however, was considered old school. So from Kevin Durant to John Wall to Blake Griffin to Kevin Love and so on, the Blue Devils were suddenly recruiting afterthoughts. They didn't produce an NBA first-round pick in 2006 or 2007. In 2008 and 2009, they landed just two top-50 recruits, per Rivals.com, and none ranked in the top 10.

Krzyzewski graduated from West Point and always excelled in recognizing obstacles and strategizing against them. Duke was still capable of being great (indeed, it had a veteran core that would win the 2010 national title) but he recognized that recruiting was about to become a major problem.

"Players win," Krzyzewski said that day in 2009. "Coaches don't win games. Players win games. A coach and his staff can set the stage for a great player to make great plays, but the player has to make them."

So he changed things up. He rode the publicity and credibility acquired from leading USA Basketball to a gold medal at the 2008 Olympics, to recruit players who weren't wondering what senior night, or even declaring a major, might be like.

He was going after the Kyrie Irvings of the world. On their terms.

Irving wouldn't disappoint that day. He announced for Duke over Kentucky. The office in a tower that stands next to Cameron Indoor Stadium erupted in cheers. This was big. Due to injuries, Irving played in just 11 games for the Blue Devils, but his presence meant more than that. He went No. 1 overall in the 2011 NBA draft anyway.

Where Johnny Dawkins and the 1982 recruiting class provided credibility to a young Krzyzewski and set up an incredible run of success, Irving did the same to an older Krzyzewski. It led to a second act that was nearly as glorious.

Coach K is retiring at the end of the season. Saturday is his final game at Cameron, a 6 p.m. ET tilt against rival North Carolina. That at 75 he's still on top of his game is a testament to his willingness to adapt even deep into his career.

His final Duke team has already wrapped up the ACC regular season title and behind a couple of other one-and-done lottery recruits (Paolo Banchero and A.J. Griffin) have a real chance at K's sixth national title.

The tournament is fickle, of course, so who knows. Whatever happens, though, this isn't a final wave to the crowd by an aging rock star. The Blue Devils are humming as well as ever. New coach Jon Scheyer, currently K's top assistant, will welcome four top-20 recruits, including Nos. 1, 2 and 3 per Rivals, next fall.

Krzyzewski's coaching career began at Army in 1975. He spent 42 seasons at Duke. His adaptability of strategy, while maintaining his consistency of purpose, has kept him at the front of the pack.

While it sounds simple, it rarely is. There's a reason even the best coaches fade. It's one thing to win 1,196 games - the most of all time. It's another to rack up 26 of them (and counting) in your final season.

"We went to 10 Final Fours because we had really good players," Krzyzewski said on the day Irving committed. "We've had seven national players of the year here. Well, with those guys, you should go to some Final Fours. We feel if we can get that caliber of talent again, we've got a shot."

Irving opened the floodgates. Jabari Parker, Jahlil Okafor, Brandon Ingram, Jayson Tatum, Wendell Carter, Marvin Bagley, Cam Reddish, R.J. Barrett, Zion Williamson and others soon rolled through Durham en route to the draft lottery. One great recruiting class beget another one.

There are plenty of reasons why Krzyzewski has done what no one else has. His coaching skills. His motivational skills. His people skills. His work ethic and competitive drive. There will be deserving testimonials to all of it.

But simply on the strategy of figuring out how to win, it isn't just that Krzyzewski is the best of all time. It's that at his retirement, he's still doing it as well as anyone.

It's a prime that never seemed to end, even if those roars inside Cameron finally will.

The untold stories of Coach K: Wine trips, film sessions and uncommon empathy

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (March 3, 2022)

Mike Krzyzewski: Winner of nearly 1,200 college basketball games, five national titles, and just as many Olympic gold medals. Arguably, the greatest basketball coach at any level of the sport.

Also Mike Krzyzewski: Wine-drinking fanatic, and lover of all things Napa Valley; meticulous planner who frequently pulls all-nighters; and doting friend, father, and son.

You know the first man.

But the second? Maybe not so much.

Time to change that. On the eve of Krzyzewski's last home game as Duke's head coach, The Athletic spoke to more than a dozen people – former players, assistant coaches, and longtime friends – to get a clearer picture of the man behind the Blue Devils dynasty.

Or rather, both men: Coach K, as the public knows him ... and Mike, as only his inner circle does.

Napa Valley Coach K

Mike Cragg, former Duke basketball senior administrator: When you said stories nobody knows, I immediately went to, "Well, what are some stories with wine?" Because I don't know if the characterization of how much he loves wine is out there.

Rob Lawson, winemaker and K Academy participant: He's definitely a wine lover.

Cragg: When we're in Napa (for the Jimmy V Foundation Wine Celebration every August), we have a day called "Guy's Day," where the spouses stay and spa or whatever, and the guys go out and do different wineries in more rapid succession.

Lawson: We hit six spots, seven spots.

Cragg: You just fill in the blank of how much you think we drank.

Ashok Varadhan, former Duke basketball manager: If you had told me, back when I was getting yelled at for screwing up the shot clock, that 25 years later, we'd be drinking wine together in Napa Valley? There's no odds I would have given you. (laughs) I would've given you a million-to-one odds.

Lawson: Coach certainly likes the, let's call it "the mainstays." The traditional sort of Napa brands: Silver Oak, Caymus, Opus One. Sort of the old school. But what I've been able to do is take him out of the old school and put him in front of smaller, artisanal programs.

Cragg: He's a red Cab guy.

Lawson: Oh, that's for sure ... One he liked is a brand called Buccella; that would be in his newer sphere.

Cragg: Obviously, we're not driving. There's a bus, and we're all – as you should be – stupid, funny, whatever you want to say.

Lawson: There's some singing on the bus.

Cragg: Smokey Robinson, Motown. He's just like anybody: When you drink a lot of wine, you have a lot of fun.

Lawson: This past year at the V Foundation, we are watching the gold medal game at the event. So I'm sitting next to Coach K, David Robinson, and Gary Steele, (ESPN anchor) Sage Steele's dad, who was a West Point guy with Coach. So we're watching the Olympic gold medal game with them – and here I am, the wine guy, watching with them. And Coach is, "Rob, look at this! Look at this!" And he's hitting me, and saying, "Hey, look at this," and we're all getting excited.

The point of the story is, for me to have that kind of experience, watching a basketball game at a wine event – with the best basketball coach ever and David Robinson – it was great.

Chris Spatola, son-in-law, former director of Duke basketball operations, and college basketball analyst: For a Thanksgiving dinner or a gathering, he'll start with a white. A couple of the daughters prefer white, so he'll break that out. He knows I prefer red, so he'll always break out a red, but he's very accommodating with it. They built that wine cellar (in their house), and I always make fun because you go down there, there's boxes of wine he has yet to even put on the shelves.

Sometimes he'll let one of the sons-in-law go down – we call it player's choice – and let one of us pick a bottle. So I'll go down and I'll come up with three of them, and one of them is obviously this extravagant \$500 bottle. So he'll look at the three that I pick, and depending on where we are in the evening, he can be more or less generous. Like, he'll look at the three and go, "Nope. We can have that. Let's wait a little bit on that one."

Grant Hill, former All-American Duke forward: My wife and I, we went out to Napa for the first time and had a great time; this might've been 2006, 2007. We got out there, really pleasant. That's the first time my wife had really been around Coach when he wasn't in coach mode. My wife's a recording artist, he's talking music, he's funny, engaging. You know, he's Coach K. He's everything.

(A few months) after that, we went to a game in Cameron. We're sitting behind the bench, and the team is up like 20, 25. Then the opposing team makes a run, and now we're up, like, 18 with four minutes left. Coach calls timeout, and he lights into the guys – and she's never seen that. So after the game, we win, and we go in the back to his little meeting area, his office off the locker room, and my wife goes up to him and says, "You know, Coach, I think I like the Napa Valley Coach K better than that Coach K."

And he says, "I like the Napa Valley Coach K better, too."

'You are the U.S.'

Nate McMillan, former Olympic assistant coach and NC State guard: The Olympic committee decided they needed to build a team, as opposed to selecting All-Stars or the "best" players every four years for the Olympics. Coach K had experience working with the Dream Team, he'd had a lot of success on his level and working with future pros, and they felt he was the best at that time to build a team.

Sean Ford, men's national team director: You've got to remember: This is coming off of the lockout year in '98, we don't win; 2000, where we barely win; '02 where we lose; and '04 where we lose. So we were getting back to the basics.

Spatola: The relationship between players and coaches needed to be rebuilt. They had these buses with a middle door. The coaches would sit in the front of the bus, and go through the front door; the players would go through the middle door to the back of the bus, and even getting on the bus, the players and coaches would never interact.

McMillan: It was his first time coaching NBA players and NBA stars, and he didn't go in there with that attitude that, "I'm Mike, I'm Coach K." He came in with the mindset of building a family, and he's gonna build trust.

Mike Gminski, former Duke All-American forward: Every single one of 'em is an alpha. And they could have said, "Oh, this guy's a college coach, what does he know?" But to a person, every one of them bought in.

I remember when Kobe Bryant was still playing and they came to Charlotte, I had a chance to talk with him, and as soon as I mentioned Mike, his face just lit up. It was so apparent the respect that he had for Mike, and he told me, "If I had gone to college, I would've gone to Duke." The fact that he was able to (build those bonds) not only at a college level, but go with that group of players and connect with them, that's pretty amazing.

Mike D'Antoni, former Olympics assistant coach and longtime NBA coach: He wanted each player, each superstar in their own right, to bring that ego into the team. He didn't want the Kobe, LeBron, whoever they were, version from USA Basketball; he wanted the version of them playing with their respective teams. He preached that a lot: Bring your ego, don't be submissive to anybody – and he would take that and mold it all together.

Alan Schwartz, Duke University trustee and longtime friend: He went into the locker room with his first USA team and said, look guys, you're not college players so I'm not gonna tell you the rules. Freshmen come into Duke, here's the rules. But we do need a set of rules, so you guys tell me. So he pulled out a whiteboard and said, "OK, who's got a rule?" And one of them, Jason Kidd, said, "I think it should be defense first." And Mike said, "Does everybody agree?" Because he said, "Let's agree on what the rules are. So, everybody agree? OK, defense first." And then he asked somebody else.

He's looking at LeBron, I think it was, and he says, "LeBron, you're not saying anything. Don't you have a rule?" And LeBron stood up and he says, "I say, no F-ing excuses!" And he looked at everybody and said, "Everybody agree with that?" Yes. So he (flipped) the whole board over, and then in big writing put NO F-ING EXCUSES. But he just realized that with a group of professional all-stars, they have to be the ones to say, "This is how we're going to manage ourselves."

Jim Boeheim, former Olympic assistant and current Syracuse head coach: He listens to what Mike D'Antoni or I would say about who to go to, or run this play. Sometimes a player, Kobe, will say, "I can get this guy here," so he listens and puts in that play. But he's really good at taking input. You know, when you have Kobe Bryant, LeBron James on your team, you listen to those guys. At Duke, he tells them what to do. He does not ask them for suggestions. (laughs)

Jason Kidd that first year, I remember Mike having him talk in one huddle, saying, "This will work, this will work." That's Mike's strength. He'll listen. Now, he's a very forceful opinion – a force of nature – and he's gonna do what he wants, but he'll listen and he'll change. We were having trouble in Rio and I said, "We gotta go to Kyrie (Irving)," even though Kyrie hadn't done much. And boom, he goes, "Yep, let's go." And Kyrie came down, hit a 3, hit a drive, and the game was over.

Ford: He thought it would be interesting to bring in the military, and maybe some wounded warriors, who could come in and talk to the players about selfless sacrifice, that type of stuff. One of the soldiers was Scott Smiley. Scott, he took shrapnel across the eyes that took both his eyes out, so he was blinded in battle. And everyone just assumed that he wanted to be honorably discharged – and he wanted to stay in. And (one of Krzyzewski's players at Army) Colonel Robert Brown said, "I get this call that Scott Smiley wants to stay in, and we'd never had someone who was blinded in battle want to stay in – but if he wants in, he's in." And Scott Smiley was there, and he spoke to the players.

Boeheim: It was earth-shattering.

D'Antoni: I mean, if you weren't moved by that, then you're not the right guy to be in that room, and I think Coach knew that.

The untold stories of Coach K: Wine trips, film sessions and empathy (cont.)

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (March 3, 2022)

McMillan: Sometimes when we talk about battling, or say it's gonna be a war out there, that's BS. ... He never even used those phrases because he understood the difference.

Spatola: He said, "You are not playing for the U.S.; you are the U.S. Like, we are the United States of America, right here."

Every meeting we had, what was up on the screen when guys walked in was that gold medal. That was the goal.

Schwartz: He took them out to the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and he said, "Look guys, that's where my grandfather John Krzyzewski came to this country, and then moved to Chicago." So he said, "I'm telling you, when we win the gold medal – not if, but when we win the gold medal – I'm gonna be standing there thinking about my grandfather, John Krzyzewski, coming to this country." And then he turned. "Kobe, who are you gonna be thinking about when we win the gold medal? LeBron, who are you going to be thinking about?"

Boenheim: It was amazing how they came together, but he orchestrated it. That's what he did, and that's what he does. He's the best basketball coach since – you know, I don't ever go against John Wooden, but from 1970 to 2022, he's so far above everybody else it's not even funny. It's not close.

'Where was Mike? At the bedside'

Hill: I went in his office (last week), and I look to see all these letters on his desk. And I asked him about it, and he said, "These are letters from cancer patients, fans," and he reads 'em and responds. Him being supportive, that's real.

Cragg: Whether he's walking on the bus or he's going to the airport, he always has this notebook, and it's got his calendar, his practice plan – and then it's got a stack of notes. Some are his that he's written to keep, and some are letters that he's been sent, and some are notes from his assistant, Gerry, about his messages. And whenever he has a moment – and I've been on lots and lots of planes where it's just the two of us traveling – he always will be writing on these notecards, and then stick a sticky on it and make a stack. Every morning when he comes into work, he's got a stack of stuff for Gerry, his assistant, that he worked on the night before. And that's no exaggeration; every single day of his life.

Varadhan: My brother was in the World Trade Center and passed away on 9/11. He was on the 105th floor of the World Trade Center. ... I lived in downtown New York, maybe about a mile north of the World Trade Center. It was almost like a military scene, something out of "Apocalypse Now." I make it back that night to my apartment – and literally, like, the phone rings and it's Coach K. I'd say probably we hadn't spoken in about three years.

And that sort of started, over the last 20 years, more of an adult relationship between us. I'll still do anything he tells me to. (laughs) I'm still a little nervous around him. But it kind of catalyzed how I would engage with the program as an adult. So we did things, like in my brother's name, there's a manager scholarship. So if a manager has financial needs, he'll get the Gopal Varadhan scholarship, and every year for the manager of the year, they give them the Gopal Varadhan Manager of the Year award, or whatever it is. And I became motivated to do something for the program because Coach K himself endowed a scholarship in the name of his own older brother.

Schwartz: When his brother (passed), it just really hit him in the gut. But I would say it this way: Those are intense moments. To compete in sports, you have to be an intense competitor, but you can't carry forward losses. Right? Other than to say, next time I'm not going to do that, and go forward. But to lose one of the most important people in your life, that's not something you just move past.

Gminski: Bill was an all-encompassing figure in his life.

Dennis "Moe" Mlynski, childhood best friend: I don't know how he did it, but he gave the eulogy – and it was a battle for him to get through it. I remember that.

Spatola: In terms of a personal tragedy, that's the lowest I've seen him. He was crushed. And this is a guy who lost his dad when he was a senior at West Point, lost his mom years later – but it had been a period where Bill and Coach were the only guys in the family. So losing him, that was incredibly crushing.

We did end up going (for the funeral). We flew out to Chicago and were there, and you know what? It was an amazing time. First of all, it was during the season – and Coach doesn't do many outside-of-basketball things during a season. So, I think for him to grieve and go through that during that period was good for him. We went back to Chicago, and we were around a lot of his other family, plus Bill's wife, Pat. We ate at this Polish community center, like, pierogies and a traditional Polish meal, and he had a smile on his face for like the first time surrounding his brother's passing. I think there was a lot of reflection and recollection and nostalgia that hit him during that. So I think that was a cool part of it: going back and being around his former neighborhood, his people.

Schwartz: If you look at when Jim Valvano got sick, if you look what happened with others, where was Mike? He was at the bedside. So you have to understand that: not only in his personal life has he had suffering, but he understands others'.

Bobby Hurley, former Duke All-American guard: There aren't a lot of people in life that you know you can count on, like, if you need them. And for him, he proved that to me when I had my (life-threatening car) accident: when I was in the hospital, when I was in rough shape. He was in the middle of the season, and I was one year removed from the program. I woke up one morning in the hospital – and he was there.

Schwartz: When my son was 5 or just turned 6, he had leukemia, and it was pretty aggressive – he got through it, but we didn't know that at the time – but he'd never been to a game. But I took him to the Final Four in Denver. Long story short, at the last minute, the doctor said that I could go (and take him). Tom Butters and (his wife) Lynn were there to help us. We would stay in the same hotel as the team, but one of the rules was, leave the team alone. ... We got permission from the doctor to stay for the final. I get a note: Come by over here, where the team is, around noon – and bring your son.

Mike had every guy on the team take their picture with him, and autograph it. My son is 38 now. He got through it, had a lot of problems, but he got through it – and he still has the poster of his picture, standing between the legs of Alaa Abdelnaby.

Later, I pointed to that picture when speaking with Bob Hurley Sr., and I said to Bob, "Hey, nobody can tell me that Duke basketball had anything to do with my son fighting his leukemia, or curing his leukemia – but then again, nobody can tell me it didn't." And Mike did that.

Hill: I know for me, he was very helpful when I went through my ankle ordeal. I was septic, I had to get a free flap on my ankle. It was touch and go; if this doesn't work, then possibly amputation. Just all these things were going on. So I was at Duke for an extended period of time, and he would come and just check on me. Even in those moments when I was unsure if this was gonna work, he was always encouraging me. Giving me this vision, even then, that I was going to come back and play. And I remember a couple of times he said it, and when he left, I was like, "Man, what is he talking about? I don't wanna play no more. I'm done." But he was persistent, and he was in my ear just planting that seed.

When I was at my lowest of lows, and only a handful of people – my parents, my wife, maybe my agent – saw me at that point, he was there.

Schwartz: If you listen to Grant or any of (his former players), they'll call him Coach. When you call somebody "Coach" because you're playing on their team, that's a sign of what they do. When you refer to him as "Coach" for your entire life, that's because of the big role they played in your entire life. And every one of his players will walk in and say, "Hey, Coach."

Sicko Mode

Boenheim: The overwhelming thing people should know? How detailed this man is.

I watch a little tape, he watches maximum tape. I watch an hour; he watches six. And it doesn't matter who you were playing. It could be Nigeria, Angola, anybody. That's just what he does. He's the most prepared coach you'll ever see. We were up till 4 o'clock in the morning watching tape for Nigeria ... who we beat by 80 points. I'm falling asleep, completely exhausted in the back of the room. We'd been to the Great Wall of China that day, played a game, got back at midnight – and we're still watching tape till 4 in the morning.

D'Antoni: There was an audible groan about 4 a.m.

Spatola: I can remember Coach Boehem one time after a blowout saying, "Nope, I'm not doing it. I'm going to my room. You call me when we're talking about the next team."

McMillan: I watch a lot of film, but nothing like Coach K. As soon as the game is over, win or lose, we would get back to our hotels, go up and change clothes, and you might as well kiss your wife – because the next time you see her, she's gonna be in bed knocked out. We would watch the game over, and then we would watch our next opponent. And this one night we did that, I walked into my room at 7 o'clock in the morning. We had watched film all night long. I walked into my room – like, the sun is coming up and we've got a 12 o'clock practice – and my wife looks at me and goes, "I know you have not been watching film all night long. You've been over at that village! You've been hanging out. No way you've been watching film all night." I said, "Yes we have." Because he looks at every single clip.

I do the same thing, but what Coach will do is he'll get his mixed nuts, something to drink – sometimes it's a diet Coke, sometimes it might be a glass of wine – and he sits there with his clicker and watches every clip. We're behind him. Sometimes he'd talk to us, sometimes he'd just write down his notes. But what I got from that is, he's thirsty for something. I don't know what it is. I don't know if it's winning more, or more championships, or the challenge, or building. It could be all of those things. But even though we were winning most of our games by 40, it was like he came in even more fired up the next day for the next game. He doesn't get complacent.

Cragg: And if we lost a game? I know he wasn't sleeping. No way. I mean, he was up watching tape, trying to figure it out. The ultimate "figure it out" kind of guy.

Chris Carrawell, former Duke All-American wing and current Duke associate head coach: It's ridiculous, dude. He's sick. It's sicko mode, for real.

Mlynski: I just remember how intense and focused he gets. I think it was 1990, and I hadn't been out to Duke for a long time to see a game. So I went out to see a game – it might've been North Carolina at Duke – and I got to stay with them, him and his wife, at their house. And his wife told me how he would wake up in the morning and play very soft music, and she said, "Don't talk to Mike, because he gets into a zone." The game is on his mind, basically.

But as the morning progresses, we're getting closer to heading to the stadium, the music in the house started being more intense. And I think by the time we left, they were playing "Rocky." (laughs)

The untold stories of Coach K: Wine trips, film sessions and empathy (cont.)

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (March 3, 2022)

Hill: It was my sophomore year, and we'd had great success in '91, came back and were No. 1 to start the year, No. 1 all season, and at that point we were undefeated. We played Florida State at home, they were new to the conference, we beat 'em pretty easily at home, and then we were scheduled to go down and play there. When we had practice the day before we left – now, we'd never played down there before – he showed a video. The crowd was saying, "We want Duke, we want Duke."

When he turned it off, like, the look in his eye? Sometimes coaches will manufacture things to get you motivated, but he was so mad. He looked like an assassin in that moment. And he says, "They want Duke? They're gonna fucking get Duke." And the way he said it, it was like, "Oh, shit."

Carrawell: Anytime we're not playing to the level he thinks we can play at, he's gonna go in on you. The timeouts, the yelling, the getting his point across, letting guys know – he's still got that. That's what he's always had. If you're screwing around, he's on your ass – period.

Hurley: There was a game when we were going for the back-to-back and we were at Clemson, and we were awful to start off – and he took all five guys out. That was on a team that had already won a million games. He wasn't gonna give anybody a free pass.

Mlynski: He was an aggressive guy (even growing up). More serious. You know, whenever we played sports – we played a lot of Pinochle, too – his tendency was he wanted to win. He was more intense than most of us. Not that he's like that today, right? (laughs)

Hill: He's somebody you want on your side in a street fight, and I think that's ingrained in who he is. People have learned more about him through the years, but don't be fooled – and I'm joking when I say this – by the "GQ" suits he wore. He's a Chicago kid. He's an inner city kid ... He's a punch-you-in-the-face, metaphorically, type of guy in how he approaches things.

Mlynski: When we were growing up, we had a secret language. We thought we were cool. Maybe we were in high school or a little bit younger. We used to put an S in front of every word. So instead of, "Hey, do you wanna go to the store?" (It was) "Shey, sdo syou swanna sgo sto sthe store?" We'd kinda mumble our way through. And I told a couple of doctors and nurses (at a speaking event at Duke Hospital a few years ago) that Mike, to this day, uses that same language in communicating with his people.

I said, "The only thing is, instead of putting an S in front of every word, he puts an F in front of every word." (laughs) Because let's be honest, he shows his emotion out on that court a number of ways. He's broken quite a few clipboards.

Varadhan: He has no problem giving you honest feedback, even if that honest feedback isn't what you want to hear.

Hill: He's blunt, to the point, but there's a relationship and a trust that had been developed to where there's a comfort level on his part to share – and a comfort level in receiving. That doesn't always happen. If you don't have a relationship, if you don't have the trust, if you don't have a connection, then it's hard to do that. But he's taken the time to establish that, and there's almost a softer side that goes into nurturing a relationship. Then you balance that with a tough side that is demanding and has that fighter mentality.

Carrawell: What he's telling you, you just believe it. The passion, he's just got it. And the whole West Point thing adds to it.

One time when we were driving to Charlotte, to see Wendell Moore actually, I asked him, "If you didn't coach, what would you do?" And he's like, I was gonna be a coach. Basically put all his eggs in one basket. No other option. I'm coaching. He was born to coach, and it worked out. But he had no backup plan. Never another option. It's in his blood. Every win, every loss, it just permeates through his body, man. It's crazy how fully he feels it. Like, damn, you didn't even play! You're on the sidelines! But it's different. He's different.

Why farewell isn't goodbye for Coach K when it comes to Cameron Indoor Stadium

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (March 2, 2022)

DURHAM - As he's done for the past 42 years, Mike Krzyzewski plans to continue celebrating and improving Duke's historic Cameron Indoor Stadium even after he coaches his last game there on Saturday night.

One of the retirement tasks the 75-year-old Krzyzewski will tackle, once his coaching career ends this spring, is what he's referred to as "figuring out Cameron."

To do so, he's not opposed to mixing business with pleasure while on a trip with his wife, Mickie.

"I think things that I will look at are, hopefully, when I'm with Mickie spending some time in Europe," Krzyzewski said. "You're visiting places that are not just cathedrals, but historic places that are old. But they're not old, you know. They're old in age."

Designed in the late 1930s and opened on Jan. 6, 1940, Cameron Indoor Stadium continues as Duke's basketball home even as other larger, glitzier and more modern buildings open at schools throughout college basketball.

Krzyzewski never wanted Duke to join that crowd. The Duke administrators who employed him since 1980 agreed, starting with the athletic director who hired Krzyzewski, Tom Butters.

"I never wanted to have something different than Cameron," Krzyzewski said. "Cameron is really one of the most unique venues in the world."

In the mid-1980s, rival North Carolina constructed and moved into the Smith Center the same season Duke first reached the Final Four under Krzyzewski, in 1986.

"It was a clear path by Mr. Butters," said Mike Cragg, the current St. John's athletics director who worked in athletics at Duke from 1987 until leaving for New York in 2018.

Butters, who died in 2015, opted for renovations, but Cameron's playing area remained mostly unchanged as capacity remained the cozy 9,314 that makes it among the most intimidating venues in sports.

"We studied raising the roof, but weren't going to tear it down," Cragg said. "How do we make it special for everyone but how do you build around it?"

It's only appropriate that Krzyzewski would study Europe's rich architecture when helping plan how to keep Cameron a viable Division I athletics venue for a few more decades. The stadium's architect, Julian Abele of Philadelphia, studied at Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and traveled around Europe early in the 20th century before also designing Duke's iconic Chapel Tower, as well as most of the school's other west campus buildings.

What European nations have done is what Duke needs to follow, Krzyzewski said.

"They didn't knock something down and build a new thing," he said. "They kept what they've had for hundreds of years. I'd like to study that and talk to people who are not in sport, but who do that, who are really experts, and have them take a look at what we have.

"We have all the feeling and the historic perspective, and whatever. It's something that I'm very, very interested in."

Duke has won 84.5% of its games (930-170) played at Cameron. Under Krzyzewski the Blue Devils are 572-75, winning 88.4 percent of the time on their famed home court.

So it's clear why Krzyzewski and Duke weren't interested in changes to the stadium over the decades.

The school did what it could to modernize the building, adding wood paneling, brass railings and a scoreboard over the center of the court in 1987-88, and new locker rooms in the early 1990s. Air conditioning finally arrived in 2002, and a video scoreboard over center court in 2008.

Duke also built facilities around Cameron to augment the stadium. That included the Schwartz-Butters Athletic Center, used by the men's and women's programs that also includes an academic center used by all of Duke's athletes over the past 25 years. It also houses the Duke Sports Hall of Fame.

The Krzyzewski Center was built with practice courts and training facilities. Both buildings are connected to Cameron.

In 2016, a new two-story addition to Cameron became a new entrance lobby while also housing hospitality areas.

In his 31 years at Duke, Cragg was involved in all those projects as he moved from sports information director to senior associate athletics director. He and Krzyzewski worked to create the Duke Basketball Legacy Fund, which has raised millions for facilities, coaching salaries and endowed scholarships, with the goal of keeping Duke basketball elite even after Krzyzewski retires.

The time has arrived for Krzyzewski to say goodbye to coaching at Cameron after this Saturday's regular-season finale against UNC. Krzyzewski and the team aim to further bolster Cameron's lore by winning championships in the ACC and NCAA tournaments, to add more banners to the rafters.

But even after his coaching is done, Krzyzewski will be working for Cameron Indoor Stadium.

"Cameron is special," Cragg said. "Whatever he can do to help, he'll do."

The Final March of Coach K

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

Mike Krzyzewski walked into his office last summer in a melancholy mood. His yellow lab, Blue, had died in his arms the month before. Approaching the start of his final season, he teared up as he told stories about Blue. The family has always had communal dogs, named Cameron and Defense, but Blue belonged to him, and would sit at his feet while he watched hours of game film. Coach K loved his dog and on this afternoon felt his absence acutely. There were a lot of feelings in the air. He had moved into the inevitable wilderness of loss and goodbyes, approaching his 75th birthday and the end of his life's work, which is not the natural habitat for a guy like him. He once wrote in an elementary school essay that he either wanted to become an accountant or a priest. Those urges still remain. He is forever keeping score.

"I try not to look in the future," he says, "and I definitely don't look in the past."

Krzyzewski's office is in the top of the tower Duke built in 1999 after he'd won two of his five national championships as its head basketball coach. He is on the sixth floor, and all the other coaches are a level below. Coach only needs to take a right out of his office, then another right down a back stairwell, to get to his assistants. For the past 42 seasons he's called the Duke campus home, bringing his wife and family into the operation -- his daughter Debbie Savarino keeps an office down the hall from his -- and that is all coming to an end. He's lived a life that would have seemed impossible to his parents in their working-class Polish neighborhood in Chicago. Not long ago, he flew back to his hometown in a private jet, and his best friend from childhood, Dennis "Moe" Mlynski, picked him up in his wife's minivan. The big jet landed as Moe watched from inside the private terminal. The pilot parked a few yards from the door and still a golf cart came to pick up Krzyzewski. Coach saw Moe gearing up to demolish him for being soft and rich as he took his first steps inside.

"Moe, don't say a word," he said.

Right now, as Coach K sits in his office and tries to dodge questions about nostalgia and imminent farewells, Moe arrives in Durham, North Carolina, to hang out for a few days. They're still best friends. Krzyzewski remains deeply connected with the world he knew as a child and no matter what he tells himself, or tells visitors to his sixth-floor castle keep, he has been most definitely looking into the past in recent days. Maybe it's more accurate to say that the past has been reaching out to him, demanding his attention.

It started last month when he found himself talking to butterflies.

There's nobody in his life who meant more to him than his mother, Emily Krzyzewski. She died in 1996 at age 84. When he'd go recruit in Chicago, instead of staying at some fancy hotel, he'd always crash in his mom's small three-room flat. She never moved, not even when her son got rich. They talked after every game.

"He can still repeat her number," Debbie says.

"1-312-276-8681," he says.

When their mother died, Mike's brother, Bill, sent him a box of possessions they'd found in her apartment. Mike started sifting through the things his mother had left behind. Finally he flipped open a worn steno pad to find thousands of notations, page after page, each line listing a date, an opponent and either a W or an L. He cried, realizing that, without him knowing, she had tracked every game he'd ever coached.

His former player and assistant, Steve Wojciechowski, says that during incredibly tense moments, big games when the noise came down from the bleachers like tumbling boulders, his boss would softly say a prayer to his mother. Coach K believes that his mother still watches over him, sometimes taking the form of butterflies. She loved them. His wife, Mickie Krzyzewski, planted bushes in their backyard that attract them. So around the time he announced his plans to retire from the game that had defined his life, a butterfly landed on his car. He stood and watched, and the thing refused to move. It just sat there, and so he waited too. Finally he needed to go. He leaned toward the butterfly.

"All right, Mom," he said, and it -- she -- finally flew away.

When this last season began, I met Krzyzewski in a hallway somewhere in the bowels of Madison Square Garden in New York, a few minutes after his Blue Devils had won their first game, against a talented Kentucky team. The Garden had prime-time energy. Bruce Springsteen sat at center court. Duke's star freshman, Paolo Bancheri, led the team and closed out a fierce opponent; a baptism, and his coach now smiled with pride.

"His first big game," Krzyzewski says, looking almost giddy. "I feel closer to this team than I have in the last decade, and I've been pretty close with teams."

He sees a familiar face waiting for him.

"Moe!" he yells with a huge smile.

The two old friends embrace. Coach K and Mickie invite Moe and his son to sit with them in the small office. Mickie, their children and grandchildren often hang around the team, working the doors at camps, babysitting for assistant coaches. It feels like one big, weird family up close, and all that is in its final year, too. "We are not going to be the first family of Duke basketball anymore," says Debbie Savarino, an assistant director of athletics who is still known to everyone as Debbie K. "What does that look like? What does that feel like?"

One of her sons, Michael, is actually on the team. The other nine grandchildren call Krzyzewski "Poppy," but Michael calls him "Coach." Inside the office, Krzyzewski talks about how important this win was, for this season, for his team, for himself. Few things in the world feel better than 1-0. Heavy bass rattles the locker room speakers as the team packs for the flight home and people gather and talk and laugh in the hall. Chatter filters out from a police radio. This is the sound of victory. The managers load blue duffel bags onto the Garden's famous freight elevator and shuttle them down to the loading dock. There's something beautiful about the efficiency and rhythm of these postgame hours, practiced, learned, internal, more like blood flowing in a vein than a schedule prepared and kept. A postgame arena, still buzzing, is a temple, a place where dreams live. Coach K is a creature of this underworld, and soon both these private spaces and his mastery of them will slip through his fingers.

"It's gonna be so weird next year ..." one of the managers says to another.

It's nearly 1 in the morning when Krzyzewski comes out of this office with both his wife and his best friend. We all take a left and step into the big freight elevator on the fifth floor of the Garden. A lot of big-time coaches love to reminisce about this elevator, which has the patina of history and a kind of gladiatorial spirit. This is Coach K's last ride on it.

On the way down, he and Moe talk about Father Francis Rog. He taught Mike geometry at Archbishop Weber High in Chicago and, for the past six decades, has served as his spiritual adviser. The father's been in the hospital, and everyone in their circle of friends is worried.

"He's one of THE great men," Krzyzewski says as the freight elevator doors close.

They're in a good mood -- you don't want to be near Krzyzewski after a loss, even now, after all the supposed perspective added by time and more than a thousand career victories -- and he and Moe and Mickie are enjoying tonight, telling stories about Father Rog.

"You know," Coach K continues, "he changed my life. He explained religion the right way."

They laugh hard as Krzyzewski plays the part of a tough old priest: What you did was a sin, what you are is a sin and what you will be is a sin. Basically, life is full of guilt and then we die.

"That is it," Coach K says with a grin. "Call it a day. I'll go to heaven less guilty."

He laughs.

"Maybe."

The elevator lets them off on the third floor, and Krzyzewski leads the way through the hidden parts of Madison Square Garden, a walk he's made so many times before. He and his team made this walk 10 years ago when he passed his mentor, Bob Knight, for the most wins in college basketball history. We round a corner and come down the loading dock toward Eighth Avenue. The cityscape of honking cabs and cheering Duke fans awaits. Coach and Moe say goodbye, and the Krzyzewskis climb aboard one of the team buses bound for the airport and, around 3 or 4 in the morning, home.

Moe picked me up at my Michigan Avenue hotel in Chicago, which happened to be in a building Mike's mother used to clean at night when she worked as a janitor. We drove over to the old neighborhood, back in time. For Moe and all their shared old Polish friends, who called themselves the Columbus after the name of their elementary school, Coach K's retirement comes as they are entering the last acts of their lives. Two recently died. Another lost his wife and can't be around the Columbus these days without crying.

"I'm gonna retire the day after he retires," says Larry Kusch, who goes by Mondo. "I will beat him!"

Moe takes me on the tour. He talked to Coach last night to find out what he wanted me to see. First we stop on Cortez Street, at the apartment where Mike grew up, surrounded by his first cousins. There were 17 of them in all, Coach the youngest, and only four are still alive.

"All the elders are gone," cousin Miriam Kross says.

The Final March of Coach K (cont.)

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

Their parents wanted for them a respectable American life, and Krzyzewski's military education and officer's commission got him that. His parents pushed him hard to go to West Point. Krzyzewski remembers them sitting around the dining table talking feverishly in Polish, punctuated by the occasional "Mike" and "stupid" and the like. They couldn't believe their son would turn down a free education at a school that produced officers and even presidents. Finally he got the message and accepted the appointment. Moe says that a lot of his friend Mike's success in life flows from a desire to honor them. But that's just part of it. Mike inherited his father's ambition and paired that with his own need to shape those ambitions into a new, better life. From the beginning, Krzyzewski burned inside and still doesn't totally understand the origins of that fire. An alien, he calls himself. His friends all followed their parents' path and built those respectable lives while erasing any thoughts of personal fulfillment or passion ("It's a sore point with me," says Eddie Stanislawski, one of the Columbos, "I told my kids to follow their bliss.") but Krzyzewski decided to listen to the person inside him who wanted to coach. His ambition made him let go of a brass ring to reach for a gold one. Moe remembers exactly where he was standing when Mike told him he was going to quit the Army. After lunch, at a hot dog place where Coach K loves the Italian beef, he drives me to the spot.

Emily Krzyzewski's apartment remains in the family. Cousin Craig lives there now. He opens the door for us and takes us up the back steps. Krzyzewski's mom and aunt lived next door to each other and shared a landing for three decades. Often they'd sit out there in their chairs, hour after hour, and laugh and tell stories. This is where Coach K came to stay during all those recruiting trips. When he woke up, his mother would have ironed his clothes.

Moe points to the spot where her West Point rocking chair used to be, and the yellow plush recliner where she'd sit and watch the games with her steno pad at the ready. There was linoleum on the floor and a faux oyster dining table. She kept a Duke calendar on the fridge, and former Duke player and assistant coach Tommy Amaker talks about how moved he was to go inside with Mike once and see his own image hanging there. We take a left in the hall to the room she used for meals. Moe still calls Coach K "Mick," which is how the neighborhood kids knew him.

"Mick, Mickie, my wife and I were in this room," Moe says, "and he said, 'I think I'm gonna give up my military commission and go into coaching.' We were sitting in here, the four of us."

There's a feeling in the room, and not because the journey to five national championships started here, but because it was here that a guy like any of us felt a pull and listened to it, trusting himself with no way of knowing how it would turn out. Trace amounts of that energy remain, the half-life remnants of a young, ambitious man turning his back on the respectable American life his father wanted for him and stepping out into the world alone.

Moe points.

"In this room," he says.

Back outside, Moe explains that this neighborhood, now a trendy place called Ukrainian Village, was known then as St. Helen. Every neighborhood in the city was known by the name of the local parish. That's not how it is now. A map of Chicago, once as accepted and formal as the printed maps of the L trains you can pick up beneath the rumbling tracks, exists only in the memories of people Krzyzewski's age. The world that shaped them is vanishing as fast as its fragile citizens. This year, then, is a gift for all of them, in the way that it demands you stop and take stock -- to consider how they were all made. They grew up in a parochial world governed by unspoken but strict laws. All of them have stories. Once Moe and a friend were walking near home and came upon a real-life, in-progress medieval Ukrainian parish schism. A small majority voted to abandon the old world calendar and align their feast days with the Roman Catholic Church. The other parishioners were filled with rage. They formed a mob outside the rectory and dragged the priest from his home, still in his cassock, and beat him there on the lawn, Moe remembers. The crowd then organized, raised money and built another enormous cathedral a few blocks away. They once saw an unleashed pack of police dogs on Damen Avenue. Mike's own brother, a tough Chicago fireman who literally never missed a day of work, refused to drink with anyone who crossed the picket lines in 1980.

Coach K's basic understanding of loyalty is rooted in the ancient rules of the blocks around his boyhood home on Cortez. Take Mike's old high school. The diocese sold the building to the city, and now it houses a public middle school. The old chapel is now an office. They have cleaned it and painted the walls, coat after coat, but no matter what they do they can never get rid of the smell of incense. Something essential comes through, leaves a mark. There's a video online of Coach K screaming at his own Duke student section for what he mistakenly thought was a chant about one of his old assistants, Jeff Capel, who'd returned to Cameron Indoor Stadium as the head coach of Pitt. Read his lips. As he points to his chest, what he is saying over and over is, "He's one of us!"

We rode up and down the old Polish streets.

Coach K might be the most famous living Polish American, but his grandfather on his dad's side wasn't actually from Poland. John Krzyzewski (whose last name is spelled Krzyzowski in some documents) was ethnically Polish, certainly, but he moved to the United States from a small autonomous region named Galicia, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and ceased to exist in 1918, swallowed after the war by Poland. Mike's grandfather was living in Chicago when that happened. He died in his 40s, just a year later. Coach K, who built his own world out of a bouncing leather ball, comes from people who lost their old homeland before they fully grasped a new one.

His father was born William Krzyzewski. He changed his last name to Kross.

"I didn't know him that well," Moe says. "He was ..."

There's a long pause.

"I didn't know him that well," Moe says again.

Bill Kross ran an elevator in the Willoughby Tower downtown. He bought a bar called Kross Tap that Mike used to clean on Sundays. A lot of Chicago cops hung out there. "He had a tavern, but he very seldom ever took a drink," says LeRoy Lipske, who was married to Krzyzewski's cousin and tended bar for his dad. "He had coffee from morning to night."

They all remember that. Nonstop coffee, always with lots of cream, a cup he called "Boston": I need a coffee, Boston, please, an old-timey order that nobody says anymore.

Bill was a dreamer, his family says, but nothing he tried really worked. His bar didn't make money, and his restaurant didn't either. "Mick and I talked about it," Moe says. "His dad always wanted to be somebody. Life didn't always give him the opportunities."

Krzyzewski grew up with a silent, hardworking father grasping for something he could never quite hold, and a buoyant, wise mother, who gave him little pep talks and sayings that he still gives to his teams, all these years later. Every Duke basketball player has heard the story about how muggers tried to take her purse when she was an old woman and she fought them off. The Emily K Center in Durham, which mentors local kids from elementary school through college, is his pride and joy, because it carries her name, yes, but also because it continues to live out her spirit.

His parents spoke Polish to each other but demanded the boys never learn it. They didn't want them to carry the baggage of an accent. Krzyzewski grew up with a strange last name that his own father didn't use. Moe has been thinking about this a lot lately because going through his own father's things he found some old letters in which his dad had used the last name Miller. Moe felt sad, emotional, wondering what else his father kept inside, what pain and longing. The same is true for Coach K. Some of the family kept Krzyzewski, while others went by Kross. One of his uncles was militant about the original Polish spelling and would gruffly quiz his nieces and nephews whenever they walked through the door. Coach K clearly remembers being young, 5 or 6, and nervously trying to get everything straight with his mother as they walked up the steps to visit Uncle Joe.

"Mom, what's my name?" he'd ask.

Bill Kross died young during his son's senior year at West Point. Bob Knight came to the small family home, sitting across a table from LeRoy the bartender (who himself died Jan. 7, 2022). In those days of grief, Knight became arguably the most important male figure in young Mike's life, now that his father was gone. The family buried this silent man beneath a tombstone with his changed last name. Here lies William Kross, who never saw his son coach a single game.

"He was such a big sports guy," Krzyzewski says as we sit in his sixth-floor office one day, with huge windows overlooking Duke's gothic campus.

"He ..."

He gets lost for a moment.

"He would be in la-la land," he says finally.

He's quiet again.

"My dad would have been walking the lobby," he says. "That's my son out there. I know you didn't ask ..."

I ask him what name his dad would use to check into the Duke team hotel.

Coach K laughs and smiles.

The Final March of Coach K (cont.)

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

"It wouldn't be Kross," he says.

Decades passed as he adjusted to the absence of his father. Krzyzewski told me one afternoon that he wished his father could have seen this life he'd built. Emily K grew old and died, too, and only then did Mike and his brother quietly have their dad's old tombstone dug up and thrown away, replaced with one that said "Krzyzewski."

Eight hundred miles away from the gravestone, Coach K sat in his office, and he wanted to tell me a story. Before the pandemic, he was in Chicago to give a speech. He's been doing that for years, and he likes the extra money but mostly likes the chance to learn and meet people outside his bubble of fame. As he usually does, he made plans with Moe to eat at one of the classic Italian joints on Rush Street. The idea was for Moe to pick him up at the hotel, but the traffic got so bad, Moe called and said they should just meet at the restaurant. Coach K decided to walk. He hadn't strolled the streets of Chicago in a long time. As he headed down Michigan Avenue, he looked up to see Willoughby Tower, where his father once ran the elevator.

Krzyzewski walked inside. The security guard recognized him.

"My dad used to work here," he explained and then asked if he could go see the elevators. The guard nodded, and Coach K went over alone and just stood there. He knows how it sounds, but he felt his dad's presence. The next morning he got to his speech early, to listen to the person going before him. A crowd of 600 people faced the front of the room while Krzyzewski snuck into the back, finding a table with a continental breakfast and rolls. Coach K poured himself a coffee and loaded in the cream.

One of the hotel staff looked at him.

"So you like your coffee Boston?"

Krzyzewski wheeled around.

"I get chills thinking about it," he says. "Son of a bitch, is he saying hello through this guy?"

He asked the man to repeat himself.

"Boston," the waiter said, "like you put a lot of cream in it." Krzyzewski smiled.

"I do like it Boston," he said.

After all these years, he feels like his dad had reached out to let him know he'd done good. That he'd seen what his son had done with their strange last name and was proud. At the end of his career, the universe was speaking to him, or maybe he was just at peace enough to finally and truly listen. Either way, he felt grateful.

I think for a moment he might cry. He laughs instead.

"Motherf---er," he says. "It's unbelievable."

Moe and I spent a lot of time together and one afternoon in Chicago, he took me to a hospital on the outskirts of the city for one last stop. Coach wanted me to meet Father Rog. We parked and went inside.

The hospital allows only one visitor at a time, so Moe sneaks me past the guard and onto the elevator. We find the father in bed, wearing a yellow hospital gown, with an amputation scheduled for part of his foot in 30 minutes. He taught Mike in high school and helped him square his faith with his ambition, and later performed the funeral for Mike's mother and his beloved brother. Coach K's daughter thinks what Father Rog gave him most of all was "permission."

"Permission to practice his faith in the way that he does," Debbie K says. "Permission to be who you are, and it's OK to be this intense person who swears on the sidelines."

The old priest turns his television volume down and extends his hand.

"I'm Father Francis Rog," he says.

On his wrist is a 2015 Duke national championship watch. He smiles when I notice it. He's got piercing blue eyes. His thick glasses, familiar to generations of students, rest on his nightstand.

"I'm sorry I'm in this condition," he says.

He's 91 years old but sharp and funny. He tells stories about Krzyzewski in high school, calling him wholesome, and he recounts how they've kept in touch. Their conversations are private, between a man, his confessor and God. "I'm very important in his life," he says, "and as a result, he's very important in my life."

There's a question that has been running through my head since I heard that Krzyzewski has a spiritual adviser: Why the hell does he have a spiritual adviser? He seems so buttoned up.

I asked everyone what he's struggled with most in his life. His former coaches gave mostly basketball answers, most of them about the personal price of his demand for perfection, and how to balance his better angels with the masochistic version of himself who was taught early on by his mentor that anger was not only an acceptable byproduct of the process but perhaps an essential part of it.

But his daughter Debbie had the best answer to the question. Her dad carries a lot of invisible burdens, wanting desperately to be all things for all people. "I think the thing he's struggled with most in his life is forgiveness of himself," she says.

Krzyzewski's best impulses are so well known that his worst impulses can seem somehow twice as shocking when seen up close. He can be petty and overly sensitive. One of his former players, when asked to talk about Krzyzewski's retirement, carefully parsed his words: "It's not even what I would say. It's just knowing him and how he could potentially interpret something I would say."

He has screamed at student reporters covering his team. Even now he struggles to apologize when he knows he's wrong. Like his college coach and first boss, Bob Knight, he's thrown chairs. He's broken clipboards. During a timeout, he once looked at his team in the huddle and told them, "Your f---ing faces suck." He has made young men cry under a verbal barrage. A favorite tactic is to kick the team out of the locker room and throw all their stuff into a pile on the floor. He is never not the man who was a captain in the United States Army. Natural cycles of overconfidence and failures of focus that can happen over the course of a Duke season tend to fill him with rage.

"He gets pissed at human nature," says Jon Scheyer, who will be the team's head coach next season.

The way his team plays is so wound together with the way he sees himself, in the opinion of one of his former assistants, that a string of losses can feel less like a professional failure and more like a personal one. Especially before his friend Jim Valvano told him on his deathbed not to miss out on his real life just to win games, Krzyzewski was capable of putting basketball above the other relationships in his life. One year, former assistant Mike Brey said they were preparing for a game at Madison Square Garden when Mickie came barreling into a meeting and dragged him away just to sing "Happy Birthday" to his daughter Lindy. Mickie has long been the officer in charge of Krzyzewski's better angels. There are many ways in which she has shaped Duke basketball but none more significant than that.

When assistants have left Duke, he can take it personally, both excited for them and yet wounded, because any defection is a potential crack in this complex work family he's built on a foundation of almost archaic loyalty. It's complicated up close. He is at his core a foxhole guy but is also always the architect and gatekeeper of the foxhole. A former assistant who coached against him put it this way: "I don't think he can allow himself to see you as a human being. I think that goes back to Knight."

"He is wired to eat his young," Brey says.

The most recent example came when ex-Duke guard Grayson Allen became public enemy No. 1 for his continued tripping. Krzyzewski and his family fixated on former Duke star and assistant coach Jay Bilas, now the voice of college basketball for ESPN, and blamed him for anything said on the network, whether or not he had anything to do with it. Once when Bilas came to do a game in Durham, he walked onto the court at Cameron and Krzyzewski literally turned his back on him. Bilas always saw Krzyzewski as a father figure. Dozens of Formers, as the ex-Duke players are known inside the program, thought the same thing about Coach K, so this rift shook a lot of people.

Bilas and Krzyzewski finally scheduled a meeting and aired out their issues and emerged with clean slates, a blip on a 40-year radar of warm feelings, and everyone in the insular family of Duke basketball could exhale. But for a brief moment, some of the people closest to Krzyzewski had to ask themselves how well they really knew him after all.

November unfolded in a dream.

The Final March of Coach K (cont.)

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

Duke went out to Las Vegas at the end of the month and beat Gonzaga. Coach K saw hints of greatness, as a young team arrived in a big game, in a big venue, and instead of being scared of the stage, it grew to fit and claim it. This flickering vision of what these Blue Devils might be, were capable of becoming, flashed bright and then would fade through the teeth of winter.

Coach K told his players his own hoops doxology: Every season is a lifetime.

"You get one shot at this," he told his team.

Out in Vegas, Mike and Mickie saw their friend Elaine Wynn, the casino baron. They've known her since Duke beat her beloved UNLV in 1991 and she loved how respectful he was after the game, refusing to buy into the narrative that this was a battle of good versus bad. She's been a great friend and a regular visitor to Cameron. Elaine loves how basketball for the Krzyzewskis is a family sport. She tells stories about going to games in Durham and seeing the three daughters lugging babies and diaper bags and bottles into the tight confines of the arena's old wooden bleachers and wondered why in the world anyone would go to all this trouble to watch their dad and granddad work. Of course she gets it. "When you have a man that is so invested in a passion," she says, "you either get on the train or you're completely off the train and you won't have a lot."

Along with her ex-husband, Steve Wynn, she created some of the great Las Vegas properties, including the Bellagio. Once she ate there with the Krzyzewskis, after she no longer owned it, and little mistakes bothered her. She told Coach K that it took her a long time to understand it wasn't her casino any longer. Then she smiled and said one day he'd have to deal with the same thing as he handed his program to someone else.

She visited Krzyzewski before the Gonzaga game, because the team always stays at the Wynn, but just briefly to say hello. He was there on business, she says. After the game, she went by the Duke hospitality room at the hotel and congratulated him on the win and hugged him goodbye. They made plans to catch up once all the madness ended. Krzyzewski loves Las Vegas. He plays video poker and visits the spa. He'll sit in the sun. Then he and Mickie look at the shows in town, and research a great restaurant, and then make plans together. Since he doesn't fish or golf or pursue any other hobby, a trip out west remains about his only distraction, a time for him and Mickie to be alone.

"He absolutely adores her," Elaine says, "and she adores him. When they're here they're like teenagers. She'll be watching him with a little glint in her eye. He'll reach out and touch her arm."

After beating Gonzaga, the Blue Devils rose to No. 1. The top-ranked team in the country, they left on an early-evening flight from Raleigh into a cold Columbus, Ohio, on the next-to-last day of November. It was dark when they landed. The unranked Ohio State Buckeyes awaited. The Duke players were believing their hype, but the coaches weren't. They worried this was a classic trap game, and they were right. On Nov. 30, Duke lost for the first time this season. Coach K looked at his players and demanded they learn from this feeling.

He's lost 365 times in his career, each of them a small death, and there are four decades of his extreme reactions to them. You could pick any of them to get a sense of how his main coaching strategy seems to be setting himself on fire and hoping his team will be drawn to the light. Here's one. In February 2005, as his team prepared to play Georgia Tech, Krzyzewski hit peak intensity. The night before the game, he played the team a battle scene from "Braveheart," showing William Wallace lopping off heads and planting a sword in the ground. The following day, the team ran out for layups and then returned to the locker room. The Cameron crowd was booming. The assistants put on "Braveheart" again and as Wallace planted his sword, Krzyzewski came screaming into the room, waving his old Army saber. He planted his sword into a big planter of dirt an assistant had strategically placed.

"Let's go, motherf---ers!" Krzyzewski yelled.

Nine minutes into the first half, during a timeout, Coach K screamed at the officials that Daniel Ewing had been fouled. Then he just collapsed. Mickie ran to the bench. The trainers rushed to his side. It was incredibly tense. Then he got himself up, gave his stunned players more instructions and kept coaching the game.

Four days later the Blue Devils beat No. 2 North Carolina. Then came two straight losses, one at Maryland and the next a stunner at Virginia Tech. The spiraling team rode a bus back through the night toward Durham.

"I remember it being quiet," says Patrick Davidson, a walk-on guard for that 2004-05 team.

They got back late, or early actually, maybe 3 in the morning, and Krzyzewski called the team into the locker room for one of his infamous meetings. These would last, former Duke guard JJ Redick remembers, basically until one of the players started to cry. They finally went home around 5 a.m. When they got back for practice later that same day, they saw the board with the starters listed for the next game against Wake Forest at home, a team led by phenom guard Chris Paul. There were four names listed to start against Wake: two walk-ons and two former walk-ons.

"I don't know who the fifth starter is," Krzyzewski told them.

His plan, he said, was to go up in the stands and just watch like he didn't know a single thing about the team. The assistants trotted out every brutal drill they could imagine -- "nothing to do with basketball," Redick remembers -- like throwing a ball on the court and making two guys fight for it. They did boxout rebounding competitions. Five wind sprints, make a layup, then dive on the floor.

Redick won every drill. He always loved doing the gladiator thing. Coach told the team Redick and the four scrubs would start against Wake.

The next day the team roared onto the court. For the first three minutes, Davidson, who remains an object of cult obsession in the Duke world, pressed and mugged Paul, picking up two fouls and getting in the star's head. When Krzyzewski finally took Davidson out to replace him with Ewing, he wrapped his arms around the walk-on in a huge bear-hug. Duke won.

Five years ago, in January 2017, Coach K missed a series of games after midseason back surgery, a run of six procedures in 15 months. The person he seemed to punish most of all in his pursuit of excellence was himself, although all Duke players can tell you punishment runs downhill. The way Krzyzewski pushes himself has scarred him, to be certain, but it has also taken its toll on everyone who reached for greatness with him. While he recovered from his back operation, Jeff Capel ran the squad. The team lost at home against NC State. All the players got a mass text: Go to Coach K's house immediately. They walked in to find three rows of five chairs set up. He went down the line, player by player. He told star Jayson Tatum, who recently relayed this story on Redick's podcast, that all he cared about was the NBA and he should just quit officially, since he'd already quit in spirit. The players left and then got another text: Be in the locker room at 6 a.m. They walked in to find two trash bags by every locker. The assistants told them to take everything out of their lockers. Tatum carried his two trash bags to his car. When they returned for afternoon practice, the security code on the locker room had been changed. The players walked to the court to find a pile of white shirts and blue shorts. They hadn't earned Duke gear.

Redick shivered when Tatum finished his story, and then laughed.

"There's some PTSD there," he said. "This is bringing back all the memories."

The day before the Ohio State loss, Father Francis Rog died. He was 91. Coach K got the news and flew home a few days later for the funeral. Moe met him at the private airport and got concerned when his friend limped toward the terminal door.

"What's going on?" Moe asked.

"Ankle," Krzyzewski said.

He didn't look as energetic as he had beneath Madison Square Garden. Although he'd been saying something different in public, truth was, he had put a lot of pressure on himself, more than usual, to finish his last run the right way, to wring every moment from an experience he'd never have again.

"I want it to be so good," he says.

It was taking its toll on Coach K and his family.

"I think they're tired," Moe says.

Moe and Mike rode together to the service. They arrived long before it began. Krzyzewski greeted old friends and then walked to the open casket. A man saw him coming and moved to give him space and for 30 seconds Coach K stood there and didn't move. He walked away, and then walked back to the casket with his sister-in-law, Pat, who was married to his brother. Bill was enormous, 6-foot-5 and a barrel of a man, who retired a captain in the fire department and died only a few years later. He and Pat never got to realize all those plans they made about the life they would live once the last fire had been fought.

"My brother was my hero," Krzyzewski says.

The Final March of Coach K (cont.)

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

He moved around the sanctuary and shook hands and gave hugs. His presence seemed to comfort people. Eventually the crowd took its seats beneath the beautiful white marble and stained glass dome of the Polish basilica. The service began with a solitary ringing bell. Krzyzewski sat on the left side and didn't speak. He said goodbye to his friend and counselor, the man who'd given him permission to become Coach K. Now in this winter of his career, all sorts of questions were following him wherever he went, about who he'd be when this ended, when he wasn't Coach K any longer but just a wealthy, famous, respected grandfather named Mike.

Father Rog had always bridged those two parts of him, and now he was gone.

Eight men escorted his body from the church while Krzyzewski watched in silence, standing with a dark overcoat folded over his arms.

By December it was clear those flashes of greatness against Kentucky and Gonzaga were, in fact, flashes. Coach K's last team would have to be shaped in real time, while playing real games, starting conference play just before Christmas. ACC games meant the arrival of what he calls "battle mode."

"He really believes battle mode is one of the reasons they win," Bilas says.

Battle mode is a way of looking at the world, of ordering it, stripping away everything that doesn't directly impact the next game. Visitors to town know not to be offended if all he can talk about is the team. There are lots of other signs. He'll stop sleeping. He'll skip meals. He'll start to look gray. He'll find fuel wherever he can.

"What amazes me is, despite all his success, his ability to keep a chip on his shoulder," says Northwestern head coach Chris Collins, a former Duke player and assistant. "It's amazing. The great ones have the ability to create their own adversity, their own enemies. We might have a mid-January game against Clemson. He's coached 1,500 games, but he finds a way in those two days to get angry about something."

Krzyzewski doesn't know what he'll do with this side of himself when the season ends. "I haven't thought about that, but it's interesting," he says. "Part of having that keeps you young. Keeps you relevant. Keeps you purposeful. And so it will be interesting where I channel that. Because it's got to be in something. If it goes, then you might as well say goodbye."

The greatest enemy of battle mode is memory mode, and he stubbornly refused this season to engage in nostalgia. The team never heard him talk about his last dance. The truth is, he loves this spartan way of living and when his career is over, it might be what he misses the most. Mike Krzyzewski becomes Coach K in this ritualized world. Krzyzewski settled into long-ago defined patterns. Pizza (usually from a local place) waiting on the bus after every road game, which he eats in his usual seat, second row on the right side. When he walks onto a team plane, he doesn't have to think: pass the players, who he has always put in first class, then to the left-side aisle seat in the first row of coach. It's in these little rituals that memory mode lurked, and he started to consider the scarcity of the feeling he got walking onto the court at Cameron.

Coach K worked all ACC season with a furious joy. He rode his stationary bike, working up a full sweat, and watched film at the same time. The coaches gathered after every game to break it down together. For a 6 p.m. game, they'd usually be done at midnight. Now these film meetings happen at Cameron. For years they happened at Coach K's house, where the assistants and Krzyzewski would order pizzas and watch tape all night. Several past assistants talk about throwing the morning paper on the porch as they left after sunrise. The pizzas were a vital part of the routine. Krzyzewski liked to put salt on his pizza and, before he had to monitor his health, there would always be a salt shaker on his seat in the bus after games, so he could doctor up those postgame pies. During this final season, two old Duke stalwarts, Quin Snyder and Wojciechowski, met up for lunch on the road. They both reached for the salt shaker at the same time and smiled.

For Christmas his family gave him a present to unwrap. Inside he saw they'd picked out a new Labrador; they made the deposit, and the puppy would be born at the end of March. Always loyal, he wanted to make sure his family knew he wouldn't ever forget Blue, or think he could simply be swapped out for another dog.

"I'm not replacing Blue," he said firmly.

They smiled and said they understood. This would be a beautiful new relationship, not an attempt to recreate an old one. Christmas is always a huge deal in the Krzyzewski family. Mike got Mickie a ton of pairs of pink Nike sneakers. Mickie always gets everyone matching pajamas, and this year they were black and white flannel pattern. There's a photo of all smiles in front of a towering tree. The children and grandchildren all spend the night at their house, a big lock-in. This year Coach K scheduled practice during the family-only time.

"You've ruined so many Christmases!" Mickie scolded him.

She runs a tight ship. They call her the Queen Mother. Coach laughed and reminded her that this would be the last Christmas he'd ever ruin.

On Jan. 16, in between a win versus NC State and a loss at Florida State, Coach K got the news that another of his West Point classmates had died, the first to pass during his final season. Bob Hoffman was a decorated war hero and a grandfather. Mike was in Bob's wedding, one of the guys holding a saber -- the same kind of saber he'd later use to fire up his team. Those long, gray line days were distant indeed. Just after Bob died, his widow, Lorie, was walking through their neighborhood in Idaho when her phone rang. A call from Durham, North Carolina.

Krzyzewski told her how sorry he was, and they laughed and remembered the old, good times. Each of them bragged on their grandchildren and talked about their families.

"You can tell how much that phone call meant to my mom," Bob's daughter Carina Van Pelt tells me. "My mom heard from every single person in that class, either a call or a nice long letter. It was pretty amazing how close they are."

Even 53 years removed from graduation, West Point still matters to Krzyzewski, because of his friendships forged in the shadow of the daily Vietnam casualty reports, and because of the way his college coach and first coaching boss, Knight, shaped his life, in ways good and bad.

A young Mike Krzyzewski idolized Knight, even as part of him probably hated him, in that way that ambitious people sometimes can't tell the difference. The basketball press made the comparison all the time until Coach K bristled at that, both wanting his mentor's approval and wanting to be seen as his own man. As he started his climb in the sport, Knight loomed large in his mind, especially in the early 1980s. "You could almost see the wheels turning," Bilas says. "What would Knight do?"

Knight rooted for Krzyzewski, wearing a Duke button on his shirt at the 1986 Final Four. But when Coach K won his first national title in 1991 and then beat Indiana in the 1992 Final Four, the relationship changed. Coach Knight did a limp drive-by handshake after the game, and when Krzyzewski waited in a hall for a second chance after the Hoosiers' news conference, according to Ian O'Connor's new book, "Coach K," Knight blew him off completely.

Then the letter happened.

It's famous inside Duke basketball as a critical breaking point. After the game in '92, Knight had a mutual friend from West Point deliver a blistering letter that Knight had written, threatening Krzyzewski with an end of their relationship, just venom pouring off the page, turning a perceived slight into a paranoid, angry screed. Knight had been into Krzyzewski's family home for his father's wake and now this? This fracture would grow and shrink in the coming years until finally the coaches simply stopped speaking, or rather Coach K gave up trying to be the bigger man. "I think that's been a horrible chapter in his life," Bilas says. "Knight should have been proud of him. He's like a child whose father won't acknowledge his success."

After that 1992 win over Indiana, with a Michigan game looming in 48 hours for a second straight national championship, the Knight letter dominated the insular Duke ecosystem. Krzyzewski got back to his hotel suite in a fog, just totally devastated. Current Notre Dame head coach Brey, then an assistant, remembers how they were trying to work and Coach and his wife kept bringing up the letter, trying to make sense of their hurt. Finally Brey knew he needed to do something. He stood up and spoke simply.

"F--- Bob Knight," he said.

The game after Bob Hoffman died, Mike Krzyzewski took out one of his rosaries and said a prayer, dedicating that night's contest to his friend. He does that every game he coaches. It's his moment to be alone before the coming storm. On the road he'll sit in his hotel room and at home, he steps into a private room in Cameron, just off the big space where he does his postgame news conferences. Once he gets settled, he'll reach into his right pocket, where he keeps the rosary given to him by Father Rog, blessed by Pope John Paul II, and finds peace and perspective. In his other pocket he carries another rosary, the one that belonged to his mother. This season he dedicated several games to his mother and father and brother. Against Virginia, he dedicated it to Mickie's family, because she grew up near Charlottesville. On his desk in his spartan downstairs office by the locker room, he keeps photographs of young kids he met over the years in hospitals who died, and a prayer card from one of his first players at Army. He carries these people with him, inside him. They are him. He is always communicating across planes of existence. This spiritual life, this desire to walk with spirits, is one of his greatest gifts and, when swirled together with his Polish tribal roots and his West Point education, lies at the heart of his success. He is, most of all, a collection of everyone he's ever met. Every time you see him on television he's got a rosary in each pocket, twin portals,

The Final March of Coach K (cont.)

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

a way of communicating with the people who walked this road with him but didn't make it to the end. Who are being carried by him to the end.

January ended and Coach K looked terrible. He always does this time of year. "That's how you know it's February," Debbie K says with a laugh. "It's Groundhog Day, it's President's Day, Valentine's Day, Coach looks like s---. It must be February."

Duke entered its toughest stretch of the season, four games in eight days, five in 12. Those became coded mantras -- 4-in-8, 5-in-12 -- and the whole program hunkered in battle mode, like a warship that sounds general quarters and turns on red lights. Duke won the first game against Carolina -- folks inside the program bristled that the Tar Heels didn't honor Krzyzewski during the game -- and then turned around and lost to Virginia, a well-coached team that gives Duke fits. That was the fourth loss of the season, the last three by a total of four points. Three days later, Duke star Wendell Moore Jr. streaked toward the basket, Clemson guard David Collins undercut him and Moore came crashing down. He writhed on the floor, and Coach K wheeled around to the Clemson bench and screamed, "What the f--- are you doing?"

He started moving toward the baseline. Debbie screamed in front of her television and realized her father, a 75-year-old man, was stalking off to fight a college kid on national television.

"My dad has very small lips," she says, laughing. "When there are no lips, he's seething. I haven't seen him that mad in a very, very long time."

Debbie is sitting in her dad's conference room talking about the play, and how Coach K got himself under control, and how the Clemson coach did a masterful job defusing, until everyone hugged and the game continued. His mentor might have detonated his career in a moment of rage, but Coach K isn't his mentor.

"You say this Bobby Knight thing ..." Debbie K says. "This is where ..."

Her voice fades, and she's quiet. Her dad carries the scars of a relationship soured by pettiness and anger. But he also didn't replicate Knight's mistakes. One of the most poignant parts of this season has been the constant stream of former players coming to meet Coach, bringing family members and children, wanting to be part of the end. He has spent his final season surrounded by the relationships he built over five decades, relationships that remain intact in no small part because he saw firsthand how not to treat someone. There have been rifts along the way, but the relationships always seemed to win out in the end. The people close to Krzyzewski understand that Knight's worst impulses live in Coach K but he has managed to control them.

When I ask him about Knight, he sighs and says, "It's complicated."

Then he talks immediately about working to be a better person.

"I don't know when but in the last decade, I said, I am not gonna have hate or resentment be part of what I do," he says. "My mom would say that all the time. She would say, 'Why let that in your heart?'"

He learned how to let go of hate and resentment. He learned by example. He learned by practice, by teaching. Knight once imagined he'd be carved in stone, on the mountaintop of his sport, and now he's the fifth-winningest coach who destroyed everything he built. His biggest contribution to basketball might be showing Mike Krzyzewski how not to treat people, which has allowed Coach K to emerge from this brutal grind of 47 seasons with his life and friendships and family intact.

Debbie K grins.

She knows she shouldn't say it, but ... what the hell.

"Karma," she blurts.

Every morning Mickie Krzyzewski sends out that day's basketball schedule. It starts on a family text chain called "Basketball Freaks" but gets forwarded around the Duke basketball world. (This thread is not to be confused with "Starting Five," the group chat of Coach K, Mickie and their three girls). In Basketball Freaks, she has carefully listed all the college games they might care about, along with the time and the channel, sorted by ACC, Ranked and Other.

JohnnyDawkins v Houston 9:00 209

Ore v BobbyHurley 9:00 206

ChrisCollins v Minn 4:00 610

This happens every day, tracking Amaker's Harvard or Nate James' Austin Peay or Jeff Capel's Pitt Panthers (aka The Fighting Capels), and folks look forward to their daily updates. The Duke basketball office is, and always has been, a blend of Coach K, his team and his family. When the three Krzyzewski girls were young, they had crushes on dad's players and now some of their own girls babysit for the assistant coaches. Snyder lounging around the house as a student watching college football has given way to Mark Williams and Jaylen Blakes learning how to play bocce ball in the backyard. The one time Debbie got busted drinking in high school, part of her punishment was her parents telling the team. She remembers Danny Ferry running into her and her mom and dad at a Duke football game and cracking, "Hey, Deb, wanna go get a few beers?" The lives of all these people are so intertwined that it's difficult to tell where family ends and the team begins.

"I view him as a second father," Collins says.

His players became part of his life. They hung out with his mom. They knew his brother. Amaker remembers a tour of West Point that Coach took him on when they were in New York recruiting. Brey remembers all those trips through Chicago, where they'd finish work and roll through the Polish neighborhood and find something to eat.

Every former player I called had stories about hearing from him when something went good or bad in their life. Collins tells me about a tough loss he suffered early in his time at Northwestern against Maryland. They'd been up 11 with four minutes to go and lost at the buzzer. The team got on a plane and flew to Chicago, and around 1:30 a.m., as he's driving home, his phone rings. It was Coach K, "just talking me off the ledge."

Arizona State coach Hurley says he struggles even now to treat Krzyzewski like a peer because he reveres him so much. Only two people in his phone have their numbers saved with just a single letter. His wife, Leslie, is programmed as L, and Coach is simply K. After Hurley was almost killed in a car wreck during his rookie season in the NBA, and he finally started to drift back into reality, around the second day, he found his parents and Coach K leaning over his bed. Same thing happened years later when Jay Williams almost died in a motorcycle crash. Krzyzewski was in the air in a private plane when he got the news. Moe says he made the pilots turn the plane toward Chicago. From the air, Krzyzewski called Moe and asked if he could pick him up at the airport. Moe drove them to the hospital and stayed in the car while the coach rushed inside. He got there in time to be one of the first faces Williams saw when he woke up. When Coach K got back in the car, he turned to his oldest friend with tears in his eyes and said, "Moe, it's pretty bad."

His greatest gift has always been not only his ability to create deep relationships, lifelong relationships, but his need for them. He loves and is loved back in return, existing at the center of a huge spinning wheel, of players, and coaches, at Duke and on the Olympic teams, his family both in Durham and Chicago. So it's important to know that this last season, although hard, has been a happy time, with Formers returning and bringing their children back with them. One Sunday, Krzyzewski came into his office, visited the guys in the training room and then went to watch film. Debbie texted and told him to look in the gym. They've got a closed-circuit camera in Cameron that he can always access. When he turned on the feed, he saw two of his assistant coaches with their kids, and two former players with their kids, everyone having a great time.

"It looks like a daycare center," he says beaming.

Coach K turned 75 during that brutal run of games, and he celebrated by going into the office on a Sunday. He's been sleeping four or five hours a night, battle mode forever. "He looks horrible," Bilas says. "He's burning the candle at both ends. He's overworking himself. He's watching film all night, doing stuff he did when he was 40."

The last game of 5-in-12 landed on the following Tuesday, at home against Wake Forest, the same day excerpts from O'Connor's long-anticipated biography dropped. O'Connor, a respected columnist for the New York Post, interviewed more than 275 people over two years, and news stories started circulating online. The juiciest one said Coach K had hijacked the search for his replacement and kept Amaker from getting the job, with the goal of maintaining control of the program.

Krzyzewski started to spiral.

"He didn't feel good all day because he was really upset," Debbie K says. "He talks things out. He thinks out loud."

She sat with him and talked about Amaker.

The Final March of Coach K (cont.)

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

The situation is more nuanced than the headlines. Krzyzewski calls the claim “a cheap shot,” and the belief around Coach K is that the source quoted in the book overstated the coach’s desire for control once he’s gone. Amaker and Duke declined to comment on this subject. An anonymous person told O’Connor that Krzyzewski could be “Don Corleone” when he felt it necessary, and a source close to both Coach K and Amaker described O’Connor’s reporting to me as accurate. What’s clear from this private dispute being made public is that the succession plan left some damaged feelings. On the day the story became public, Krzyzewski worried that he’d hurt a member of the tribe. “He 100 percent has that guilt,” Debbie K says. “Did I do something that caused any harm that would bother Tommy? I love Tommy. He’s one of my boys. I don’t ever want anything to hurt my guys.”

Sitting in his office, emotional and raw, he looked at his daughter.

“I just want to take care of everybody,” he said.

“You have and you are, Dad,” she told him.

She understood, too, the unspoken part of his emotional reaction, coming days after he turned 75, with just two games left to coach at Cameron.

“Even when you are not on the sideline,” she told him, “you will still be taking care of these people. They’re still your boys.”

That night, Krzyzewski led his team onto the court to play the Demon Deacons. Debbie and Mickie watched from upstairs during the first half until Debbie saw her daughter frantically waving her cell phone at her, as if to say: Check your texts. Debbie saw a message: Poppy doesn’t feel good.

Debbie slipped away from her mother, not wanting to worry her yet, and went down behind the bench to talk to the trainers. They told her they wanted to wait for the media timeout at under eight minutes to get him some Gatorade. Everyone agreed to meet in the locker room at halftime. Mickie Krzyzewski had seen all of this commotion and when Debbie returned upstairs, Mickie asked what was going on. Debbie explained that he felt lightheaded.

“I’m going,” Mickie said.

At halftime Krzyzewski struggled to keep his eyes open. His blood pressure was elevated. Doctors gave him fluids through an IV. When he recovered enough to watch the game, he started yelling about the officials and his blood pressure rose again. His daughter Jamie scolded him. “Dad, are you kidding me?” she said, according to her sister. “Really? This is what we’re doing? You’re gonna stroke out in the middle of a f---ing basketball game?”

He raged at himself, too, at time, at being 75, at losing some essential part of his K-ness.

“I sound like I’m weak!” he barked.

“You don’t sound weak,” Debbie told him. “You sound human.”

The team won, barely, and the beat reporters searched for news about Krzyzewski’s health. He spoke to his players briefly and then went home without breaking down the film, a tiny concession.

Later that night, Debbie texted with her mom.

“Where is he?” she asked.

“He’s rewatching the game,” Mickie replied, “but I convinced him to watch it from bed.”

The next afternoon, Debbie met me in the conference room next to her dad’s office. She told me he felt a lot better and that he and Amaker had talked, which helped. They are all feeling emotional. Krzyzewski remains in the moment, but these people who love him are wondering about the end of the season.

“We have to be strategic,” Debbie K says. “When people retire they age very quickly. He’s been so ageless for such a long time. We have to make sure he stays active, stays in it, because otherwise what are you gonna do? You’re gonna be a really old, crotchety, grouchy person.”

There are a few things on the calendar. This team will officially disband after the April 14 team banquet, and then the annual K Academy will happen in early June, which brings back a legion of Formers, so that will feel like a reunion. They have their annual family summer vacation planned, where all the kids and grandkids stay in a rented house. A chef comes every night to make dinner, and the whole family plays marathon sessions of board games.

This year they’ll be at a lake house in North Carolina that comes with a boat, a hot tub and, most critically, a bocce court. At the lake, Krzyzewski will team with a younger grandkid and take on all comers, winner stays. “He talks enormous amounts of trash on the bocce ball court,” Debbie says laughing.

He likes Vegas. He likes really nice wine, mostly heavy Californian reds and a few nice Italians. All 10 of his grandkids live in Durham and three live within a mile of his home. The Krzyzewskis have a pool and games and love the energy of a house full of family.

“My wife has created a grandkids trap,” Krzyzewski says with a smile.

Krzyzewski told his granddaughters he wants to take them to Chicago once this is all over, and show them all the places he once knew. They’ve never been with him. There is also a planned West Point trip to do the same thing, to slip warmly into the memory years.

He is keeping his office on the sixth floor, doing work as an ambassador for Duke, but the floor beneath him is being completely gutted and rebuilt. Part of the renovation includes literally bricking up the back stairwell leading from his office to the nerve center of Duke basketball.

Krzyzewski has said over and over to friends that he won’t be like John Wooden, going to all the UCLA games and casting a long shadow on the man with the difficult job of replacing him. His daughter says that you can hear the Cameron crowd up on the sixth floor, so he can’t be in the office for games, either. There will be corporate boards, and maybe a role with the NBA, and family trips and youth sporting events and fundraisers. But there won’t ever be another team.

“What are you gonna do without the outlet?” his daughter asks.

His family insists he isn’t saying goodbye to Duke, or to basketball, just to being the head coach of a team, but there are things he’ll never have again. He is saying goodbye to battle mode. He is saying goodbye to the annual rebirth of new relationships. There are no more ambitious 18-year-olds coming to be baptized into the tribe. Mike Krzyzewski has a lot more to do in his life. Coach K will start to fade the moment this season ends. Maybe that’s a good thing. He’s earned peace. Redick says people ask him constantly how Krzyzewski will handle retiring. He always gives the same answer about the satisfaction of walking away justified and intact.

“I’m f---ing happy for him,” he says. “He doesn’t even know what’s on the other side. It’s so good. What he’s about to experience is so good.”

Two mornings after almost collapsing on his sideline, an embarrassed Coach K came into his office wearing a blue Duke pullover with every black hair perfectly in place.

“I’m doing better,” he tells me, “but I’m not there yet. That s--- I got was f---ing exhaustion. It was a culmination of all that travel. We’ve had so many one-day turnarounds, and I still prepare the same way.”

He sounds open and vulnerable.

“I’m 75,” he says.

He pulls out a pair of socks and puts them on the table. Laughing, he says when he got into his office after the medical scare, he found a bag stuffed with Polish-themed wrapping paper with a gift inside: Duke-colored socks with Moe’s face printed on them.

“Moe is as good a friend as anyone has ever had,” Krzyzewski says.

He slips on a set of headphones and looks at the notes spread out on the table. It’s time for his weekly SiriusXM radio show, which he has done for 17 years. He loves talking to people inside and outside of sports, and the show allows him to briefly show the world what people inside the program have always known: Coach K is actually hilarious. Today’s guests are the CEO of McDonald’s and Georgia football coach Kirby Smart. He sounds wistful talking to Smart, wishing he could experience the feeling of a first national championship again. Krzyzewski talks eloquently about how he loved watching Smart share the title with his players, coaches, fans and family. Coach K will miss that brotherhood. His daughter has loved to slip into the practice gym this season and just watch him coach, working with individual players or sitting down to talk to a recruit. He is not somebody who is limping to the finish, or who is cheating himself, or the game. Krzyzewski is going to coach his last team with all of himself until the last whistle blows. You can hear it in how he talks to Smart, picking his brain about coaching tricks to make hard practice tasks fun for the players. On the eve of his next-to-last home game at Duke, Coach K is still trying to get better.

“I wish we had a lot more time,” Krzyzewski tells Smart.

The Final March of Coach K (cont.)

By Wright Thompson, ESPN.com (March 2, 2022)

Two nights later, with Cameron as loud and intimidating as ever, he walked slowly onto the court and allowed himself to take in the feeling, to let himself plug into the energy. He felt lucky and grateful. The bleachers behind his bench were filled with Moe and a huge group from the old neighborhood. A few hours before, Krzyzewski had reached into his right pocket, pulled out his rosary and dedicated the coming action to all the dead Columbos and to Father Rog. He said their names. They were with him.

Following the game, after a season of swatting away any question about nostalgia, he finally indulges the idea and admits what everyone already knows: It will be incredibly emotional when Carolina comes to town and he leads a team for the last time onto the court that bears his name. The past was everywhere around him now. The next morning, he and Moe and the old neighborhood friends went to early-morning mass. Usually Krzyzewski slips out after communion, but his friends didn't know the drill and returned to their seats, which meant he stayed around at the back of the sanctuary until the service ended. When the priest asked if there were any visitors, Moe stood up. Coach K shook his head as Moe announced he and these guys were from Chicago and then started speaking to the priest in Polish.

For a moment they were on Cortez Street again, and all of this was yet to unfold.

Mike Krzyzewski didn't walk into his office so much as he floated, carried along on waves of optimism and focus. It was about 9 a.m., less than a week ago, and he was operating on four hours' sleep; the team had arrived back at Cameron from a road win at Virginia around 1 a.m., and he'd watched film until 3:30 a.m. He couldn't wait to tell me that he'd finally seen it: that mythical it that all great coaches know, even when it exists in a place beyond language -- he had a team that was capable of going all the way.

He lounges in blue Duke sweats that say "brotherhood" on the pants and looks out his window at the sea of tents stretching out from Cameron, the students camping to see his last home game in person.

He tells me the story of the four days since I'd seen him last.

Two days after beating Florida State, with a well-coached, dangerous Virginia team on deck, Krzyzewski and his staff put his young team through a high-level preparation. And instead of flying over the players' heads, it stuck. He told the team it had been in the shallow end all season and it was time to jump into the deep water. During Tuesday practice, Krzyzewski couldn't believe what he saw. He felt things he hadn't felt in years.

"I get chills thinking about it," he says.

After that practice he gathered his team and staff and told them he'd seen something from them for the first time: They were ready for the coming battles of March ... and even April.

"You're an old Duke team right now," he told them. "You look like a machine."

Sitting in his office, he looks at me.

"They knew it," he says. "I could see it in their eyes."

He tells me about the trip. They all flew to Charlottesville. Mickie flew with him. He packed his rosaries. Managers sorted gear. They set up base camp like they'd done for nearly half a century, a Duke blue garrison, a world where he aged more each year while the faces he saw stayed young, Johnny Dawkins becomes Bobby Hurley becomes JJ Redick becomes Tyus Jones becomes Paolo Banchemo. So many years had gone rushing past but also no time at all. Life was simple and sharp. They were in town to win a basketball game. They were brothers in arms. He gathered the team that night at the hotel and looked out at them. They looked back at him.

"You're ready," he said.

Coach K's last Duke home game will also be emotional for Cameron's other caretaker

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (March 2, 2022)

DURHAM - When Mike Krzyzewski takes his final bow at center court at Cameron Indoor Stadium on Saturday, William Harris will be watching. He'll be perched on a collapsed basketball goal that sits behind the stands in the corner behind the visiting bench, a vantage point that allows him to poke his head over the fans and see the entire court.

Harris will watch and listen. He'll wait as Krzyzewski and his family and the fans and dignitaries and Duke legends file out, the students leaving flakes of blue paint behind. Then he'll do what he has done after every Duke game for the past nine years. He'll grab his push broom and sweep the playing floor clean.

Krzyzewski has thought of himself as Cameron's caretaker over his 42 years at Duke. Cameron's actual caretaker is fine with that.

"He built this program," Harris said. "They weren't destitute before he got here – they had some history as a program. But I was a fan as a kid, and I never knew anything like this."

Harris grew up in Durham, just south of N.C. Central, and went to Hillside and Jordan for high school. In the early-to-mid-'80s, it wasn't easy being a Duke fan. The UNC fans on the school bus outnumbered him ten to one. Then Duke, under Krzyzewski, became the Duke we know today and life got a little easier.

After serving as a Navy cook, Harris came back to Durham and signed up with a temp agency that sent him to Duke housekeeping. Eventually, he got hired full-time and moved around campus. In 2013, when the Cameron job came open. Harris had the seniority to get it, and he never looked back.

"I feel honored to work here, to work in this building on this campus," Harris said. "I can't say I did anything special to get here, but now that I'm here, it's mine now. Somebody else wants this building, I'm not going to give it to them. I like it."

LATE NIGHTS IN CAMERON

Buildings like Cameron that exist in our minds on a plane far beyond bricks and mortar, where the past seeps from the crevices, often have someone who not only takes care of them, but feels a personal connection to them.

Cameron has two.

There's Krzyzewski, who has made protecting the traditional (and claustrophobic, and intimidating) interior of the space a bedrock priority, while pushing to modernize and expand it elsewhere. It's air-conditioned now, with more electronics, and the building's footprint has expanded, but the stands are just as close to the court as they ever were, still surrounded by wood paneling and brass railings.

And there's Harris, who over the past decade has come to know all the quirks and secrets of a building this old, the mechanical ghosts that inhabit it and the living history that's never far away.

As Jon Scheyer will soon, Harris works in the footsteps of a legendary predecessor. Ronald "DC" Williams worked in Cameron for 16 years before passing away in 2005, and was used as an exemplar of teamwork in Krzyzewski's 2000 book, "Leading with the Heart."

For almost a decade, Harris has worked third shift, from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., and during Cameron events, where he sweeps the playing floor before each half, in addition to myriad other duties. It's his building now, alone in Cameron for all the late nights amid the echoes and strange clanking noises. He and his girlfriend bought a town house not far from campus a few years ago, where they live with their two teenage children. It's close enough that Harris can walk to Cameron through the snow, if he has to.

There's a rhythm to the time between each game, men's and women's, attention rationed out as needed. The first night after a game, he'll sweep the court and its corners. The next night, the lobbies at both ends. The night after that, he'll polish the terrazzo floors of the concourses. The next he'll shampoo the carpet in the back hallways and Legacy Club, where famous alumni mingle before the game and at halftime.

Most nights, he's alone, after all the players and coaches have gone home, and it's just him and Cameron.

"It's quiet, almost like a church," Harris said. "You walk into an empty sanctuary. I like the contrast though. I can come in at night and it's dead quiet. Three hours prior, it could have been a men's game and you want to put your headphones on because your head is thumping. You should see the place when it's over. You just stand there and say, look at this mess."

But Harris holds no ill will toward the students in their paint, or the fans who spill popcorn or soda. It is not the first time, and it will not be the last. It will all be made clean during the quiet dark nights Harris spends alone with his headphones and his thoughts – but he also reflexively stoops to grab a single loose piece of pom-pom from the floor as he walks.

'IT MIGHT BE TOUGH'

During the first half of men's and women's games, he has the Legacy Club to himself, a rare moment of respite from the madness outside. After his halftime duties are complete, he'll quietly shimmy up on the collapsed practice basket to watch the end of the game.

That's when he sees the most of Krzyzewski. Since Harris works overnight on non-game days, he doesn't often bump into Krzyzewski or the players. Harris sees them when they get back to Cameron early in the morning after flights home from Syracuse or Boston, or before games when Krzyzewski grabs a meal in the team room, always with a fist bump for Harris. The freshman stars come and go in a flash, but Harris gets to know the players who stick around for a while – Quinn Cook, Jack White, Matt Jones, Nick Pagliuca.

Still, Krzyzewski has been a constant for Harris, as he has for so many at Duke, from childhood to adulthood, for 42 years – long before they ever shared a building they both respect and revere. And while this may be Krzyzewski's last basketball game at Cameron as a coach, neither he nor Harris is actually going anywhere.

That won't make it any less emotional for either of them.

"I keep thinking about that," Harris said. "Like, how's it going to be in here Saturday? Especially if they have a tribute or something on the video board I haven't seen yet? It might be tough. I keep saying, he'll be retiring, but I don't think he'll be away from the program that much. He'll still be here."

So will Harris, who will watch Krzyzewski exit the floor for the last time from his perch in the corner, waiting for not only the coach but everyone else to clear out so he can get back to work. There are floors to sweep and wastebaskets that won't empty themselves.

Krzyzewski's last home game will be over. Harris will have another long night ahead, in an old building that won't be quite the same.

As new era began, Jim Ramsey remembers Coach K's first game at Cameron

By Chip Alexander, Raleigh News & Observer (March 2, 2022)

Jim Ramsey was there at the beginning.

With so much being made of Mike Krzyzewski's last game Saturday at Duke's Cameron Indoor Stadium, Ramsey remembers – and was there for – the first. The former Cary High standout was a guard for the Stetson Hatters, who faced the Blue Devils in the opening game of the 1980-81 season as the Coach K era began.

"I was told I had the first assist on the first basket against a Coach K team in Cameron," said Ramsey in speaking with The News & Observer this week.

True enough. Archived video of the game shows Ramsey, wearing No. 4 for the Hatters, passing to Frank Burnell for a backdoor score after Duke's Kenny Dennard tried for a steal.

While so many years have passed, Ramsey still recalls other moments before and during the Nov. 29, 1980 game. His parents were there, and a few friends from Cary.

"It was pretty wild," Ramsey said. "We were downstairs in the locker room and all of a sudden we heard this pounding and chanting. The students were singing the Queen song 'We Will Rock You' and pounding on the bleachers.

"It was really loud and raucous and it was a fun place to play. The students didn't single players out and didn't develop the chants and do a bunch of pre-planning like they've done the last 15 years. But Cameron was special."

The Blue Devils didn't rock the Hatters, but Coach K's first game was a "W." The Blue Devils, with guard Tom Emma scoring a team-high 19 points, broke open a close game in the second half to win 67-49, holding the Hatters to 33% shooting from the field.

It has been noted that Gene Banks scored the first basket in the Coach K era at Duke, and that Dennard had the first dunk. It was the start of a 17-13 season.

"Working against their man-to-man, I think we were not getting manhandled at all, but size-wise we had a difficult time matching up on defense," Ramsey said.

It wasn't Ramsey's first game in Cameron. Before transferring to Stetson from East Carolina, he was a sophomore reserve on the ECU team coached by Larry Gillman that lost 105-82 to the Blue Devils on Jan. 28, 1978.

But the second time at Cameron was different. Ramsey was a starter for Stetson. Bill Foster no longer coached Duke. The Blue Devils had brought in a young Bobby Knight protege who was head coach at Army for five years and was 9-17 in his fifth season.

Stetson's coach, Dr. Glenn Wilkes, had won 358 games at the DeLand, Florida, school and was well-respected in the coaching ranks. Krzyzewski, the new guy at Duke, had won 73.

Five national championships and 1,122 victories later, Krzyzewski will coach his last game at Cameron against North Carolina as college basketball's all-time men's Division I leader in wins with 1,195. The Coach K legacy, including three Olympic gold medals with Team USA and 15 ACC championships, is a rich one, and will be an enduring one.

Ramsey, 64, and his wife are grandparents and live in Wrightsville Beach, having moved from Charlotte. While still working full time, he also spends time working on his golf handicap.

In looking back to that 1980 game, Ramsey said he guarded Emma until the Hatters later turned to a zone defense. He did not know and was saddened to learn that Emma, later a Duke team captain, died in June 2011 in New York City.

Ramsey said he will be watching the broadcast Saturday and reminiscing a little more when Krzyzewski takes his final bows at Cameron on what should be a super emotional night.

There will be a lot more than the 8,100 people who were at Coach K's first game at Cameron, and they'll all certainly be paying a lot more to see it.

A Coach for All

By Stephen Schramm, Duke Today (February 28, 2022)

Few people at Duke can appreciate the wisdom of Mike Krzyzewski quite like Jon Scheyer. For half of his life, Scheyer, associate head coach of the Duke men's basketball team, has leaned on the guidance of Krzyzewski, who has led the Blue Devils program for more than four decades.

As a high school basketball star, Scheyer talked with Krzyzewski about where his life could go. As a Blue Devils player, he saw first-hand how Krzyzewski's lessons about trust, communication and collective responsibility built championship teams.

Now, as a 34-year-old father of two with a third child on the way, and the person who will succeed Krzyzewski this spring, Scheyer still relishes opportunities to hear the Hall of Fame coach's insights on basketball and life.

"I'm trying to soak up every single day with him," said Scheyer, part of NCAA championship teams in 2010 as a player and 2015 as a coach. "I know when the time comes in April, we won't have as many of these moments. So, I cherish the times when we're traveling, or when we're in here early in the morning, and those natural organic conversations pop up and we just start talking about life. I'm thankful for those."

This spring, Krzyzewski, the winningest coach in college basketball history, will lead the Blue Devils for the final time, ending a tenure that began when Duke hired him as a 33-year-old in 1980. Krzyzewski, who turned 75 in February, leaves behind a program that he built into a global brand, and gold standard.

And at Duke, Coach K's legacy extends well beyond the court. His ability to build and motivate teams, stay nimble amid change, and never lose sight of the people who make success possible, set an example for the Duke community.

"It's so important to have leaders like Coach K who can model the values and behaviors that an organization aspires to in its culture," said Sanyin Siang, leadership expert, author and founding executive director of the Fuqua/Coach K Center on Leadership & Ethics (COLE) at Duke University. "The more visibility we have for leaders throughout the organization who embody those values, the more organizations can create enduring success."

From Duke's frontline caregivers to those at the heart of the university's educational mission, Krzyzewski - through leadership and example - leaves a legacy of inspiration among colleagues he worked alongside, and those he never met. Here are some of their stories.

STAY CURIOUS

Around four years ago, Erica Hill, now director of development for Trinity College of Arts & Sciences, was part of a group of consultants examining the feasibility and goals of a fundraising campaign for the Emily Krzyzewski Center in Durham.

Mike Krzyzewski created the non-profit center that builds the academic, career and leadership potential of students from populations often underrepresented in higher education, in honor of his mother. When it came time to present the report, Hill and her colleagues did so to Krzyzewski in a boardroom near his office.

While a bit starstruck at first, Hill, a 1998 Duke graduate, said that Krzyzewski led a fruitful conversation, digging into details to gain a deeper understanding of paths forward.

"He was a gracious listener and had so many good and thoughtful questions," Hill said. "You could tell that he's great because he knows a lot, but then he tries to keep learning."

When it wrapped up in 2020, the Emily Krzyzewski Center's Game Changer Campaign raised over \$18.5 million. And long after her work was done, Hill said that Krzyzewski's curious approach is something she brings into how she looks at the world.

"I think that's a great way to go through life," Hill said. "Just be curious and keep learning. Especially on a university campus, it fits in with what we do."

MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

When the "ECHO" program, an expansive research initiative examining factors shaping child health, kicked off in 2017, Todd Robbins took on a leadership role as part of a large team of people who collected and monitored data from around 100 research sites.

In the team's early days - and during the pandemic, when it adjusted to fully remote, and later hybrid, working situations - Robbins, a devout Duke hoops fan, leaned on lessons drawn from Mike Krzyzewski's books on leadership.

The most important cue he took from Krzyzewski was the value of being adaptable in how you lead individuals. Or, as Robbins put it, meeting people where they are.

"Almost every year, he has to start from scratch because he lost so many players to the NBA," said Robbins, a lead clinical research associate with Duke Clinical Research Institute. "He has to go with the flow and adjust with his team. That's so important because, for example, my team comes from various backgrounds, and some of them have different strengths. So early on, we really had to learn about each other and establish our bond."

By shaping his team members' roles to suit strengths - such as having better communicators serve as contacts for sites or having detail-oriented people process documents - Robbins said his team weathered challenges.

"That's the key, you have to know people's strengths, and when to pass something off to somebody who can run with it," Robbins said. "It just goes back to meeting people where they are."

CHOOSE THE HARDER RIGHT

In the summer of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, Mike Krzyzewski voiced his feelings in an online video.

"Black lives matter," Krzyzewski said looking directly into the camera. "Say it. Can't you say it?"

Over the next few minutes, an emotional Krzyzewski pleaded with viewers to acknowledge the role racism plays in society and aspire to do better.

As a Black woman and behavioral health case manager in Duke University Hospital's Emergency Department, Bonita McMorris has a keen understanding of the ills Krzyzewski referenced. In her work, she sees how the lack of access to health care, education and opportunity can leave Black citizens and families in crisis.

She saw Krzyzewski's video not long after it was released and was struck by his passionate, direct message.

"I was pleased to know that Coach K had the feelings he has," McMorris said. "He's exactly right."

In the video, Krzyzewski, a West Point graduate, recited a line from the school's cadet prayer.

"Lord, help me choose the harder right, instead of the easier wrong," Krzyzewski said.

Not only has McMorris turned that line into a personal mantra, that spirit led her to join a group of hospital colleagues that meets weekly to discuss race and forge a more inclusive future.

"I'll never forget," she said.

INSPIRE OTHERS

Since 2013, Ingrid Bianca Byerly, a faculty member in the Thompson Writing Program, has taught public speaking courses that have been useful for Duke men's basketball players destined for careers in the spotlight.

"It's wonderful having basketball players in the class, they contribute so much," said Byerly, whose classroom stories often feature names such as Quinn, Justise, Grayson and Jahliil.

She gets glimpses of the culture of the basketball program through her experience with the players, who bring a sense of confident calm to class and are usually quick to build camaraderie among classmates.

Through personal anecdotes about how they overcame obstacles, rebounded from disappointment, or faced fears, the players often share in their speeches how they built resilience and determination. And in many of the stories, lessons from Mike Krzyzewski are at the core.

"It's always really heartfelt and inspirational, I can just hear Coach K's voice in there," said Byerly, who draws her own inspiration from the speeches. "When I hear some of them talk, I think 'I cannot believe I have a job like this, where I can learn these wisdoms from people a fraction of my age.'"

A Coach for All (cont.)

By Stephen Schramm, Duke Today (February 28, 2022)

WHAT WOULD COACH K SAY?

Growing up in Lynchburg, Virginia, Becca Murphy watched plenty of ACC basketball and developed a deep respect for how Mike Krzyzewski led his teams.

She admired how he took players from different backgrounds and built tight-knit teams with a unified sense of discipline and purpose. And when games got tense, and emotions ran high, Murphy appreciated how Krzyzewski's teams never seemed to shrink from the moment, usually staying focused and calm when opponents were rattled.

As a licensed practical nurse, Murphy often remembers the qualities Krzyzewski instills in his teams when facing her own trying times or important moments, such as caring for COVID-19 patients while working in a hospital in Idaho, or helping vulnerable patients in Duke's Adult Blood and Marrow Transplant Clinic, where she's worked since May of 2021.

A big part of Murphy's role in the clinic is caring for patients recovering from bone marrow transplants. Patients have depleted immune systems, so caring for them requires extreme discipline and attention to detail. It's at these times when she'll think of how Krzyzewski's teams execute.

"It doesn't do you any good to freak out, that's not going to help you think clearly," Murphy said. "So, I'll often think, 'If Coach K were here, what would he say about what I'm doing?'"

FIND A HIGHER PURPOSE

After successfully navigating the 2020-21 regular season with no players or coaches testing positive for COVID-19, the Duke men's basketball team headed to the ACC Tournament last March hoping to collect marquee victories and earn a spot in the NCAA Tournament field.

But during the ACC Tournament, a positive test result by a member of the program brought about conversations among coaches, school officials and infectious disease experts about what needed to happen next.

Duke Associate Professor of Medicine Dr. Cameron Wolfe, an infectious disease expert who serves as an advisor to Duke Athletics on COVID-19 matters, was part of the Zoom meetings and phone calls where these conversations unfolded. He recalled when Mike Krzyzewski opened the meeting with his insight, along with the health of Duke team members, Krzyzewski was equally concerned with Duke's opponents. No matter the decisions, he didn't want to jeopardize someone else's season.

Wolfe said that Krzyzewski's selfless statement set the tone for discussions that eventually led to the decision to withdraw from the ACC Tournament, ending the season for the Blue Devils, who ultimately had several members of the program test positive.

"I can't tell you how refreshing and how much easier it made my thought process to have the coach say that, straight from the outset," Wolfe said. "It's reassuring to know that there's a higher purpose here than just to win."

EVERYONE DESERVES RESPECT

Around 2008, Mike Krzyzewski spoke at an event in the airy lobby of North Pavilion. Several floors up, Jacqueline Tate and fellow housekeepers gathered by a railing and listened.

"Some of the girls I was working with were Duke fans, so they wanted to watch," Tate said.

In his remarks, Krzyzewski told the story of his mother, Emily, who cleaned office buildings at night when Krzyzewski was growing up in Chicago. He spoke of his deep affection and respect for her and how, regardless of her work, she led a life of dignity.

"He said no matter what position someone has, always treat them with respect," said Tate, who didn't know much about Krzyzewski prior to his talk. "That really spoke to me. I looked at him as a down-to-earth, wholesome person with integrity. Once you know someone's background and values, you look at them differently."

Over the next several years, Tate enrolled in Duke's Professional Development Academy and moved into Duke Radiology, first as a scheduling assistant and now working at the reception desk. All these years later, Krzyzewski's words about treating everyone with respect shape her interactions with patients and colleagues.

"I work with thousands of people doing different jobs and we all need to work together," Tate said. "So you've got to have respect for everyone, regardless of their story. Everybody's human."

With improved Duke defense on display, Blue Devils know they'll need more

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (February 26, 2022)

CHARLOTTEVILLE, Va. - Tucked inside all of the postgame chatter from Duke's 65-61 win at Virginia Wednesday night was an important nugget from coach Mike Krzyzewski that could mean plenty in the coming weeks.

"I'm proud of our guys," Krzyzewski said. "We actually prepared extremely well for this game, more like a veteran team, and I thought our defense was excellent."

Heading down the home stretch of his 42nd and final regular season as Duke's coach, Krzyzewski longed to see his team embrace such preparation. Although the No. 7 Blue Devils (24-4, 14-3 ACC) are in first place in the league standings with 10 wins in their past 11 games, they have produced uneven performances over the past two months.

After routing rival North Carolina, 87-67, on Feb. 5, Duke dropped a home game to Virginia, 69-68, when it made critical errors on offense and defense in the final minutes.

On Feb. 15 at Cameron Indoor Stadium, the Blue Devils built a 19-point lead over Wake Forest only to see the Demon Deacons tie the score before Mark Williams' put-back basket in the final seconds delivered a 76-74 win.

So while Duke has a sparkling record and will clinch the ACC tournament's No. 1 seed with two wins in its final three games, a higher level of focus and play will be needed to win bigger prizes in March and April.

The Blue Devils displayed that at John Paul Jones Arena on Wednesday night, holding off Virginia's charges time and time again to emerge victorious in a nip-and-tuck game.

"I think that showed in our play on defense," Duke associate head coach Jon Scheyer said Thursday morning. "Offensively, we did take great care of the ball and valued it."

Duke turned the ball over only eight times, or on 13.6% of its possessions. For the season, Virginia's hard-nosed defense has forced teams to turn it over 16.3% of the time.

In Duke's loss to the Cavaliers earlier this month, the Blue Devils committed 15 turnovers, coughing it up on 23.4% of their possessions.

On Wednesday night, the Cavaliers shot 43.6% from the field. That's actually better than the 40.5% teams have shot against Duke for the season. But the Blue Devils did an exceptional job of finishing defensive possessions with rebounds.

Back on Feb. 7, Virginia secured 11 offensive rebounds. On Wednesday night, the Cavaliers had no offensive rebounds in the first half and finished with just six.

How important was that part of the game? When the Cavaliers scored off rebound baskets on their first two possessions of the second half, an angry Krzyzewski called a quick timeout to correct things.

"We fought, we kept them off the offensive boards," Scheyer said. "And that's been the making of a great Duke defensive team through the years."

Scheyer said the players just "leaked out" early on those two possessions after halftime. But, otherwise, he called the game "just a really steady performance."

"We've played 28 games so it's our 28th preparation," Krzyzewski said. "I thought the maturity of our team and the preparation went to a different level. They're getting it."

The win gave Duke its fourth five-game winning streak of the season. Only once previously have the Blue Devils extended it beyond five. That was when Duke started the season with seven consecutive wins to achieve the nation's No. 1 ranking.

Ohio State changed that, rallying from 15 points down in the second half to beat Duke, 71-66, on Nov. 30.

Losses to Miami, 76-74 on Jan. 8, and Virginia on Feb. 5 halted Duke's other five-game streaks.

To win the NCAA championship the Blue Devils long to deliver to Krzyzewski in his final season, it will take a six-game winning streak through March and April.

For a team that starts three freshmen, playing consistently at a high level isn't easy early in the season. It's more likely later.

"I think the preparation was at a really high level," Scheyer said. "Look for when you're in high school, the preparation, the scouting reports, the attention to detail, our guys haven't had to have that at that level because the talent discrepancy is so much bigger. So I think for us going through, you know, 26-27 games, they've learned the importance of understanding the preparation. That takes attention to detail that you have to have. For us as a staff, we felt like it was the best that we prepared."

Coach K appreciates respect from other college coaches, ACC ‘brotherhood’

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (February 24, 2022)

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. - Much as Mike Krzyzewski doesn't want it referred to in this manner, the lasts are piling up as his time as Duke's coach draws to a close.

Wednesday night marked the retiring Krzyzewski's final road stop in a traditional ACC venue and his Blue Devils delivered a 65-61 win over Virginia at John Paul Jones Arena.

Coach K's Blue Devils have battled Virginia annually during his 42 seasons at Duke. That made this stop different from upcoming games at Syracuse on Saturday and Pittsburgh on Tuesday.

While those are ACC games, they come against a pair of former Big East schools who have less than a decade of experience in the ACC.

Though Duke and Virginia are two of the ACC's top basketball programs - they along with North Carolina have won NCAA championships as league members in the last seven years - their combative nature took a pause a few times Wednesday night.

It started just prior to the national anthem, when Virginia coach Tony Bennett grabbed a microphone to address the 75-year-old Krzyzewski and the sold-out crowd.

"Coach, I know you are not retired and hopefully you have a lot of games left in this college basketball season," Bennett said. "But I want to take this opportunity because this is important to me and our team and the rest of us to acknowledge your monumental contributions to the basketball world and our game of college basketball. "The Virginia crowd then interrupted Bennett's speech with a warm ovation. Bennett continued, saying Coach K's success "stood the test of time" and also praising Krzyzewski's wife, Mickie, for her patience and support behind the scenes.

"It's a partnership," Bennett said. "Congratulations to you on this journey and I hope you guys have a blessed retirement."

With that, the crowd cheered again. Bennett hugged Krzyzewski and presented him with a plaque to honor his career.

After the game, Krzyzewski admitted it was an emotional moment.

"It was really, really very, very good of Tony to do that," Krzyzewski said. "Look, I'm not looking for a farewell tour or anything like that. But it is my last year and if there's some way that we can celebrate the brotherhood that's in the game, that's a good thing."

Krzyzewski celebrated that brotherhood another time during pregame. He spotted where retired Virginia coach Terry Holland sat to watch the game. Krzyzewski walked across the court to embrace the 79-year-old Holland, who coached Virginia from 1974-90.

Early in Krzyzewski's Duke days, Holland's Cavaliers were a nemesis. A 109-66 ACC tournament loss to Virginia concluded Krzyzewski's third season amid pressure from Duke boosters to oust him.

But Wednesday night was nothing but love between the two, an extension of Bennett and Virginia's honoring Krzyzewski's Hall of Fame career.

Krzyzewski pointed out the contrast to other scenes in college basketball, referencing the recent postgame kerfuffle between Michigan and Wisconsin. Wolverines coach Juwan Howard drew a suspension from the incident after he hit a Wisconsin assistant coach in the head.

"We've got all this stuff going on, handshake lines and all that," Krzyzewski said. "Tonight was beautiful. It showed the brotherhood in our league and the respect that programs have for one another and that coaches have for one another. It meant a great deal to me."

Virginia joined a number of other ACC schools that honored Krzyzewski upon his final trip to their venues. Florida State, Clemson and Boston College all made announcements along with donations to Durham's Emily Krzyzewski Center in honor of Krzyzewski's career.

Louisville had a pregame ceremony with retired coach Denny Crum where Krzyzewski was presented a custom-made Louisville Slugger bat and a personalized bottle of Maker's Mark bourbon.

Notre Dame played a video during halftime of Irish coach Mike Brey, a former Duke assistant, praising Krzyzewski for his career and the impact on his career.

For Bennett, having Virginia join that list was a must.

"When someone can last that long and do what he's done and again," Bennett said, "it was the right thing to do."

Said Krzyzewski, "Tonight was to me, I get a little bit emotional about it, because that's the college game and that's the ACC I know. It's beautiful. There's not one program that wins all the time. But there are a lot of great programs, and they should be celebrated, and the people in them should be celebrated. Not just by their own fans, but the other programs."

Jeremy Roach is proving he deserves a seat at Duke's table

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (February 24, 2022)

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – It's a small thing. And in the long run, probably an inconsequential one. On this night, though, one simple sequence spoke volumes.

Because, after all, has Mike Krzyzewski ever carried your chair?

Nah. Didn't think so. Because this is not something Mike Krzyzewski, winner of more games than any other coach in college basketball history, does. Chairs are carried for him, to him – not by him. Now, there are exceptions, sure. Tops on that list is his wife, Mickie, and one figures Dad would probably treat his daughters the same way. (Even at 75, Krzyzewski hasn't outgrown chivalry.) But as for non-familial exceptions? Pssssh. It would take a lot – like, a lot a lot – to warrant it. Like, say, scoring a season high off the bench. Or locking down an opponent's best player, on possibly the hottest night of his four-year career. You know, the glorified (and gritty) things that translate into W's.

Or, in other words, all the things Jeremy Roach did Wednesday night against Virginia.

So, yes, in the aftermath of No. 7 Duke's 65-61 win, in came Krzyzewski and Roach to the postgame podium. One teensy-tiny issue, though: Two people, one chair. So Krzyzewski slid his folding chair a few inches to the right, grabbed another from off the ledger and unfurled it to the left of his. Then, he and Roach sat down for some questions. Again, a small thing. (Krzyzewski even joked, as he did it, that's what Polish people do.) Make no mistake, though: Folding out that chair – not to mention, you know, bringing Roach of all people to the podium – was a sign of respect. Of appreciation. Of thanks.

"I really thought the key guy for us in the game was Jeremy," Krzyzewski said. "Obviously, A.J. (Griffin) made big plays and we were able to do a couple things there, but I thought Jeremy's performance was the differentiator."

That's high praise, but not undeservedly so. Because consider: This season probably hasn't gone exactly the way Roach envisioned when he decided to run it back as a sophomore for the Blue Devils. After starting 18 games as a freshman and doing the same earlier this season, Roach has more recently come off the bench in conjunction with Griffin's emergence. His field goal percentage is basically the same as last season, and his 3-point percentage has dropped. His minutes are up, marginally, and his assist-to-turnover ratio is much better – 2.5 after Wednesday compared with 1.4 a year ago – but it has hardly been a star turn. Case in point: Roach scored 11 points against Elon on Dec. 18, then didn't hit double digits again until last Tuesday against Wake Forest. For a former five-star, score-first guard, that is not an easy transition. At all.

Then again, Roach didn't want easy. He's at Duke, for crying out loud. His other college finalists? North Carolina, Kentucky and Villanova. Not exactly "easy" places at which to play or prove yourself. But Roach, even off an ACL tear as a high school junior, leaned into that challenge and came anyway.

And a challenge it has been. Even this season, two full years removed from that devastating knee injury, Roach saw others surge ahead of him in Duke's backcourt. Wendell Moore Jr. made a massive leap in consistency, becoming a captain and one of the more clutch players. And Roach's former high school teammate Trevor Keels arrived this summer as an immediate starter because of his lockdown defense and aggression driving to the basket. Griffin's knee injury in October meant Roach kept his starting spot for the time being – as Krzyzewski reiterated Wednesday, starting isn't the be-all and end-all – but by January, Griffin was too good to come off the bench. Then Keels went down with an injury, necessitating Roach rejoining the starters temporarily until Keels got healthy enough to reclaim that spot. In, out, back in, then out again.

Maybe that's too much fuss about starting when it matters more who finishes games. (Seriously, starting is important but overrated.) But all that just goes to show the nonlinear, jumbled journey Roach has been on this season. Heck, even Wednesday, when he dropped a career-high (and team-best) 15 points in 32 minutes, he didn't get a spotlight; Griffin, who scored 10 of his 13 points in the final four minutes, also deserved a fair share of the credit for Duke outlasting the Cavaliers.

And that is totally fine with Roach.

Why? Because Duke still won.

"I'm always just here for my teammates," Roach said, "and doing whatever it takes to win."

If that quote sounds like it wasn't properly sifted through a "player-speak" filter, it's because it wasn't. And to some extent, yeah, that's a guy saying the right thing. But in Roach's case, it's also exactly what he has done all season, especially the past two months, and why he, as much as anyone else on Krzyzewski's final roster, is so critical to this team hitting its championship ceiling. Because unlike the gobs of other good scorers on this team, from Griffin to Keels to Moore to projected top-three NBA Draft pick Paolo Banchero, Roach doesn't necessarily need to get his.

"His" is Duke winning games.

So while, no, this team might not have one true point guard, considering all its various ballhandlers and their respective scoring responsibilities, Roach is probably the closest there is. That doesn't mean he's perfect; Moore has the best assist percentage on the team, and Keels has the fewest turnovers. But since that Florida State game when Keels injured his calf, Roach has averaged 4.3 assists per game, twice notching a career high with nine dimes. The advanced metrics back up the importance of that ball-sharing ability. Per Synergy, Roach averages just 0.81 points per possession (PPP), easily the lowest of Duke's top eight rotation players. But when you also factor assists into that equation, he skyrockets to 1.257 PPP, which is in the 86th percent nationally. Translation: More often than not, when Roach is the dude dishing to teammates, Duke scores.

As for Wednesday? Well, that's what's so fascinating. For just the third time all season, Roach didn't record a single assist. Not a one. (To be fair, Duke had only nine on 24 made shots, but that's a separate story.)

Instead, he was malleable, matching his game to what his team needed most from him, which, against Virginia's typically stingy pack-line defense, was scoring. So after Roach first checked in about five minutes into the game, it took him only three offensive possessions to chuck up a 3. It dropped. And perhaps he could've had a few more drops had Virginia guard Kihei Clark, the last holdover from UVA's 2019 national title team, not gone absolutely nuclear. Clark – a career 35.4 percent 3-point shooter who has never made more than four 3s in one game – all of a sudden went berserk, draining six triples before halftime. "He kept us in it," Virginia coach Tony Bennett said. "He shot a pull-up 3, and I told him, I said, 'If you do that, you better make it.'" Well, Clark did, then did again, and he just kept going. After the sixth 3, which put Virginia up five with 4:32 until halftime, the diminutive guard simply turned on his heels to the crowd with his arms wide open. Are you not entertained?

Well, I'll tell you one person who wasn't: Coach K. "We had to change our defense," Krzyzewski said of Clark's first-half shooting. That meant less switching and more singular focus on limiting Clark – more singular focus for Roach, that is.

And that's exactly what Duke's sophomore point guard did: shut Clark down, at least relatively speaking; after scoring 18 first-half points on 6-of-10 shooting, Virginia's senior floor general had just seven points in the second half on 3-of-5 shooting. "I take a lot of pride on the defensive end," Roach said. "That's definitely one of my strengths." Of course, other Cavaliers subsequently stepped up to keep things close until the final whistle – ECU transfer Jayden Gardner had 16 points, and Reece Beekman, who hit the game-winning 3 in the first meeting of these teams, also pitched in 11.

But what Roach did to Clark's offense in the second half, stymying it pretty solidly, was the opposite of his own scoring prowess after halftime. He led Duke at the break with seven points on 3-of-4 shooting, but he kept up the same pace in the second frame. (Given Roach's success handling Clark, it was somewhat surprising he didn't start the second half. But there we go getting worked up about starters again.) Punctuating that performance, in his return to his home state: two massive 3-pointers, the latter of which with just under seven minutes to play easily could've been the dagger.

Instead, credit to the Hoos. Bennett's ballclub kept grinding, especially defensively, and got things back to within one just over a minute later. At which point, here came Duke's second star of the night: Griffin. After a dismal 1-of-8 start to the game, Griffin somehow came alive in the waning minutes, making his final three shots to maintain the Blue Devils' one-possession margin. (That he did so late, after disappearing in the second half of several games recently, is another encouraging sign this team will gladly take away from Charlottesville.)

"He hung in there. Difference-maker," Krzyzewski said of Griffin. "But again, we wouldn't be there (in a position to win late) if Jeremy hadn't done what he (did)."

Where Duke goes from here? Back home for a recharge before two more trips – to Syracuse and Pitt, respectively – and then the biggie: Krzyzewski's final home game at Cameron Indoor.

But all that is known. It's scheduled. On the books. Beyond that? That's the fun part. Duke will go to Brooklyn for the ACC tournament likely as the No. 1 seed and potentially with its first outright regular-season title since 2006. That's a nice honor, sure. Just not the one Krzyzewski and his team will be satisfied with.

No, that honor comes much later, if at all – and not on a Wednesday in Virginia but on the first Monday night of April in New Orleans. Duke doesn't have many weaknesses, but one perceived problem is its lack of a point guard. The conventional answer, to now, is that it has many. And technically, it does.

What Roach showed against Virginia, though, is that he has the capacity and the inclination to assume that role. In some ways, he already has been. But if Duke is to get to the top of the mountain, it needs that malleable role player who doesn't particularly mind passing. Roach doesn't have to be Duke's best passer for the Blue Devils to go all the way, but he does have to be its most willing passer and the person who can unstick the offense when it gets a little dribble-happy.

If that same person is also capable of knocking down a few clutch 3s when called upon? Well, all the better.

That's the type of player who deserves a seat at Duke's table.

With one last walk across the Cameron floor, the end of Coach K's tenure begins

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (February 20, 2022)

DURHAM - Leonard Hamilton got a hug. Mike Krzyzewski had kind words for Florida State's Wyatt Wilkes and, later down the line, for all of the Seminoles' many injured stars. Then he turned to his left and started walking across the floor, head down as he crossed the free-throw lane.

Six hundred and forty-four times before he had made some variation of that walk across the Cameron floor, after wins and losses, certainly far more of the former than the latter, and this was, inexorably and unavoidably, the last.

The end has arrived, the final finalities of Krzyzewski's 42 years at Duke, and after the next game he coaches at Cameron there will be no walk back to the locker room. There will be speeches and honorifics and a grand encomium at the distant end of a record-breaking career. Saturday was the last home game he'll coach at Duke that felt anything close to normal and routine.

Krzyzewski knew it, too. He has so assiduously avoided any hint of sentimentality this season but there was no way to dodge it Saturday. It was like a gentle slap across the face, awakening but not painfully so, a reality that could not be ignored.

"Look, it'll be emotional, the last game here," Krzyzewski said. "Some of these games have been a little bit emotional for me, in one way and then another. Even today, with all the crowd and whatever, you want to savor that feeling because you're only going to be able to walk out on that court one more time and have that feeling.

"But it makes me understand how lucky I've been to do it hundreds of times. Not a dozen. Six hundred. I don't know how many games I've coached. But I've had these moments hundreds of times. It's been a blessing to be the coach here, with this crowd and with this culture. I'm a lucky guy. I've been a very, very lucky guy."

Krzyzewski hadn't even gotten to make that walk in Duke's last home game, bailing out at halftime for IV fluids, exhausted. ("It doesn't perk as quickly," he said.) But after taking care of an undermanned Florida State team, 88-70, with his grandson taking and making Duke's final shot, all that was left was that walk, three road games and North Carolina in two weeks.

All this time, the pressure has been building, the weight of expectations as the end approaches. After Tuesday's narrow win over Wake Forest, Paolo Banchemo even mentioned finishing first in the ACC standings, not a priority that's often been acknowledged at Duke, where the ACC championship and NCAA tournament have always been the ultimate goal. But that's the kind of season this is, where everything matters and there's no space to breathe. Saturday's victory moved Duke into sole possession of that position with four games to go.

Nowhere is that more true than in Cameron, where the Blue Devils appear almost stifled at times compared to their generally free and easy play on the road. Duke has won its past five road games by nine or more – and the games at Notre Dame, North Carolina and Clemson are as tough as the ACC has to offer on the road this season – but it had played three straight close home games going into Saturday.

And Saturday even started out that way, with Florida State apparently unable to miss despite missing five starters and Banchemo and Mark Williams in first-half foul trouble. Duke finally pulled away late in the first half, locking down on defense and running its lead to 24 – not that double-digit leads have been lock-tight in Cameron this year. Another symptom.

The crowd could feel the moment, too. It was as engaged as it has been for a non-UNC game in some time, every bit of the undergrad and grad sections packed to the corners, almost like a warm-up for two weeks from now. Krzyzewski noticed it and acknowledged it, not merely clapping toward the fans as he exited the floor, but even stepping into the maelstrom for high fives and hugs as he started to disappear from view.

"What a crowd," Krzyzewski said. "A tremendous crowd. We had a great Cameron day."

Even if you couldn't tell from all of that – and you can – the steady procession of luminaries finding their way back to Cameron to pay their respects would give it away. There have been some rarely heard names at recent games, but the number continues to increase.

Billy King, Danny Ferry, Cherokee Parks, Mike Dunleavy, Matthew Hurt, Ricky Price, Shavlik Randolph, Shelden Williams and Josh Hairston were among those making the pilgrimage Saturday, although Tre and Tyus Jones got bigger cheers than any of them.

One can only imagine the guest list for March 5.

Duke has three road games to play before returning home for the Konclusion, each with its own sentimental value. At Virginia, where Tony Bennett is as close to anyone the ACC has who can be thrown the torch to hold high. At Syracuse, against Jim Boeheim, the man who taught Krzyzewski the 2-3 zone. And at Pittsburgh, where Jeff Capel was once thought to be heir to this throne.

And then, two weeks from now, the end. It's hard to imagine the pressure to perform in that game, so much so that Brooklyn and Greenville, S.C., and wherever Duke goes next – the NCAA top-16 preview Saturday had Duke headed west to California, where Krzyzewski has never won an NCAA tournament game – may seem like an August jaunt to the Bahamas compared to the North Carolina game.

There will be no quiet walk across the floor on that day, win or lose. This was the last time things will be the way they've been for four decades. The end has arrived, and this was the beginning of it.

One last time, Duke delivers a [semi-normal] Cameron classic for Mike Krzyzewski

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (February 20, 2022)

DURHAM, N.C. – Two things are everywhere: paint, and the smell of many, many, mango-flavored adult beverages.

First, the former. All bodywork begins outside of Cameron Indoor, in and along the outer edges of Krzyzewskiville, the student tenting village directly adjacent to Duke's most famous building (which, obviously, is named for its most famous figure). Here, you'll find plenty of long plastic trays with still-wet paint, leftovers of that luscious latex now stuck all over students' stomachs and shoulders. Some trays even still have globbed-up brushes dipped in them, all in that signature shade of blue. Of course, over the five hours these students spent waiting in line for entrance to Saturday's game – an 88-70 Duke win over short-handed Florida State – that paint has hardened and dried and already started to crack. Shocker, then, that during the mad rush inside about two hours before tipoff, plenty of it comes crumbling off. And between bathroom breaks, concession stops and general milling about, well, you get just about what you'd expect: paint flecks, everywhere. (On that note, this reporter will be billing the Crazies for a new pair of navy slacks; not even the best dry cleaners can combat sitting in a pile of paint for two hours.)

As for the latter? Well, take that number of paint trays and brushes and empty tubes and multiply it by about 100 ... and then maybe, maybe, you get some idea of the number of crushed cans around Krzyzewskiville. White Claw, Blue Moon Mango Wheat, Stella Artois, Bud Light: You name it, you can find it – and without a doubt, smell it. Why the mango mania? There's no clear explanation, although perhaps this fine February afternoon has something to do with it. But by and large, these college kids are not particularly picky about their booze. It all does the job, just the same.

Now, there is nothing new about either of these developments. The aptly named Cameron Crazies have been partaking in painting and drinking for decades, the enormity of their excitement rising right in tow with Duke's on-court success. Another Final Four? Another national title? Well, that's only another log on the proverbial fire that is their fandom. And for 42 years – or, at least most of it, once Mike Krzyzewski established himself as the real deal – the extent of this excitement has just gone up and up and up, rising like a lost balloon into the clouds.

And it's never come down.

Nor will it anytime soon.

But the energy inside Cameron Indoor does indeed ebb and flow, some nights not quite as spectacular as others. Saturday, though, was a spectacle. In Coach K's penultimate home game, you figured it would be ... but you never know until you're actually in the building.

"What a crowd today," Krzyzewski said after the game. "What a tremendous crowd we had. It's such a great Cameron day."

A Cameron classic, if you will – and really, the last one of Krzyzewski's tenure. There is still the final home game, of course, against North Carolina on March 5, but that one will be different: with more speeches, more displays, more out-of-the-norm recognition.

This one, then, was the last bastion of semi-normalcy: the last time Krzyzewski will duck his head and dart to the far corner of the court bearing his name, with the locker room waiting around the bend. For the finale, there will be pageantry and praise heaped upon the man who made this program what it is, and rightfully so. (And, sure, it'll still be loud as hell.) But it'll be something more, too, something unique – and not just a standout night that Krzyzewski has had here hundreds of times before.

"It'll be emotional, the last game here," Krzyzewski said. "Even today, with all the crowd and whatever, you want to savor that feeling – because you're only gonna be able to walk out on that court one more time and have that feeling."

Well, Krzyzewski did. He drank it all in.

And much like the Crazies outside Cameron, there was plenty worth consuming.

That began even before tipoff, when there were signs the atmosphere might be something special. "I noticed it right away during warmups," senior Joey Baker said. "You can't really explain it, but you can feel it." That was evident as the clock slowly counted down to the actual game, regular routines eliciting outsized reactions: The pregame hype video, featuring highlights from Krzyzewski's career; LeBron James' quick cameo in it, when he calls Coach K "the G.O.A.T.;" Cascada's "Everytime We Touch," the program's proud anthem. Decibels rose, dramatically, an audible hum echoing across the arena.

And then, in the flick of a switch – literally, as the lights came on to signal the game's start – there was basketball to behold. Duke needed this win not just to maintain first place in the ACC but also to widen that margin. For a team looking to claim its first regular-season conference title in over a decade, with its next three games on the road, a home tilt against a team missing all five of its expected starters this season is not one you can afford to give away. Early on, though, the energy in Cameron went both ways. The Seminoles and Blue Devils basically traded baskets for most of the first half, Duke unable to stop FSU from penetrating into the paint; those 28 interior points kept Florida State in an offensive flow and within striking distance.

But with about three minutes left until halftime, that changed. Because like so many times in Krzyzewski's career – especially earlier on, before the advent and adoption of one-and-done – Duke got valuable contributions from its key veterans: Baker and junior Wendell Moore. Baker had missed his previous eight 3-point attempts across Duke's previous seven games, but no matter. On Friday night, the staff showed each player a personalized highlight reel, and Baker's included a big 3 he made in the Blue Devils' win over then-No. 1 Gonzaga.

Hokey? Maybe. Effective? Absolutely.

Baker came off the bench to drain four first-half 3-pointers, the last two of which were part of a 12-2 Duke run to end the half. (He also took a charge on his first defensive possession after entering the game, which did exactly what you'd expect to the crowd.) Those 3s helped put the Blue Devils up 11 at intermission: room to breathe but not to relax. As Krzyzewski said, "Joey saved us in the first half. I mean, Joey was spectacular."

And Moore? While he scored eight points in the first half, he also had four assists, the sign of more to come. Duke has been at its best all season when Moore is heavily involved – not just scoring but also dishing out assists, crashing the glass and making life miserable for opponents on the defensive end. Check, check and check Saturday, as the junior played one of his more complete contests in recent memory. His final stat line – 16 points, seven assists, six steals, five rebounds and only two turnovers – exemplifies that, but so too did arguably his best play of the game.

Moore missed a breakaway dunk in the first half when he was fouled from behind, but about four minutes after the break, he found himself in a similar situation. He picked the pocket of FSU guard Jalen Warley, snatching the ball and sprinting down the right side of the court opposite Duke's bench. But as he went up, again, a Seminole started to make contact. No matter – Moore just outmuscled him (or outmanned him, you could say) and violently punctuated a dunk anyway. And-1. His subsequent free throw put Duke up 12, a margin it maintained until the final whistle.

In the grand scheme of things, Duke has other talented players – ones who might be picked higher than Moore in the NBA Draft, or who possess a more complete skill set than Baker – but when it needed plays, those two provided them. There's something to that, something Duke has to hope endures over the next eight weeks.

But that the team's two older, more experienced captains stood out in Krzyzewski's penultimate home game? With legions of former four-year stars in the audience, like Danny Ferry and Shelden Williams? Well, there's something fitting about that part of this semi-send-off, too.

"Dell has been here three years, Joey's been here four, so they've seen it all," freshman Trevor Keels said. "When they play like that and just lead, we're a whole different team."

Expecting Baker to produce like that every night may not be fair – he's hit four 3s in a game only twice before – but any production off the bench from him is greatly appreciated. And Moore – who had his power conference-leading 11th game this season with at least 10 points, five rebounds and five assists – is certainly capable of keeping this up. In fact, Duke needs him to, at least to get where it wants to go.

Which is a bigger game than Saturday. A bigger game, even, than Coach K's final contest in Cameron Indoor.

"We're always thinking about (Krzyzewski's final home game), but Coach does a tremendous job of keeping the spotlight off of him. Because the thing is, we know that we have bigger goals," Moore said. "We want to make it to the big stage in April – so Coach's last game will be the last game of the season. That's the ultimate gift we can give to him for this year."

Wise words from one of K's last captains. But though that goal, that gift, is still out there, it's not the only thing this group can give its coach.

Because what it gave him Saturday – what everyone in the stands gave him Saturday – is also incredibly special. It has been for 42 years. Penultimate isn't final, but it's the last barrier before the end. Now that's here, try as Krzyzewski has to avoid it since his retirement announcement last summer.

"How lucky have I been to have a moment like that to savor," Krzyzewski said, "but I've had those moments hundreds of times. It's been a blessing to be the coach here, with this crowd and our culture." Then he paused for a second, briefly but tellingly. There were no tears, but maybe more of an understanding: of all that has been, and that little bit still left. Saturday was a final taste for Mike Krzyzewski, and though technically there's another in two weeks, it won't be the same. Coach K has shirked sentimentality all season, maintained that notorious "next play" mentality even as it relates to his own goodbye. But for a second on Saturday, he let that slip.

"Lucky guy," he added. "I've been a very, very lucky guy."

‘Loyalty is love’: The story behind Coach K’s final recruit, Theo John

By David Thompson, Fayetteville Observer (February 17, 2022)

DURHAM – Intimidation was never the goal for Theo John.

It’s simply the end result of a life he’s built through determination and loyalty; a relentless drive that took him from a lanky teenager in Champlin Park, Minnesota, to the Duke Blue Devils’ 6-foot-9, 242-pound enforcer on Mike Krzyzewski’s final team.

“When you’re someone of my size and you give off the persona that I do, I wouldn’t blame you for being intimidated by me,” John told the USA TODAY Network. “But that’s because you probably don’t know me, either.”

It’s true.

There’s one side of John he lets the world see: the icy stares aimed at opponents, his lionlike roars after a ferocious dunk or block – the infectious energy off the bench that has made the 23-year-old graduate transfer from Marquette a crowd favorite at Cameron Indoor, and the No. 1 player on opponents’ “do not mess with” list.

He’s also a loving grandson who sends his grandmother, Jeri, a Bible verse before bed every night. The oldest of four siblings who grew up surrounded by small children at his mom’s in-home daycare. The son holding back his parents with both arms to look for traffic before letting them cross the street. The basketball player who became Coach K’s final recruit because of his experience and an absolute willingness to fit a role Duke desperately needed.

“He’s always been a protector,” his mother, Kate John, told the USA TODAY Network. “He’s always wanted to be the one to keep people safe.”

It’s not the need to intimidate that brings out the fierceness in John – it’s loyalty: loyalty to the game of basketball, his community, his family and the teammates who have embraced him in his final season of college basketball.

“That’s why I play the way I do,” John said. “Because to me, loyalty is love.”

Loyalty and commitment to the game

John was already 6-8 when he entered his freshman year at Champlin Park High School.

He was the product of good genes; his mother is 6-0 and his father, Walter, who hails from Trinidad and Tobago, is 6-4. Both were athletes, and it was Walter who first spent hours in the driveway with his son teaching him post moves.

“He taught me damn near all my fundamentals,” John said. “I have a lot of good memories with that.”

Ironically, John’s biggest weakness was his physical strength as a freshman. That changed when he discovered the power of the weight room and spent his spare time, while not in the gym, watching documentaries on others who had transformed their bodies with lifting.

“When he started hitting the weights, you really saw him start to transform,” said Mark Tuchscherer, John’s high school coach. “He started to turn on this switch that I think you see all the time now – that guy that no one wanted to mess with.”

He became obsessed with improvement: getting stronger, faster, bettering his defensive technique or offensive post moves. Basketball, and his future in it, became his primary goal.

He wasn’t interested in the normal high school activities. On the night of his junior prom, he went to the school’s basketball gym to work on fundamentals while his peers danced the night away on the other side of campus.

“One of the teachers tried to have a heart-to-heart with me and told me that I need to enjoy high school,” John said. “I told him, ‘What is any of this going to do to help me with my future?’ He looked at me and said, ‘You damn right’ and let me keep working.”

Community loyalty

John’s growth and the success of Champlin Park made him a bit of a local celebrity.

It’s a community that loves high school basketball over all other sports, and John, along with teammate McKinley Wright IV – now with the Minnesota Timberwolves – were two of the team’s biggest stars. In four years, the Rebels went to the state title game twice and John finished with 1,000 career points and left as the school’s leading shot blocker.

His younger brother, Alex, who plays college basketball at Missouri Western, was also on the team as a sophomore during Theo’s senior year.

“The support from the community for those teams was really amazing,” Kate said. “There’s a lot of pressure on those teenagers, but I think that really brought them together as a team and really endeared them to the community for how hard they worked and the pride they instilled in all of us.”

John’s favorite after-practice dinner was Chipotle, and rarely were his meals not interrupted by young fans. They would beg for autographs and pictures, and John would always oblige. He’d ask their names and if they wanted to play in the NBA when they grew up.

“Being around kids teaches you patience and teaches you to be vulnerable,” he said. “I learned very early on that giving a kid five seconds of your time can make his day, maybe even month.”

It was a tenderness he learned from his mom and the throng of daycare kids constantly at his home. He couldn’t walk from his bedroom to the front door without a couple of kids hanging on his legs and at least a dozen piggyback requests.

“What you see on the court and what Theo is off the court are two different things,” Tuchscherer said. “I think you’ll see the loyalty on the court, the loyalty to his coaches and to his teammates. But off the court, it’s kind of the same loyalty, but just much gentler.”

A lasting lesson

John’s final high school game is something he’ll never forget – and the backstory for the long braids he wears that hang down his neck.

Facing Apple Valley and former Duke standout Tre Jones in the 2017 state title game, John let his confidence get the better of him. Champlin Park was undefeated and had beaten Apple Valley earlier in the season.

“Before the game, one of my teammates asked me what would happen if we lost,” John said. “I said to him, ‘If we lose, I won’t cut my hair ‘til we win.’”

It was said in jest, but Apple Valley won 60-54. John has not cut his hair since.

“It’s fine, man, you can cut your hair, it’s no big deal,” his former teammates have told him on multiple occasions.

But for John, his hair represents the downfall of hubris.

“It’s a reminder, literally, on the back of my head to never get overconfident,” he said.

It’s not that he’s unwilling to cut his hair, it’s just that John only answers in a single five-word sentence if you ask him about it.

'Loyalty is love': The story behind Coach K's final recruit, Theo John (cont.)

By David Thompson, Fayetteville Observer (February 17, 2022)

What needs to happen to cut your hair?

"I need to win something."

What does that mean?

"I need to win something."

Like a national championship?

"I need to win something."

Coach K's final Duke recruit

John knew it was time for a change.

He had spent four years with Marquette and Steve Wojciechowski, the head coach who had recruited him since his sophomore year of high school. He played 124 games at Marquette and played through a left wrist injury as a junior that required surgery in the summer. Despite a nagging left knee injury, John averaged 8.2 points and 5.2 rebounds as a senior and finished with 191 career blocks, the second-most in program history.

"Coach Wojciechowski was one of the first people in our gym when it came to Theo, and I know what that meant to him and the way he latched on to Wojo," Tuchscherer said. "Theo was very loyal to him."

Coach K in Chapel Hill: Remembering Mike Krzyzewski's greatest moments in the Dean Dome

Wojciechowski, a former Duke point guard and longtime assistant coach under Krzyzewski, was fired in March of 2021 after seven years with the program and replaced with Shaka Smart.

"I'm good," John told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "I'm ready to move on. I did my four years."

Jon Scheyer, Duke's 34-year-old coach in waiting, remembers the moment John entered the transfer portal.

"We found out we had a chance to get Theo, Coach (K) literally almost got out of his seat and he jumped at it," Scheyer said. "We all felt that way, it was unanimous."

John had met Krzyzewski the year before when Marquette practiced at Cameron Indoor Stadium after beating North Carolina in late February, but it was associate head coach Chris Carrawell who first reached out to him about playing his final season in Durham.

Carrawell, a member of the Blue Devils' 1999 Final Four team, had been an assistant at Marquette during John's freshman year before returning to his alma mater in 2018.

"When he originally first hit me up he was just reaching out to see how I was doing, where my head was at, and as soon as I entered the portal he hit me up again, like 'all right, let's talk for real now,'" John said earlier this season. "Just the relationship and how pure it was and how it was already set way back when...and when Coach K called, it's hard to say no."

John entered the transfer portal on April 14 and was officially a Blue Devil within the next 48 hours. Less than two months later, Coach K announced he would retire after the upcoming season.

It was during a subsequent visit to Duke's campus that John realized his place in history.

"We were sitting at dinner with Coach K and my sister mentioned that I was his last recruit, his last commit and it all just kind of sunk it," John said. "To be the last guy that coach recruited, the last piece to the puzzle, I mean, it's an honor. Now it's up to me to perform. I have to show that I'm worth it."

Loyal to his role

Coming off a 13-11 campaign and missing the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1995, Duke entered the 2021-22 season with an elite freshman class that included a trio of five-star talent in Paolo Banchemo, A.J. Griffin and Trevor Keels. But the Blue Devils needed depth in the frontcourt, someone with experience to play behind 7-foot sophomore center Mark Williams. A player with confidence and a little bit of an attitude. Someone who would push Williams but also make an impact when he's on the court.

"For Theo, especially when I'm in the game, he's always talking to me - about rebounding, about defending, he's always just keeping me in check, trying to see where my head's at, just sort of being that leader," Williams said. "He's been great for us. He's always pushing me to be the best player I can be."

John is the oldest player on a young roster with eight players under 21. His teammates jokingly nicknamed him "Uncle" and he's embraced that role and his place in the Duke basketball family.

"He doesn't really sit down much when he's on the sidelines," Scheyer said. "But he's always pushing them, telling them to keep going and to get better. The guys look up to him, you know, like a big brother."

But things haven't always been easy for Duke's big brother this season.

John's minutes dipped dramatically at the start of ACC play, averaging 5 minutes in the first four games. Even his coaches acknowledged that his confidence on the court had been shaken.

"I think one of the biggest things I've learned this season is to be at peace with where you are in your process," John said. "Being comfortable without being complacent."

He refound his confidence in a Jan. 15 win over N.C. State, hitting all four of his shots and finishing with a season-high 10 points, two rebounds and a block while getting to the foul line twice.

"He was looking to compete and it just came to him," Krzyzewski said after the 88-73 win. "He can be a key factor for us, there's really no question about that."

Since that game against the Wolfpack, John is averaging 13 minutes per game and scored in every contest except one - a 71-69 win on Jan. 25 over Clemson. He had a season-high three blocks in a 69-68 loss on Feb. 7 to Virginia, a game that threw into question Duke's legitimate chances of winning a national title this season.

It was also a reminder of the role John will have to play in the coming months.

"We are going to need Theo," Carrawell said. "These games are getting a lot more physical and as you get into March, these teams you're going to have to beat are going to have a high level of physicality and athleticism that Theo brings. He can help us. That's why we brought him here."

Mark Williams redeems himself in Duke's last-second win over Wake Forest

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (February 16, 2022)

DURHAM, N.C. – Sorry, will.i.am, but Mark Williams will not relent.

He might want to, sure. Wouldn't you? But as the loudspeakers inside Cameron Indoor Stadium reverberate with electronic beats and pumping bass, then the rapper's lyrics – I wanna scream, and shout, and let it all out – Williams doesn't succumb. So, he doesn't scream. Doesn't shout. Nope. Just a smug, subtle grin that slowly turns into a (quite well-timed) head bob.

At present, there are 0.4 seconds left on the clock, and Williams is basically underneath Wake Forest's basket. That precise positioning should not be lost on anyone because it is, more or less, exactly where Williams stood at the end of Duke's last home game ... when he lost track of his man, who promptly buried a game-winning 3 to deliver Duke its fourth loss this season. Ouch. Williams took the blame for that mental miscue – disproportionately so, if we're being honest – and flat-out owned any postgame outrage.

Nice to be on the other side of that scenario, huh?

And though Duke's last-second 76-74 win over Wake Forest on Tuesday – emphasis on the "last-second" nature of it – certainly was a 180-degree shift from the Virginia debacle, it also represented more. Like, say, Williams' poetic page turn from scapegoat to GOATed and this team's ability to get hit in the face, bleed out a 15-2 opponent's run and then stitch up its lip before the shape is gone entirely. This was Duke, one week after arguably its sorriest moment of the season, flipping the script on what it takes to survive.

Or maybe, finally learning how to.

"We've been in a lot of situations where we haven't been successful in closing out close games, so I think tonight, even in the huddle, we knew we were gonna have to win," Williams said. "Then that last play, having the last shot, it's knowing time and score. Worst-case scenario it's OT, but best-case scenario we get two points – and the best-case scenario happened."

So, about those two points. The two points. After leading by as many as 19 early in the second half, Duke allowed Wake Forest to claw its way back into the contest. Some of that was Wake Forest's doing, like Dallas Walton's trio of 3s and Jake LaRavia's general scoring prowess, but it was also very much Duke dooming itself with poor decisions. In the final two minutes alone ...

- A.J. Griffin forced up a 3 unnecessarily early in the shot clock ... before turning it over.
- Trevor Keels rejected a call for timeout from the bench, split two defenders ... then turned it over with an errant pass.
- Wendell Moore, stalling for time, got pushed back against the midcourt line ... and committed an over-and-back turnover.
- And Williams, who had committed only one other personal foul all night, was called for a questionable foul with 20 seconds left ... that sent Wake Forest to the line for the tying free throws.

Not great. Like, at all.

"We got a little panicked down the stretch," associate head coach Jon Scheyer said, "just with making quick plays."

Uh, yeah. But with 17.5 seconds left, after Wake Forest's Alondes Williams made both foul shots to tie the score, Duke had a chance to undo all those unfortunate mishaps. To prove it can play older than its age suggests. (Per KenPom, Duke is still No. 336 nationally in experience, at 1.08 years on average of college basketball.)

That Duke was in this position at all absent coach Mike Krzyzewski only added to the wackiness of the situation. Duke's head coach, in his third-to-last game stalking the sideline inside Cameron Indoor, seemed off from the opening seconds Tuesday night and was attended to by team trainers several times in the first half. His halftime stroll back to the locker room was slow, even by his typical standard.

"We went back at halftime, and clearly Coach wasn't himself. He wasn't right," Scheyer said. "We just told the team he needs to focus on taking care of him, and we need to step up and come out in the second half and do what we need to do."

So when Duke came back out after intermission, Krzyzewski wasn't with his team. (His wife, Mickie, also disappeared from her customary seat in the stands.) Off went Scheyer, sliding over 15 inches and switching titles on the fly, from "coach-in-waiting" to "acting head coach." A temporary promotion, at least until it becomes permanent eight weeks from now.

But the point is, as Duke built its 19-point margin early in the second half, then watched it all disappear, it did so without its Hall of Fame coach on the bench. (It turns out Krzyzewski was still in the building, receiving treatment and watching from the bowels of the arena.) That also meant, with 17 seconds left, Scheyer got his first taste of a true high-stakes situation. One call, for all the marbles.

He went to his ace.

"The main thing was we wanted to get Paolo (Banchemo) attacking downhill," Scheyer said. "Paolo attacking downhill is always a good thing for us."

And after he scored 13 second-half points, despite zero in the first half, you can understand why. Credit to Scheyer going to the reliable thing, but also: What, you're not going to give it to your 6-foot-10, 250-pound projected top-three NBA Draft pick?

Pssssh. Yeah, OK.

So Banchemo got the ball and isolated near midcourt. After a brief exchange with Griffin, Banchemo got it back, and with only a few seconds left to play – thank you, Cameron Crazies, for that loud second-by-second countdown – put up a layup high off the glass. "It felt good off the hand," Banchemo later said. Good as it felt, though, and sure as it looked, nothing could be so simple on a night like this. Instead, the ball hit plum in the center of the front iron, taking a baby hop off the rim and into midair.

Under one second, loose ball, game tied. Everything, in that instant, was equal. Entirely quiet, save for the clank of the ball off the rim.

Until Williams flew into the frame, using every inch of his 7-foot-7 frame, hit the ball from his left hand to his right, then dunked it through the net.

"Big Fella came in and dunked it," Moore said, flashing a wide smile. "He brought us home, like he did all game."

The clock flashed 0.2 seconds as officials reviewed – then confirmed – the call. No basket interference, much to the chagrin of the Demon Deacons and head coach Steve Forbes. "That's your biggest fear," Forbes said. "A tip-in or an offensive rebound on a play like that." But as the referees replayed the situation at the scorer's table, assistant coach Nolan Smith stood a few feet away and emphatically flicked his pointer finger downward. Good basket, he was willing into existence. And it worked.

But after the clock was reset to 0.4 seconds – technically enough time to catch and release a full-court heave – there went Williams, strolling and strutting to beneath the basket. His job on the subsequent inbounds would be to prevent the long pass, although it never came. (Major props to Damari Monsanto, though, for the closest full-court, side-armed, whipped prayer of a shot this reporter has ever seen – not that it would have counted, due to time, but Monsanto's shot-put hit the rim and rolled out.)

Rewind to right before that last shot, though, before victory was officially decided but all but certain. Look at Williams, bopping his head, a toothy smile practically begging to explode into a full-blown celebration. But he doesn't. He listens to will.i.am and sees the happy student section, then refocuses on the final play. Then it ends, and his job is done – but only then, and not a second before.

Asked later about what he saw on the game-winning play, Williams described his positioning to crash the glass and potentially secure a rebound. It was technical. True. But then he also said this: "Right place, right time."

Telling on Tuesday, sure. But for Duke as a whole? That wisdom also feels particularly applicable. Because Duke wasn't perfect against Wake Forest. Far from it. But it won anyway, which is more than you can say about this team when facing similar scenarios in the past. And that Williams, who was on the wrong end of one of these moments just a week ago, could turn things around so quickly?

Well, it's the sort of small step you notice in the continuous climb to March.

Only time will tell if Duke's growth matches up with Williams' reaction to his game-winning shot: subtle or something worth screaming and shouting about.

Another odd step forward, with Coach K ill and a narrow Duke escape

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (February 16, 2022)

DURHAM - On a day when discussion around Duke basketball was dominated not by an important game against Wake Forest but the coach-in-waiting the Blue Devils didn't hire, the one they did was once again pressed into early service.

Jon Scheyer got more on-the-job training, all of it against the Demon Deacons this season, when Mike Krzyzewski didn't come out for the second half Tuesday night. "Not feeling well," was the official word, although he met with the team afterward. Krzyzewski missed a hell of a finish.

It took Mark Williams' tip to himself with 0.4 seconds to go to give Duke the lead and the rim to deny Damari Monsanto's three-quarter court prayer, very nearly Duke's fifth loss by a total of 10 points but instead one step closer to the ACC regular-season title in a season when that unofficial honor really matters.

Krzyzewski's sudden absence was a reminder of just how fragile this final lap is, how much can go wrong in this season predicated upon everything going right before Krzyzewski retires. Just as Krzyzewski missed the game at Wake Forest last month due to illness, he missed the second half of this 74-72 win, what may be a natural and inevitable hazard for a 75-year-old coach trying to make one last run in the midst of what's still a pandemic.

It was also the latest in an increasingly long list of odd occurrences in this final farewell, from his grandson's drunk-driving arrest with star Paolo Banchemo in the back seat, to the words (and apologies) exchanged with players and coaches from Army and Georgia Tech and Virginia, to the David Collins air-to-air takedown of Wendell Moore at Clemson, to Krzyzewski's absences against Wake Forest.

"It's definitely been kind of an odd year," Moore said. "But I love the way we've fought through adversity as a team."

It wasn't even the first distraction of the day.

Tuesday began with a minor kerfuffle over a passage in a new book about Krzyzewski by New York Post columnist Ian O'Connor, who wrote that Duke's administration wanted to hire Harvard coach Tommy Amaker but Krzyzewski intervened to ensure Scheyer would get the job instead.

Sensing any controversy in that would require the suspension of disbelief that Krzyzewski had not obtained the right to exercise veto power over his successor, or that Krzyzewski would risk disturbing Duke's recruiting pipeline by bringing in a relative outsider, even a famous alum like Amaker (or Jeff Capel). The results since Scheyer was nominated speak for themselves in that respect.

Still, just as when other coaches from John Calipari to Nate Oats take their shots at Krzyzewski, anything with his name attached is news, tepid as it may actually be. Heavy is the head and so on. (O'Connor's book includes far more interesting and compelling stuff on Krzyzewski's relationship, or lack thereof, with Bobby Knight, but that's not quite as flashy.)

It was almost enough to distract from just how vitally important this game was for Duke in the here and now. Wake Forest went into Tuesday only a game and a half behind the Blue Devils in the ACC standings and one of four teams with a realistic chance to deny Duke its first regular-season title since 2010. In the intervening 12 years, the Blue Devils often consoled themselves with an ACC title or No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament - even a national title in 2015 - but that won't do it this year.

Just as Krzyzewski has consistently downplayed any sense of sentimentality surrounding this season, there's an undercurrent of expectations even he cannot deny.

"I'm not doing this year to get another paycheck," Krzyzewski said on his radio show last week. "I'm doing this year to try to do something special. I want to win."

Which really isn't any different from the expectations around a program like Duke - or Kentucky or Villanova or Gonzaga and so on - in any given season, but the finality of this, the two-strike swing of it, leaves Duke no margin for error. The pressure builds and it has nowhere to go. Perhaps that's why this season has felt like one long string of strange. With or without Krzyzewski present.

"We've had some unique situations this year already," Scheyer said afterward, an epic understatement delivered from Krzyzewski's leather media-room chair that will soon be his.

Duke struggled to close out a win without Krzyzewski in the second half Tuesday, just as they have at times with him, going from up 19 to tied with 20 seconds to go. There was an eerie echo of Gordon Hayward's heave in the 2010 national-title game in Monsanto's spinning sling, from the way it looked good to the way it caromed in and out after the buzzer.

"Would it have counted?" Wake coach Steve Forbes mused. "Probably not here. You know how it goes."

(It would not have counted, here or anywhere.)

There are only two home games left in Krzyzewski's Duke career, against Florida State on Saturday and that game on March 5. Who knows what weirdness yet lies ahead.

Coach K, the Team Builder

By Michael Rosenberg, Sports Illustrated (February 15, 2022)

Chip Engelland has pulled off a rare basketball double: He has won with Gregg Popovich and lost with Mike Krzyzewski. Engelland has been a Spurs assistant under Pop for 17 years, winning two championships and establishing himself as one of the best shooting coaches in the world. But four decades ago he was a Duke forward during Krzyzewski's first three years at the school, when the Blue Devils finished twice with losing records and never made the NCAA tournament.

Nobody, including Engelland, knew then that Krzyzewski would become one of the best basketball coaches ever. But years of seeing Popovich's greatness firsthand in San Antonio and Coach K's from afar have helped him understand how he did.

"They're thinking about the team all the time," Engelland says. "They're just trying to figure out how everything's gonna work together. And that could be from the walk-on players at Duke or the Spurs' two-way players. Those are all important decisions. It's not just: How do we handle the star? They're thinking about the walk-on player who may not play a minute that season."

This sounds so basic as to be unremarkable. But Krzyzewski's success does not come from what he does with X's and O's. It is his ability to shape people into a team—to understand that the last man on the bench might be at the center of the social circle, that the guy playing the best might not be playing hardest, that one player who is struggling might need encouragement while another who is struggling needs to be chewed out. Every interaction matters.

There are many ways to illustrate Krzyzewski's achievements. Five national titles. Twelve Final Fours. Almost 1,200 wins, more than any coach in Division I history. But this might explain him best: In Krzyzewski's 41 years at Durham (not counting this season), the Blue Devils have missed just five NCAA tournaments. One was in 1994-95, when Krzyzewski took a leave of absence because of back surgery and the team, which started 9-3, fell apart. Another was last season, when COVID-19 kept players and coaches from interacting as closely as they usually do. And the other three were his first three seasons at Duke, when he was mostly coaching players he had inherited. Even with the bulk of a team that made the Elite Eight the year before, Krzyzewski went 17-13 his first season. He followed that with two losing seasons.

But give him the face time with players he wanted, and Krzyzewski has almost always been unstoppable.

Mike Tissaw, who was one of the holdovers in the early years, says when Krzyzewski's first big recruiting class showed up, "It just dawned on me: Hey, you know, he has just always needed the kinds of players that he wants. And we haven't been those players, for the most part."

Krzyzewski had a different connection with that 1982 recruiting class, which featured Johnny Dawkins, Mark Alarie and Jay Bilas. It wasn't favoritism. The bond was genuine: "We're probably, early on, not as comfortable with him," Engelland says. "He's getting to know us on the fly. When you've been in everybody's living room when they're in high school, there's a closeness there."

Krzyzewski's Final Four teams in the 1980s were often depicted as scrappy overachievers, a lazy portrayal stemming from the fact that some prominent Blue Devils were white. (The '90-'91 Duke team that stunned UNLV in the NCAA Final Four had more lottery picks, three, than the Runnin' Rebels.) His recent teams have had so many one-and-done NBA stars that critics have wondered how much coaching is really involved. But through the years, Krzyzewski's greatest skill has been constant: He is a master at getting everybody in his program to do what he thinks they need to do.

Krzyzewski announced his pending retirement last June, shortly after rival Roy Williams of North Carolina had retired, and there was immediate speculation that name, image and likeness rules were sending the old guard out. But Krzyzewski has supported the new rules. He has pushed college basketball to modernize for years. He bristled at any implication that he couldn't handle change, and rightfully so: No basketball coach in history weathered so much so well.

When Krzyzewski took the Duke job, in 1980, there was no shot clock. When he first led the Blue Devils to the Final Four, in '86, there was no three-point line. He thrived when the game was dominated by seniors and then when freshmen ruled; before cellphones and in the social media age.

Krzyzewski is demanding and can go f-bomb for f-bomb with any coach in America. But what separates him from his mentor, Bob Knight, is his adaptability. Tissaw remembers thinking Coach K was "brilliant" when it came to teaching man-to-man, his long-preferred defense. But in 2015, Krzyzewski realized star freshmen Tyus Jones, Justise Winslow and Jahliil Okafor wouldn't stick around long enough to allow Duke to develop into a great man-to-man team. He started sprinkling in some zone, and the team won the national title.

Knight proudly called himself "an anachronism. . . . I'm 20 years behind the times"—and that was before he turned 40. Krzyzewski is 75, and his feet are planted firmly in 2022. He watches Duke film until he has peace of mind and watches his Chicago Bears on Sundays. His current team could seize his sixth national title—more than Knight and Dean Smith combined to win.

Coaching, especially on the collegiate level, requires a combination of manipulation and trust. The trust must come first. When he arrived at Duke, taking over after Bill Foster left for South Carolina, Krzyzewski went after some of the nation's top recruits and whiffed on all of them. He later blamed himself, saying, "We were recruiting too many people." He did not make that mistake again.

Even in the one-and-done era, with so much turnover on rosters, Coach K has arguably been the most selective recruiter in the country. Players know he does not throw scholarships around like candy. He makes an offer only when he really wants somebody. That faith builds the trust that serves as the foundation of his teams.

Krzyzewski is as competitive and feisty as the worst-behaved coaches, but self-aware enough not to be one of them. More than once he has sparred with the Duke student newspaper, *The Chronicle*, but he has apologized. He is relentlessly gracious in defeat, visiting the locker room of No. 14 seed Mercer to congratulate the Bears on beating his team in the 2014 tournament, and he can be charmingly self-deprecating and funny, too. A reporter once asked him whether he was a big karma guy, to which Krzyzewski responded: "A karma guy? I'm a Polish guy."

If the public persona was a recruiting tool, it was an effective one, and Krzyzewski has not let his image get in the way of his program. He timed his retirement announcement to give Duke time to form a succession plan—his former guard and current assistant, Jon Scheyer, will take over—but swore he would keep the focus on the season. For the 42nd straight year, he has done it.

Engelland knew his young coach ran exceptionally well-structured practices, and he remembers this, too: "He would stop it at the perfect time. The great coaches don't overtalk." Players did not have to step on the court before practice, but if they did, they had to work. The coach's favorite play, even then, was the charge, because it brought three levels of success: drawing a foul, forcing a turnover and making the opponent wary of driving to the basket again. Engelland does not remember a lot of "Knutie Rockne speeches." Once, before the Blue Devils played powerful Louisville in 1982, Krzyzewski turned out the locker room lights, entered with a candle and told his team they were not there to praise the Cardinals, they were there to beat them. They lost by 38.

As the defeats accumulated, Tissaw recalls, "A fairly influential faculty member, whom I liked a lot, actually said, 'I can guarantee that Coach K will not be here within the next year or two.'" Krzyzewski, who knew how precarious his standing was, has credited then AD Tom Butters for sticking with him. In January of Krzyzewski's fourth season—with Duke unranked, in the middle of a four-game losing streak and coming off a fifth straight loss to North Carolina—Butters gave him a five-year extension.

Dawkins's recruiting class saved Krzyzewski. It also gave him credibility with everyone who came after. In retrospect, what is remarkable about K's early years is that he was always himself, even when the whole campus seemed to want somebody else. The players on K's first teams did not reach the same heights as Christian Laettner or Shane Battier, but they got the same coaching.

"Pat Conroy, the writer, said, 'Losing teams don't have reunions,'" Engelland says. "And there's something wrong with that, but it is true."

In lieu of reunions, in many years players could go watch their coach and their alma mater in the Final Four and enjoy the reflected glory their successors provided. Duke talks about its "brotherhood," and cynics wince, but Engelland and his teammates are proof of it. Krzyzewski did not recruit them. They did not win much for him. And yet . . .

"They could be No. 1 in the country," Engelland says, "and if you wrote him a thank-you note, whether it was for tickets or just you know, Hey, Coach, just want to let you know, I'm playing here, and thanks, he would write you back. It was incredible."

The banners will remain long after Krzyzewski stops coaching. The letters will, too.

Why defense is key for Duke basketball and its chances for a first-place ACC finish

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (February 14, 2022)

At times this season, No. 9 Duke played the kind of lock-down defense that's defined the program throughout Mike Krzyzewski's 42 seasons.

A few other times, that defense faltered, particularly late in games.

Now that the Blue Devils are as healthy as they've been all season, with a key ACC game looming Tuesday night against Wake Forest at Cameron Indoor Stadium, they hope to make that defensive edge closer to a permanent weapon.

For the season, the Blue Devils (21-4, 11-3 ACC) are No. 18 in the country - but No. 1 in the ACC - in defensive efficiency, according to KenPom.com. Duke allows 90.9 points per 100 possessions (.909 per defensive possession).

The next best ACC team is Wake Forest at No. 42 nationally, allowing 94.7 points per 100 possessions.

Duke's stinginess was at its best in the game that currently allows the Blue Devils to sit atop the ACC standings.

Two weeks ago, on Jan. 31 at Notre Dame, the Blue Devils beat the Irish, 57-43. Without that win, Duke would not be tied with Notre Dame (18-7, 11-3 ACC) for first place.

After that game, a man who helped design Duke's defenses during some of the program's best seasons three decades ago saw the current Blue Devils at their lock down best and came away duly impressed.

"We've had Kentucky come through here, we've had Carolina come through here with bodies," Notre Dame coach, and former Duke assistant, Mike Brey said. "Ain't nobody got bodies like these guys. And so how do we combat that? We make 3s. We couldn't do it and I think I got to give them a lot of credit. They were just on us."

That night, Duke held the Irish to just 0.65 points per possession and the Irish had to hit a flurry of late shots to reach the 40-point mark. This from a Notre Dame team that averages 1.09 points per possession and 70 points per game for the season.

That's the best of a string of great defensive games for Duke in ACC play. Another was Jan. 22 against Syracuse, when Duke beat the Orange 79-59 by allowing Jim Boeheim's team to score just 0.88 points per possession.

When Duke won 76-64 at Wake Forest on Jan. 12, the Demon Deacons produced just 0.93 points per possession.

Duke is in position to place first in the ACC regular season standings for the first time since 2010 because only six times in 14 league games has an opponent produced more than a point per possession.

Of those six games, Duke's three ACC losses can be found. The worst, from a Duke perspective, was Jan. 18 in a 79-78 overtime loss at Florida State. The Seminoles scored 1.11 points per possession.

Virginia scored 1.08 in beating the Blue Devils, 69-68, on Feb. 7. Miami was at 1.07 in its 76-74 win at Cameron Indoor on Jan. 8.

In all three of those losses, Duke had a defensive breakdown in the final minute that reversed the result, like Virginia's Reece Beekman hitting a 3-pointer with 1.5 seconds left or Florida State's RayQuan Evans forcing overtime with a driving shot in the lane to beat the buzzer.

But those are the exceptions. Only Virginia has topped the point per possession mark against Duke in the Blue Devils' last five games.

So why has Duke been so good? It goes back to what Brey said about all those bodies.

Having the ACC's leading shot-blocker in 7-1 sophomore center Mark Williams is a great start. He's swatted away 76 shots or 3.04 per game.

On the perimeter, Trevor Keels and Wendell Moore are making it hard for teams to get into their offensive sets.

Moore, the 6-5 junior forward, gets the assignment to guard the opposing team's top scorer on many occasions.

"He's got a huge wingspan to go along with being 6-5," Krzyzewski said. "He moves his feet and he's really worked on his lateral movement. He's had some big time matchups for us that he's done very well. He, to me, is one of the best defensive players in our conference."

The 6-5, 221-pound Keels brings a sturdiness many other ACC guards can't match. He injured his lower right leg during the loss at Florida State and missed the next three games. A starter for Duke's first 17 games prior to the injury, he's come off the bench since returning over the last five games beginning with the win at Notre Dame.

Brey saw that when his team hit only 3 of 18 3-pointers that night. Open shots were hard to come by and Williams helped if anyone managed to drive inside from the perimeter.

"They really took our shooters away and then they got the shot blocker back there when you turn the corner," Brey said. "They swarmed us. We took some bad shots, some quick shots."

To finish off a first-place finish in ACC play, the Blue Devils need to do more of that over their final six regular season games.

They've certainly shown the ability to do so.

Coach K said he didn't want a farewell tour. His stop at BC provided one anyway.

By Gary Washburn, The Boston Globe (February 12, 2022)

The final game for Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski at Conte Forum transformed into the atmosphere into what BC coach Earl Grant would like to see far more frequently.

The bandbox arena was filled, mostly with Duke fans, including Celtics forward Jayson Tatum, with Celtics president of basketball operations Brad Stevens and assistant general manager Mike Zarren.

In addition to bidding Krzyzewski farewell, the Celtics trio made a rare appearance at BC to check out freshman phenom Paolo Banchero, perhaps the final great Duke player Krzyzewski will coach after 42 years at the school.

The Blue Devils are a Final Four caliber team, and they beat up on the feisty Eagles, 72-61, in front of a crowd of 8,606, at least half Duke fans. A program with such tradition travels well and the ACC is filled with these benchmark programs, making it almost unfair for BC to compete because it lacks that tradition.

Grant would love to see Conte Forum filled not only for games against Duke and North Carolina, but Florida State, Clemson, Virginia Tech and Pitt. But that's not likely in a market that mostly ignores the Eagles unless they are relevant or a national power comes to town.

"It gives us a good picture of what it should look like as we continue to try to build a program," Grant said. "Hopefully we get to a point where it's always like that, and all of them cheering for us."

In this case, the Blue Devils arrived in Boston early Friday morning, were unable to practice at Conte because of BC's hockey game Friday against UConn but were greeted by the usual packed house that welcomes them on the road.

Krzyzewski was honored before the game as BC announced it was contributing to the Emily Krzyzewski Center (Mike's mother) – something Krzyzewski said was greatly appreciated.

It was in the next two hours Krzyzewski truly was comfortable. He said he didn't want a farewell tour but that's exactly what is happening around the Atlantic Coast Conference, which is honoring one of the game's all-time great coaches who has run a clean and elite program for four decades.

"I've been received like I expected to be received at every [ACC venue], let me put it that way," Krzyzewski said tongue-in-cheek about visiting rival schools for the final time. "Overall, people have been really respectful. Look, I didn't stay this year to have a farewell tour. I stayed because I wanted to coach one more year. When a school takes some time out and says 'We recognize that you've been pretty good for the ACC and for basketball,' that means a lot."

Yet, the ultimate goal is going out on top. Krzyzewski has won five national titles and reached 12 Final Fours. But he hasn't won a title since beating Wisconsin in 2015, despite having the likes of Tatum, Zion Williamson, RJ Barrett, Cam Reddish, and Luke Kennard roll through the program.

So his focus is now on beating BC, winning the ACC, claiming a No. 1 seed, staying healthy, and being completely ready for a long tournament run.

Krzyzewski's final edition is a rugged club with a bunch of physical and skilled players but no real superstar.

This year's blue chipper is a Seattle manchild named Banchero, who is certainly going to be a top 5 NBA draft pick in June and will enter the league physically ready to play and with a skill set that makes him a potential cornerstone.

Krzyzewski doesn't appear to be as vocal or animated on the bench as in previous years. He allows his assistants, including coach-in-waiting Jon Scheyer, to direct a team that is a Final Four favorite, and prior to every ACC road game, Krzyzewski is receiving the recognition of one of the game's pioneers.

But he can't appreciate the adulation right now. It serves as more of a distraction, more of a hindrance.

"I'm in the next moment right away," he said. "It's maybe a stupid analogy; I said if I was a car, I wouldn't have a rear view mirror. In order to keep at it and keep hungry, you can't look back. You cannot look back, negatively or positively. You've got to keep your eyes on your lane right now. I've been very good at times, and I learned from not being good at it."

That's not to say he doesn't appreciate the kudos from opposing schools, his former players showing up at ACC road games, or former rival coaches posing for photos. But focusing on that takes away his attention from his current players, some of whom were in elementary school the last time Duke won a championship.

"When you coach for 47 years, there's a lot of things that you've failed at," he said. "When you fail, failure is a part of learning about a new limit. That's why a lot of parents don't allow their kids to get C's. You're not going to get better unless you're told the truth. When you lose and you don't do well, you should tell yourself the truth, and move on. And when you win, move on. Learn from both and get better. That's what I've tried to do."

"When it's over, I'll look back. There's no question I'll look back. We got to look back at, with Duke and [Team] USA. I've been the luckiest guy ever in coaching, 47 years at West Point and Duke, 11 years at USA; you can't get luckier than that."

"And I'll look back at it, but not now. Not when [BC is] making an 8-0 run to cut into a 16-point lead."

Virginia's buzzer-beater hands Duke a loss and a lesson

By David Thompson, Fayetteville Observer (February 8, 2022)

DURHAM – Duke sophomore Mark Williams was quick to take the blame after Monday's loss to Virginia.

It was indeed his man, Virginia's Reece Beekman, who got loose with 1.1 seconds left and hit a game-winning 3-pointer from the high corner to deliver a 69-68 win over No. 7 Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

"It was on me. I lost Beekman," said Williams, who played most of the second half with four fouls but still scored a game-high 16 points. "I should've stayed with him off the inbounds and he got an open look and he knocked it down. There's not much more to it. I just lost him. I take full responsibility for it. I let my teammates down."

It's an admirable admission but an oversimplification of how the Blue Devils (19-4, 9-3) suffered their fourth loss of the season. It was much more than a missed assignment that snapped a five-game winning streak two days after a convincing 20-point rout in Chapel Hill over rival UNC.

Led by 17 points from Jayden Gardner and an 8-of-8 performance from reserve forward Kadin Shedrick, Virginia scored 52 points in the paint and turned 15 Duke turnovers into 20 points.

The Cavaliers held a five-point halftime lead, Duke's largest deficit of the season, as only Paolo Banchemo and Bates Jones hit multiple field goals in the opening 20 minutes.

The Blue Devils trailed from the 9:27 mark in the first half until four minutes remaining in the second period. Despite that, they still had a chance to win before some critical late-game errors.

Jeremy Roach's pocket was picked by Beekman under Duke's basket with under two minutes to play, leading to a bucket that tied the game at 66. Then, Banchemo turned the ball over with 32 seconds remaining with Duke up by 2. Virginia's 5-foot-10 point guard Kihai Clark wrestled and won possession on a jump-ball tie-up with Duke's Theo John – who has a foot and 100 pounds on the undersized senior – with 7 seconds left in the game, setting up the final score.

Beekman's game-winner was Virginia's second make from beyond the arc.

"I'm glad we were 2 of 12 from 3 instead of 1 of 12," UVA coach Tony Bennett joked.

Maybe it was a Carolina hangover? Or maybe, as Coach K put it, it's his team using its rearview mirror.

"We made two bad plays. Two really bad plays. One on offense and the other on defense," said Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski. "And that's all it takes. They made plays. It's a tough loss because of how it ended, but we were not worthy of winning most of the game."

Banchemo held to 9 points

Banchemo missed a potential game-winning shot at the buzzer, launching a 3-pointer over two defenders on a shot that hit the side of the backboard – his only attempt of the second half.

It was the first game in a Duke uniform that Banchemo did not reach double-digit scoring, finishing with nine points, all in the first half. He was double-teamed by the Cavaliers for most of the second period.

"He needs to take more shots," Coach K said of his freshman phenom who is a favorite to win the ACC Player of the Year award. "He needs to take his jump shot."

Unlike the win over North Carolina, Banchemo's offensive struggles were not buoyed by the play of A.J. Griffin. The freshman scored a career-high 27 points against UNC and was named the ACC freshman of the week. He had two points against the Cavaliers.

"They're young ... We just tried to say, 'They have to earn it,'" said Virginia's Bennett, whose team earned its second Quad 1 win of the season and strengthened its shaky NCAA Tournament bid.

"Teams are hungry and we've got to be hungry after we've eaten. They were hungrier and tougher than we were tonight," Coach K said.

NCAA Tournament impact

The loss pushed Duke into a tie for first place in the ACC with Notre Dame but also gave light to an alarming trend. The Blue Devils have lost all four games – Ohio State, Miami, Florida State, Virginia – by a combined nine points, and in each loss, led in the final minute of the game.

Freshman Trevor Keels wore a wry smile when he was asked about those close losses.

Should the Blue Devils be concerned with how they close out games?

Keels reply? Nah.

"We didn't lose a championship here," said Keels, who scored all 12 of his points in the second half. "We can learn from this. We've got to be mad about this, but mad in a good way. This is how things are going to be in March."

It's true, but March is only a few weeks away and this loss could have a significant impact on Duke's seeding in the NCAA Tournament.

Virginia started the week ranked No. 88 in the NET (NCAA Evaluation Tool), giving the Blue Devils its first Quad 3 loss of the season. Only three Top 20 NET teams – Duke, UCLA and LSU – have a Quad 3 loss. The Blue Devils also have Quad 2 losses to Miami and FSU.

"We're high D-I players. We've got the best trainers in the world, so we can't make excuses and say that our bodies were hurting from the UNC game and stuff like that," Keels said. "We've got to prepare better mentally and be ready for when people punch us in the mouth. We're going to get everybody's best shot."

Coach K's final games at Cameron

After Monday's loss to Virginia, only three home games remain in the Krzyzewski era.

The Blue Devils will travel to Clemson on Thursday to a Tigers team they narrowly defeated at Cameron, 71-69, on Jan. 25 before playing their fourth game in eight days at Boston College on Saturday.

Duke will return to Cameron on Feb. 15 to host Wake Forest (19-5, 9-4 ACC) and look for revenge at home against Florida State (13-9, 6-6) on Feb. 19. The Blue Devils lost to the Seminoles on the road, 79-78 on Jan. 18, before beginning their current six-game win streak.

Duke will play two of its last three conference games on the road, facing Syracuse (Feb. 26) and Pitt (March 1) before Coach K's final game at Cameron Indoor against rival UNC on March 5.

Duke's loss to Virginia fits a pattern, and not a particularly good one

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (February 8, 2022)

DURHAM, N.C. – The fans outside Section 12 of Cameron Indoor's upper concourse would like another look, now. Like, right now. (Masochists? Maybe.) They're all congregating, clumping, like flies in a spider's web, trying to get a glimpse of the single flat-screen television catty-corner from the corridor they've just come spilling out of. In the span of seconds, the walkway they're filling – four, five, then six wide – goes from a wholly good hallway to a festering ground for frustration. And in this case, misery and fury love company.

But as the replay rolls, it's all there. Duke 68, Virginia 66. A measly 7.2 seconds to play. Then the official's whistle blows, Reece Beekman inbound the ball ... and the nightmare comes to life all over again.

Mark Williams, all 7-foot-1 of him and his 7-foot-7 wingspan, stretched out like Inspector Gadget on the baseline, trying to deny Beekman's entry pass; Beekman finding Kihei Clark in the corner anyway; Clark backing up, taking three dribbles and looking for an open shot from 3; Clark realizing, in real time, that Beekman has broken free of his defender; firing the pass to the open man in the high corner; Paolo Banchero seeing the same opening and scrambling to contest Beekman's shot; and, finally, Beekman rising up regardless – and sinking the 3-point dagger that dealt Duke its fourth defeat this season. "I," said one older fan, his hands behind his head in a surefire surrender cobra, "just cannot believe it."

One replay is, unsurprisingly, enough for most fans to suffer. The mob dissipates. The dreary parking lot march begins.

If only it were that easy for Duke to move on from a loss like this.

Only ... should it be that easy? And really, after Monday night's 69-68 upset, how much moving on should the Blue Devils be doing? Four games in eight days sort of necessitates some Ted Lasso logic here – have the memory of a goldfish, right? – but at the same time, there's something here worth stirring over: a pattern, and not a particularly good one.

It's not so much that Monday's loss is a carbon copy of Duke's previous three, to Ohio State, Miami, and Florida State. It's more that Monday's loss feels more like a combination of those three. Consider: Against Ohio State, Duke was four days removed from the emotional high of beating No. 1 Gonzaga in Las Vegas. And Monday, Duke was just two days removed from a 20-point blowout of rival North Carolina. Emotional letdown? Check. Against Miami, Duke allowed 52 points in the paint. And Monday, it allowed the exact same to a Virginia team not exactly known for its interior scoring prowess. Out-efforted inside? Check. Against Florida State, Wendell Moore's driving runner – when he had other offensive options – got blocked to end the game. And on Monday, Williams lost track of the inbounder to lock in another defeat. Late-game miscues? Check.

Four losses by a combined nine points don't sound all that bad on the surface. Then you peel back a layer or two, and you can see some cracks in the paint.

"I mean, we lost four games pretty much the same way," Trevor Keels said. "At the end of the day, we've gotta make changes."

And that, really, cuts to the heart of why Monday's result was so troubling, not just for the Duke diehards glumly watching the replay of a loss together but also for Mike Krzyzewski. If these losses are supposed to be things his team learns from, then at some point, it does have to show that it has learned.

"We've made (plays late) against Clemson, we've made them at the end of Gonzaga," Krzyzewski said. "What do you have to do? You have to make a play. If you get the ball in the lane, you have to get a shot, and we weren't able to get a shot. Then we missed the defensive assignment on the last play, and when you do that, you lose. But we're collectively responsible for that. I'm not blaming anybody. I'm just saying, we make two plays and we win."

He's right. Really, the fact that Duke was even in position to win late on Monday says something about just how flat-out freakin' talented his team is. When you allow that many points in the paint – so many so that you play as extended a stretch of zone as you have arguably all season – and still have the lead with 30 seconds left? When A.J. Griffin, your star-in-the-making Saturday against North Carolina, scores only two points ... but graduate transfer Bates Jones hits two big first-half 3s instead? When Williams racks up four fouls early in the second half but manages to play through them and score a team-high 16 points in just under 19 minutes? That's a game you probably don't deserve to win, but you grind out a way to do so.

Duke's talent put it in that position, and its continued issue closing games took it right back out.

If this seems like an overblown ordeal, well, it's not. Because the fine print on Krzyzewski's final season has always been title or bust. As Keels said, "We'd rather this happen now than March." But now in two tournament-like settings – a big win one day, a disappointing loss days later – the Blue Devils have dropped the ball. It doesn't need to explicitly be said, but Krzyzewski did on Monday, since, well, it's that important.

"If you're fortunate and you've earned the right to play in the NCAA Tournament and you win a big game on a Thursday or Friday, you have a quick turnaround and you have to win another one, and in order to do it you have to win six," the coach said. "A lot of people win one, then you have two, then you have a break. Then a lot of people win three – but not a lot of people win four. It's a bridge you have to cross, and you have to learn how to cross it."

In mid-February now, though, Duke has more and more recent experiences of not bridging that gap. Gonzaga happened, yes, but in November. We're three months past that. We're not past these problems, though.

If it were a poor shooting performance – Duke wasn't lights-out, hitting 42.3 percent from the floor and 35.3 percent from 3, but it wasn't terrible either – then that's one thing. The repetitiveness here, though, is the real concern as much as anything.

So while, yes, the searing image in fans' minds will be Beekman's buzzer-beater, that alone isn't the issue. It's one of them. Credit to Williams for taking the blame for that missed defensive assignment, but the blame for the loss is far from his alone to carry. (If not for his battling with Virginia's Francisco Caffaro and Kadin Shedrick inside, and showing savvy through some difficult foul situations, Duke wouldn't have been in a position to win whatsoever.) "It's on me," Williams said of that final sequence. "Take full responsibility for it. Let my teammates down." That's a mature response from a sophomore center, but it's also outsized blame for the more basic reasons the Blue Devils faltered.

As it had against Ohio State, Miami, and Florida State – games this team lost by a combined eight points – Duke again led in the final two minutes. On a roster with potentially five first-round picks, regardless of their being freshmen or not, and the winningest coach in men's college basketball history, you'd take the odds of a win 100 times out of 100 in those scenarios.

You don't have to win 100 games with this group, though. Just six.

There's a reason Duke has been a top-10 team in the country all season. Its championship ceiling is still there, unshattered.

But the floor, at least right now, is also far more familiar than it should be. With eight weeks exactly from Monday night to the national championship game, it's time Duke starts floating up again – only this time, without the increasingly common comedown.

Duke delivers a statement win in Coach K's final game at the Smith Center

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (February 6, 2022)

CHAPEL HILL -- Duke could have spent the final five minutes running the Four Corners in Mike Krzyzewski's final tribute to Dean Smith, a bitter rival who became a compatriot, the titan of the ACC that Krzyzewski spent years trying to dethrone only to, eventually, become.

Krzyzewski openly mused this week that it would be a shame if North Carolina ever slapped a corporate name on the Smith Center, which in today's world of college athletics isn't quite the leap of logic it once might have been.

Then again, Krzyzewski exited the floor for the last time Saturday, having all but stamped his own name on the building somewhere.

It's difficult, in the 256th edition of anything, to do something -- anything -- new, but Duke managed to deliver a performance worthy of the moment, commemorating the coach's final game in Chapel Hill with one of Duke's biggest wins in the series, an 87-67 drubbing. At one point, Duke led by 28, approaching Duke's record 29-point win in Chapel Hill in North Carolina's disastrous 2002 season.

"Anytime you get a win of this magnitude in this rivalry, it means a lot for us," Duke's Wendell Moore Jr. said. "It was about more than Duke and Carolina. This was coach's last time coming to North Carolina. We wanted to send him out with a win."

It wasn't quite Duke's 104-69 win in Woollen Gym in 1964 -- Vic Bubas was on the bench for that one -- but it's hard to imagine Krzyzewski exiting this particular patch of real estate more authoritatively than this, with his 50th win over North Carolina and second-biggest win in the building.

To sum it up: A.J. Griffin, goodness.

Leaky Black all but shut down Paolo Banchero for long stretches of the game but Griffin was too good, the best player on the court by far on his way to 27 points, whether launching from the outside or driving the lane for dunks.

As embarrassing as it was for North Carolina, which fell behind 31-8 early and cut the Duke lead to 11 before Griffin went on a personal 10-0 run to start the second half, it would have been worse without Brady Manek, whose outside shooting and 21 points was all that kept the Heels afloat at times.

Armando Bacot was in early foul trouble, Caleb Love was a mess and a crowd primed to party right from the first profane chant directed at Krzyzewski was left alternately stunned and angry before a trickle of fans toward the exits with five minutes to go became a flood.

"You could tell everyone on the team, including coach, wanted to do something special for him in his last game," Griffin said. "Coming into this environment, the older guys knew what to expect, and the younger guys were hungry to win."

It was all so jarring and unexpected, because even in the most unbalanced years the pendulum never seems to swing too far one way or the other. And even when it does, it swings back quickly. The gap between these teams has rarely been as large as it was Saturday.

"They're better than us," Krzyzewski said in 2009, with the Tar Heels seemingly ascendant, only for Duke to answer with a national title a year later. Hubert Davis had his version of that Saturday.

"There are times when you tip your hat to a certain player or team with regard to the way they played," Davis said.

With a minute to go, Krzyzewski called timeout to send his grandson, Michael Savarino, into the game. Krzyzewski and Savarino and the other four Duke players on the court huddled and locked arms for a moment.

"It wasn't that I wanted to get my grandson in my last game. He was the next guy to go in," Krzyzewski said. "But the fact that we won at the end fairly convincingly was big."

Then Savarino dribbled out the final seconds of his grandfather's final win at the Smith Center, a family affair, beckoning to the crowd to bring on the boos, also a family affair.

But by the time Krzyzewski left the court and walked into the tunnel, the noise was gone. All that was left was one of the biggest wins in the history of this rivalry, a final statement on this most hostile of floors.

Duke makes sure Coach K enjoys his final game at Chapel Hill

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (February 6, 2022)

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – Champion bus No. 3,086 is, if nothing else, direct.

As it rounded its final turn Saturday afternoon – a left off Skipper Bowles Drive into the back parking lot of the Dean Smith Center – and rolled down the sloping hill that is UNC’s loading dock, Duke’s game-day transportation came to a sudden (yet somehow soft) stop. Heat was still permeating off those rows of rubber tires, the bus barely shifted into park, when the front door slid open and disembarking began.

First came Duke’s staffers and team managers, bounding down the bus steps and sprinting back to the underbelly to unpack: foam rollers, black duffel bags stuffed with jerseys, orange Gatorade coolers and more. Then came the players. Freshman Stanley Borden was the first to emerge, followed by A.J. Griffin, scout team guard Spencer Hubbard and the rest thereafter. Next were the assistant coaches: Jon Scheyer, Chris Carrawell, Nolan Smith. And lastly, for the 42nd and final time, Mike Krzyzewski. As he spun off the bus and into the bowels of the Smith Center, an overflowing black folder of notes firmly clenched in his left fist, it was 4:14 p.m.

Just in time, right? Almost two hours, to the minute, before tipoff of the greatest rivalry in college sports: North Carolina vs. Duke.

And though all these games are special, all of them lauded (and understandably so) for these two shades of blue-tinted laundry, this one still stood out. Will stand out. Was always going to stand out. Because since 1980, when Krzyzewski was first hired in Durham, he has made this annual 8-mile passage, bringing with him some of the best teams and players the sport has seen. Christian Laettner, Grant Hill, Jay Williams, JJ Redick – all have made this drive, sometimes even with the same chauffeur, just for the chance to compete under Krzyzewski in Chapel Hill. (The chance to silence UNC’s crowd – its student section chanted, “Fuck Coach K” when Krzyzewski first appeared – is a bonus.) There have been wins. There have been losses. But there has always been another game.

And there still will be, next spring ... just not with Krzyzewski on the sideline.

That fact, despite Coach K’s attempts at minimizing this season’s sentimentality, ensured Saturday’s game was always going to stand out just that little bit more. Someone, like Wendell Moore Jr. did two seasons ago, will always steal the spotlight – come on down, Mr. Griffin – but Krzyzewski’s shadow was going to be tied to Saturday night, regardless of the result. “I mean, obviously none of us went up and told him, ‘We’re gonna win this for you,’” Moore said, “but on the inside, we wanted to do this for Coach because he really deserves it.”

Consider it done and then some. Win the game for Krzyzewski? Pssh. How about “completely crush our archrivals” for Krzyzewski?

Because that is what happened. The final score – an 87-67 shellacking that ties for the second-largest road margin of victory over UNC in the Krzyzewski era – doesn’t even fully capture how dominant the Blue Devils were. Not since North Carolina’s infamous 8-20 season during the 2001-02 season have the Tar Heels been so properly thumped. But first-half leads of 13-2 and 31-8 (!!) do, indeed, indicate a thumping. A terrible lopsidedness, really. (To the two North Carolina fans smoking cigarettes just down the road after the game, outside the entrance to the Kenan-Flagler Business School: We get it. Drag away.)

“I thought we started out so well,” Krzyzewski said. “We really won the first 12 minutes of the first half.”

Again, that’s putting it lightly. If there was hope for North Carolina entering Saturday’s contest, considering the four- or five-to-zero imbalance of future first-round picks on each team’s roster, it was to feed All-ACC-caliber big man Armando Bacot early and often, then to surround him with several 3-point shooters. Well ... about that. Bacot, initially matched up with Paolo Banchemo defensively, drew two fouls in the first 3:05 of the game, sending him to the bench in short order. And other than Brady Manek, who drained six of his 10 3-point attempts, the rest of UNC’s roster combined to make just three of its other 12 deep attempts.

Strike one and strike two.

No strike three was needed because the Tar Heels were already out.

At the risk of oversimplifying this sort of blowout, things were mostly decided in the first 12 minutes. With Bacot parked on the bench, Duke drove to the rim at will. The Blue Devils’ first basket after Bacot exited? An emphatic dunk from Griffin, who was only just getting started. By the time Bacot returned later in the first half, the damage was done; Duke led by 19, a margin it mostly maintained the rest of the game.

Now, if there was one instance when Duke’s vice grip on victory was even slightly less strong, it was over the last eight minutes before halftime. After going up 31-8, Duke stumbled a bit by allowing UNC to rip off a 20-8 run of its own. But again, that North Carolina could end the first half on a plus-12 stretch and still be down 11 at the break sorta says it all, no?

“I just told them (at halftime) that we won the first 12 and they won the next eight. If they start out the first four like the last eight, they’re going to beat us,” Krzyzewski said of his halftime message. “But if we start out the first four like we did the first 12, then we’re going to win. In our really good games, we’ve come out well in the second half. Tonight, we came out great – because of A.J.”

“Great” doesn’t even seem gratuitous enough to describe what Griffin did next. Because “great” is when you take an 11-point lead into halftime, on the road, against your most hated rival. What Griffin did? Ordinary human beings just don’t – can’t – do those sorts of things.

As he is quickly proving, though, Griffin is anything but ordinary. In Duke’s road win a week ago over Louisville, Griffin’s five 3-pointers ended the Cardinals’ hopes of a comeback. Against Notre Dame on Monday, in a game in which Duke scored 57 points, Griffin had “only” 13, plus a season-high seven rebounds. Ho-hum. Yet for all of Griffin’s stupendous performances of late, it’s hard to argue any was more impressive or impactful than his first 2 minutes, 46 seconds after intermission. The game log reads as follows:

Made jumper by Griffin.
Made 3-point jumper by Griffin.
Made 3-point jumper by Griffin.
Made jumper by Griffin.

Not a typo. Just your casual, totally normal, 10-0 personal run to end whatever spark North Carolina thought it had. As Krzyzewski put it, “A.J. exploded.”

“Reading the defender and whatever he gives you, just let it fly or take it to the hole,” Griffin said when asked what he saw during that stretch. OK, then. Must’ve really liked what he saw.

And to some extent, he should’ve. North Carolina opened the game with Bacot defending Banchemo, but when early foul trouble flubbed up that plan, Hubert Davis shifted his strategy and put Leaky Black, UNC’s best individual defender, on Banchemo instead. And that worked decently well; Banchemo had five points in the first minute and a half of the game, then didn’t score again until midway through the second half. The problem, though, is that Black is just one person. Banchemo and Griffin make ... two.

You see North Carolina’s dilemma here?

“Unfortunately, we couldn’t divide Leaky into two players. We just didn’t have an answer for those two,” Davis said. “At the end of the day, Paolo and A.J. were better than anybody that we had tonight.”

Back to the moment, though, Griffin’s outburst pushed the lead back over 20, and any momentum UNC had built was quickly undone. From then on, the last 17 or so minutes of the game, it was only a question of how large a lead the Blue Devils could build. (The answer is 28, by the way, which came with 3:53 remaining. The Smith Center stands had cleared out long before then, as you might expect.)

In the end, Griffin set a career high in scoring with 27 points, cementing himself as the star of the night. But even if he weren’t as humble as he is, you already know where Griffin’s praise was going after the game: back to Krzyzewski. “I could tell everyone on the team, including Coach, really wants to do something special for him, especially his last game (here),” the star freshman said. “We’re just happy we got it done for him. For real.”

Take a longer look at Griffin’s last quote, though, and see if you spot the double meaning. Yes, of course Duke’s players understand the enormity of this rivalry in the larger college basketball landscape and in the context of their coach helping create it. Duke-UNC always delivers, but a large part of the reason is that Krzyzewski built a program capable of holding up one half of that bargain. Even considering the storied history between these schools, “something special” is not just one win, even if it is against that team from down the road. Rivalry wins matter, of course, and have throughout Krzyzewski’s tenure. This win will undoubtedly be a fond memory in hindsight.

Yet at Duke, “special” carries a certain standard, one that takes the form of the five blue-and-white banners hanging in the Cameron Indoor rafters.

So, yes, a special night. One that will be remembered, celebrated and rejoiced for years, even after Krzyzewski’s sixth-floor office ceases to be the center of Duke’s basketball universe. But Saturday night in Chapel Hill was more than that, too.

It was a night when Duke very much looked like a team capable of achieving that superior special, too. When, before the nation’s watchful eye, “Sights on Six” went from a catchphrase to an attainable aspiration.

For that reason, that longer-term focus – and, you know, the fact that it hosts Virginia on Monday – this won’t be a win Duke can relish for a long time. “Really,” Moore said, smiling, “the only time we have to enjoy this is from here back on the bus ride to Durham.” Fair enough, then. In that case, better hope champion bus No. 3,086 takes its time driving home.

Or, the next best thing, takes its time leaving. When Griffin finally finished his postgame interview in the Smith Center’s visiting locker room, the team bus was already on the proverbial tarmac, ready to depart. At 8:11 p.m., the sun having set long ago – the feel outside by then was damn close to Duke’s final margin of victory – the bus sat there idling and spitting out smoke into the chilly sky. A minute later, Griffin ran out of the loading-dock exit, shuffling speedily up the slope in his warmups and black sneakers. As he boarded, the sliding door closed right behind him, likely before he could even take a seat.

Then, in the reversal of its afternoon ritual, the bus began its slow ascent out of the loading dock and Chapel Hill at large. It hit the real road, a right turn onto Skipper Bowles, just as the clock was flipping to 8:14 p.m.

Talk about an ideal four-hour business trip.

When Duke and UNC play, former teammates will be on opposite sides of rivalry

By C.L. Brown, Raleigh News & Observer (February 4, 2022)

Leaky Black committed to North Carolina while still a sophomore at Concord's Cox Mills High School, and he was extremely invested in getting one of his teammate to follow.

UNC coach Hubert Davis, then an assistant, was the primary recruiter responsible for calling and texting Wendell Moore.

Black was unofficially a recruiter, too.

"He was on me about coming to Carolina, because they were obviously one of the heavier teams that recruited me early in the process," Moore said. "He was on me a lot at that point. When I made the decision to come to Duke, ever since then there have kind of been jokes between us every time we play."

The two former teammates will square off when Duke and Carolina renew their rivalry Saturday at 6 p.m. at the Dean E. Smith Center. They may even find themselves matched up against one another.

Moore and Black are 2-2 in head-to-head meetings, although Moore has one-up on Black after making the game-winning putback in overtime to beat Carolina back in 2020.

But they won't be the only former teammates on opposite sides of the rivalry matchup this season. Carolina sophomore guard R.J. Davis and Duke freshman forward A.J. Griffin both played their prep years for Archbishop Stepinac in White Plains, N.Y. Saturday will be the first time they've played against each other.

"We're just happy for each other's success," R.J. Davis said. "For him to be at Duke, for me to be at North Carolina, where we're from, that's a big time accomplishment. So that's something that we congratulate each other on."

Wayne Ellington, who currently plays for the Los Angeles Lakers, recalls when he and Gerald Henderson talked about possibly staying home to play for Villanova as teammates when they both starred at Episcopal Academy in Marion, Pa.

Ellington and Henderson were each recruited by Carolina and Duke. Ellington ended up in Chapel Hill, Henderson in Durham.

"It was weird at first that first Carolina-Duke game, it was intense," Ellington told The News & Observer. "There's obviously a lot of a lot of hype behind it. And then that being my first time playing against my former teammate, it was different for me. It was different, but it was fun. It was super competitive."

Henderson now runs his own luxury real estate firm in Charlotte – Henderson Ventures – with his wife. Henderson said Ellington has made investments and deals with him, and they're like brothers. But Ellington is quick to remind him of the Heels' 5-1 record against his Blue Devil teams from 2006-09.

"We're still best friends, man, and family," Henderson told the N&O. "But he always reminds me, always reminds me. We're such competitive dudes and comedians, so we're always cracking on each other and trying to one-up each other."

'A MUTUAL RESPECT'

Ellington served as a peacemaker when Henderson became a villain to Carolina fans. In the closing moments of the Heels' 86-72 win during their freshmen season in 2006-07, Henderson committed a hard foul on Tyler Hansbrough that left him with a bloody nose.

Those who didn't know Henderson took it as intentional, but Ellington knew otherwise. He was the first to call Henderson as Duke was on their bus ride back to Durham. And Ellington also served as a peacemaker who gave Henderson Hansbrough's phone number so he could call and apologize.

"I was trying to defuse the situation the best I could, but it was intense man," Ellington said. "It was an intense situation especially, obviously, within that rivalry. Nobody was trying to hear it when I'd say it wasn't intentional. It wasn't on purpose. Everybody was pretty pissed off to say the least."

Without Ellington's presence, the "bad blood" may have continued, but it dissipated. (Henderson and Hansbrough teamed up to do a podcast together in 2017.)

"There's a mutual respect there, especially since we're doing the same thing," Henderson said. "We know what it's like being in college and under the lights and being part of this rivalry. There's no real hate there, I mean, besides some of the fans that take it too serious. But it's all love man."

IMPACT PLAYERS

Black, R.J. Davis, Griffin and Moore won't all be happy after Saturday night's matchup. But all four will have a say in the game's outcome.

Black is averaging 9.0 points, 4.5 rebounds and 3.7 assists during the Heels' four game winning streak. He's also gone 7-for-11 from 3-point range during that stretch.

Davis is third on the Heels in scoring averaging 13.9 points per game. He leads the team shooting 42.6% from 3-point range for those with more than 25 attempts.

Griffin has started the past seven games for the Blue Devils after slowly coming back from a knee injury. He's averaging 9.0 points and 3.5 rebounds.

Moore emerged as a leader for Duke this season. He's second on the team with 14.2 points per game and leads the Blue Devils with 4.5 assists.

Hubert Davis said the relationships are a lot different now than when he was a player, when grassroots basketball in the summer wasn't as big as it is now.

"That's the different part, the kids now they have relationships, they have friendships with so many different people from different parts of the country, different places," Davis said. "And so whether you come to UNC-Duke or wherever those relationships continue to exist while they're playing college, and I think that's really neat."

Wendell Moore Jr.'s road from Dean Dome legend to leader of Duke men's basketball

By Jonathan Levitan, Duke Chronicle (February 3, 2022)

It only takes a moment for a legend to be born in the Tobacco Road rivalry. For Wendell Moore Jr., it took less than a second.

Thanks to a furious Duke comeback and a breathtaking end to regulation, college basketball's most storied rivalry was tied at 96 with 6.6 seconds on the clock in overtime. Naturally, the ball wound up in the hands of sophomore guard and eventual ACC Player of the Year Tre Jones, whose buzzer-beating jumper had just given the Blue Devils an extra five minutes of life in Chapel Hill.

With the clock winding down and defenders collapsing onto him, Jones hoisted the potential winning shot from midrange. In what already appeared an instant classic, it only made sense that Jones should provide the storybook conclusion.

But when Jones' jumper fell short, missing everything, a streaking Moore caught the errant shot under the hoop and put it back up and in. By the time the ball fell through the net and the freshman forward managed to turn back toward the court, the buzzer had already sounded, and Moore had already etched his name into history.

"It really just means everything to me," Moore said after the game. "[As] a kid growing up from Charlotte watching this game for 18 years of my life and getting a chance to be a part of it with a group of guys like this, and just the things we overcame this game meant everything to us. We knew this was a big game for us and this was a game that we had to win."

Initially, as he stood facing the court beneath the basket, Moore looked to be in disbelief, briefly pausing as if to make sure he wasn't dreaming. Then, under the bright lights of North Carolina's famed Dean Dome, Moore had his moment.

It took only that moment for Moore's story to begin, but years for it to grow. All this time later—almost two years to the date—Moore will step back into the Dean Dome once again. This time, though, he'll take the court as Duke's captain and cornerstone. This time, those lights are shining brighter than ever.

January 2021

For as grand as the start of Moore's story was, his next chapter drew far fewer eyes. Much of his sophomore season played out in front of empty stands and cardboard cutouts, a far cry from that moment in Chapel Hill.

Heading into the new season, expectations for Moore—a preseason All-ACC selection—were considerably higher. But it was fellow sophomore Matthew Hurt, followed closely by tantalizing freshman Jalen Johnson, who made the leap for a Duke team in need of a star. Moore ended up taking a backseat in a rather surprising turn.

"Wendell [Moore] is really struggling," said head coach Mike Krzyzewski after an early-season loss to Illinois. "God bless him. He's just really struggling."

After three rocky games, Moore ceded his starting spot and went scoreless in his first two games off the bench. His outlook seemed bleak until a January matchup with Boston College: with Duke down 16 early, the sophomore forward dumped a career-high 25 points on the Eagles to lift Duke to an 83-82 win, including an all-important baseline jumper with under a minute remaining.

In a season that, by and large, saw Moore struggle, his performance that night in a deafeningly quiet Cameron Indoor Stadium proved to be a beacon of light in an otherwise trying campaign.

"We're a different team [with Moore playing well]," said acting head coach Jon Scheyer after the game. "His versatility is something that we've missed."

Scheyer was right: Moore never truly got it going for a prolonged stretch in 2020-21, and neither did the Blue Devils, who ended up missing out on their first NCAA tournament in a quarter-century.

In a February matchup against the Tar Heels in Durham, Moore's solid play gave his team a chance to tie the game on the last possession. In stark contrast to his game-winner the year prior, Moore was called for a travel as he closed in on the hoop, and North Carolina walked out of Cameron Indoor Stadium with the win.

There was no signature moment this time. Heading into his junior season, the lights shone dimmer for Moore and the Blue Devils.

November 2021

Something changed for Moore between the end of his sophomore season and the beginning of his junior year. As he took the court against Kentucky for a top-10 matchup in Madison Square Garden to open the season, the same player who had failed to seize the spotlight a year earlier looked incredibly well-prepared to handle the bright lights.

Duke won that night and Moore impressed, even if his 12 points played second fiddle to breakout debuts from freshmen Trevor Keels and Paolo Banchero. Still, the difference in Moore's on-court presence was hard to miss.

In one fell swoop, both Duke and Moore seemed to announce, "I'm back." But for the junior captain, this had been months in the making.

"I think for me, that confidence really started in the offseason," Moore said later in the season. "Basically, once our season ended last year, it wasn't really down time for me. I was right back on campus with Coach Will [Stephens], our strength coach, just doing as much work as we can to prepare for this season. That's really where the confidence comes from."

The redefinition of Moore's game mainly happened behind closed doors, far from the grandeur of Madison Square Garden. The hints were there throughout the preseason: heaps of praise from the coaching staff, his appointment as captain, rumblings of a dominant performance in a not-so-secret scrimmage against Villanova. All signs pointed towards a remarkably confident player.

The rumors were true, and it didn't take Duke fans long to put their faith in Moore once again. Just days later, with Duke going up against Army in a game rife with other storylines and noise, he stole the show by posting the fifth triple-double in school history.

By the time Duke toppled top-ranked Gonzaga in Las Vegas—Moore posted 20 points, six rebounds and six assists—he had established himself as arguably the most important player on one of the best teams in the country.

"He spent seven weeks this April and May changing how he ran, how he walked," said Krzyzewski after the win. "He busted his butt with our medical people. He's an inch taller, he's a better athlete, his force and how he runs has changed and he took a look at himself and said, 'These are the things [I need to improve on], how I walk, how I run,' and it's worked out. But you have to be open to that, and then you have to work."

"He's worked really hard," Krzyzewski added. "That kid is really having a hell of a year. He's my captain."

February 2022

After a fairytale start to the season, things got tougher for Moore and Duke in 2022 as conference play picked up. The Blue Devils fell twice in four games, dropping a pair of ACC matchups against Miami and Florida State by one possession each.

"I really think that all starts with me," Moore said after the loss to Miami. "Tonight, I didn't lead the guys the way I'm supposed to. Up three with 30 seconds left, I feel like, as a leader, I can't let our team lose that game. So really I kind of put this one on me as a leader."

If it wasn't already clear, those losses showed once and for all that this Duke team goes as its junior captain goes. Moore couldn't convert on the final possession of overtime against Florida State nor could he sink the go-ahead shot against the Hurricanes, but there is a reason that the ball wound up in his hands on both occasions.

And so, as his junior-year honeymoon ends and Duke's late-season challenges begin to present themselves, Moore comes back to where it all began, the spot of his moment frozen in time.

When asked at September's ACC Tipoff to name his favorite stadium excluding Cameron Indoor, Moore didn't hesitate: "Non-Cameron? Dean Dome."

Things likely won't go down the same way they did in 2020, but then again, Moore is no longer the player he was then. This time, he won't find the spotlight on him suddenly.

The lights are already shining.

As Coach K prepares for final Chapel Hill trip, a look back at his first game at UNC

By Chip Alexander, Raleigh News & Observer (February 2, 2022)

The headline in The News & Observer read “Heels Crush Blue Devils,” and the 1981 game was neatly wrapped up in one story in the sports section.

The Tar Heels won 80-65 on their home court – then Carmichael Auditorium – as Al Wood scored 20 points and James Worthy 17. The Blue Devils, missing 12 of 17 free throws in the first half, fell behind 40-25 and never recovered in losing at UNC for the 15th consecutive time, the N&O reported.

So ended Mike Krzyzewski’s first trip to Chapel Hill with Duke.

Duke and North Carolina had played earlier in the season in the Big Four Tournament in Greensboro, the Tar Heels winning 78-76. But the second game was Coach K’s first in Carmichael. The loss was Duke’s fourth in row, dropping its record to 7-7 in Krzyzewski’s first season as head coach.

“Our inability to handle pressure and missing so many free throws hurt us,” Krzyzewski said after the game. “I thought Carolina did a real good job with their half-court pressure. We didn’t handle it well.”

That was on Jan. 17, 1981. There have been many more short trips to Chapel Hill for Krzyzewski as the Duke-Carolina rivalry became as intense and storied as any in college basketball history in the past 40 years.

Former UNC coaches Dean Smith and Bill Guthridge have retired and both have passed away. Roy Williams retired after last season, and Hubert Davis was named his successor as the UNC basketball lineage has continued.

Coach K remains at Duke, but will be making his last venture into Chapel Hill this week, his retirement set after this season. The Blue Devils, ranked No. 9, will face the Tar Heels at the Smith Center on Saturday, playing a team undefeated at home this season.

Interestingly, Krzyzewski’s first game in the Triangle was at N.C. State’s Reynolds Coliseum – as a player. Army, coached by Bob Knight, was beaten 75-60 by the Wolfpack in the Triangle Classic in December 1967, the Black Knights’ worst loss in what would be a 20-5 season. Krzyzewski had two points and five fouls in that game at Reynolds as the Pack’s Eddie Biedenbach was the star with 21 points –

Krzyzewski guarded Biedenbach and did a creditable job on the speedy guard in the first half. Krzyzewski, a junior guard, had the winning free throw the next night as Army edged Yale 50-49 in the consolation game.

After playing and later coaching at Army, Krzyzewski was a surprise pick by then athletic director Tom Butters at Duke to replace Bill Foster as the Blue Devils’ head coach in March 1980. He inherited a team with such players as Gene Banks and Kenny Dennard, who had helped Duke win the ACC championship and reach the Final Four in 1978.

In that 1981 game in Chapel Hill, Dennard fouled out with 10 minutes left in the game and Banks suffered a sprained ankle, adding to Duke’s misery. But the Blue Devils beat the Tar Heels in the final game of the regular season at Cameron Indoor Stadium, Banks making a buzzer-beater to force overtime and Duke winning 66-65 on Senior Day.

Banks, before his last home game at Cameron, appeared in a tuxedo and tossed roses to the crowd, ever the showman. The senior then scored 25 points and hit the game-winner late in OT as Coach K got his first win over the Tar Heels.

After blowout losses in Chapel Hill his first three seasons, Krzyzewski and Duke lost in double overtime in March 1984 at Carmichael. The next season, Duke was ranked second nationally and won 93-77 in Chapel Hill against a UNC team ranked sixth.

A year later, Duke was 16-0 and ranked third when it went to UNC for the long-awaited opening of the Dean E. Smith Student Activities Center on Jan. 18, 1986. The Tar Heels, ranked No. 1, emerged with a 95-92 victory before a crowd of 21,000 that enjoyed chanting, “We’re No. 1.”

“I was extremely pleased with the win,” UNC’s Smith said after the game.

Krzyzewski was given a technical foul in the game after protesting a call, spurring a 12-0 run by the Tar Heels.

“I was shocked. I did not curse,” the N&O reported Krzyzewski saying. “I’ve had technicals before and probably deserved them. But not this time. I didn’t say much.”

Things have never been quite the same, and won’t be Saturday in Coach K’s last ride to Chapel Hill, and his final game at the Smith Center.

Duke basketball is starting to hit its stride in Coach K's farewell season

By Mike Lopresti, NCAA.com (February 1, 2022)

SOUTH BEND, Ind. -- Duke has come to town. The taco stands in Notre Dame's Purcell Pavilion are closed. No hot dogs or popcorn or soda or water, either -- COVID no-concession regulations. It's a dry arena Monday night, but hardly a quiet one, the crowd aroused by the name in Gothic letters on the visiting team's blue jerseys.

Mike Krzyzewski has come to town. Nearly 40 years ago, he was a frequent sight at DeMatha High School practices in Maryland, recruiting Danny Ferry to Duke. During all those stops, he became more and more impressed by the work of a young DeMatha assistant coach named Mike Brey. In 1987, Krzyzewski hired Brey, who would stay in Durham eight years -- great dynasty-building years.

"I call him the Final Four assistant," Krzyzewski says. "Six Final Fours, two national championships. Having he and (Tommy) Amaker together with me was magical."

Three decades later, on the final day of January 2022, Krzyzewski and Brey are facing one another as opponents -- maybe for the last time. It is a night to check in and see how the Coach K victory lap is going. The answer turns out to be a little ominous for those in Duke's way down the road.

As tipoff nears, Notre Dame seems a scary foe, having won 10 of its last 11 games and staying a perfect 9-0 at home, with two of the victories over Kentucky and North Carolina. The Irish will send out a veteran lineup that includes four seniors or graduate students, including leading scorer Dane Goodwin, who is the only Division I player in America above 50 percent in both overall shooting and 3-point attempts, while averaging at least 15 points.

The crowd is buzzing for an upset, especially all the students in green at one end who enthusiastically boo the Blue Devils when they first appear. But there are few boos from the students when a 74-year-old man pops out of the tunnel 4:35 before tipoff, walks past the Irish leprechaun, and heads over to embrace Brey.

Coach K is in the building. They know about legendary coaches here. Just across the walkway from the arena is the football stadium with all the statues; Knute Rockne, Ara Parseghian, Lou Holtz, etc. And sitting in his courtside seat at one end is Digger Phelps, who on a Saturday in 1974, set this place on fire, directing the Irish in their wrecking of UCLA's 88-game winning streak. John Wooden was on the visitor's bench back then. Krzyzewski is there Monday night.

His team is about to show why his last ride might go well into March, or even April.

Two hours later, it's over. Duke 57, Notre Dame 43. It's been something of an ugly night. The two teams have combined to go an awful 6-for-37 from the 3-point, but Krzyzewski sees that from a different perspective. "We both have good shooters. That means somebody played good defense," he says. "When somebody doesn't play good defense we'll shoot better from the 3."

The Blue Devils -- the 10th most prolific scoring team in the land -- have had a very modest offensive night, except for Paolo Banchemo. They have shot only three free throws. Three free throws? Duke? But they led by 22 and won in a hostile place by putting a defensive headlock on Notre Dame.

The Irish shot 19 percent in the first half and were 3-for-18 from the 3-point line for the game. Goodwin, Notre Dame's hottest hand, missed all seven shots and went scoreless.

"They swarmed us," Brey will say in his post-game press conference. "We tried a little bit of everything, we couldn't get anything going . . . We've eventually been able to get loose in the second half (against other teams). No shot tonight."

Duke has been out of the spotlight a bit since losing at Ohio State and dropping from No. 1. So much attention swayed to Auburn. Or Gonzaga. Or Baylor, or Purdue, or the Pac-12 powers. But Monday is a picture into the Blue Devils' journey.

There have been some tough times with COVID. Krzyzewski mentions how Duke had to dial back for 10 days, and more than 40 people affiliated with the program have been infected, including his own wife. "I've never been through anything like that," he says. "So it's been a hell of a month."

Also, makeups of postponements have forced Duke into a current stretch where five of six ACC games are on the road, something the Blue Devils haven't seen in 30 years. Duke won at Louisville Saturday, now Notre Dame. Next is North Carolina in Chapel Hill Saturday, then home to Virginia, then back out to Clemson and Boston College. That's a big ask for a team whose rotation includes three freshmen and two sophomores. But so far, so good.

"You've got to do what they ask you to do and try to use it as a positive," Krzyzewski said. "We have a young team, so going through this, you get confidence, you get older."

The thing is, all virus complications aside, this team is starting to roll.

Prized freshman Banchemo is more and more a force. He had 21 points Monday and 10 field goals -- or only three fewer than the entire Notre Dame starting lineup. Led by Banchemo, Duke has the tools to outscore a team. But if the shots aren't falling, there is also the ability to shut down an opponent. Take Monday for instance. "One thing we can always count on is our effort and defense," Banchemo said. "Obviously we have to clean up the offensive end. Tonight was a good example of how our defense can win us some games."

Maybe most imposing of all is the Blue Devils' sheer physical talent and presence. Having seen the business end of Duke Monday night, Brey speaks at length about that.

"We've had Kentucky come through here, we've had Carolina come through here with bodies," he says. "They don't have bodies like these guys."

The Irish would normally try to combat that with the 3-point shot. They made 13 against North Carolina, and seven against Kentucky. They had three Monday night. And when they tried to drive to the rim against the wide bodies such as Mark Williams and Theo John, that didn't work, either.

"You can tell your guys, 'finish strong, go in there,'" Brey said. "Well, when they've got guys with 7-3 wing spans, it's a little tricky."

Brey mentions the Duke freshmen -- Banchemo, Trevor Keels, AJ Griffin -- and how their physiques don't match their years. "Are they 18?" he asks. Keels and Griffin are, Banchemo is 19. The Notre Dame coach has a big laugh at that. "My strength coach is sitting there going, we could have Nate Laszewski bench press for five years. But that's OK, that's who we are and sometimes we get you. But not tonight."

No, not tonight. The two coaches and friends share some words afterward and then Krzyzewski leaves the Purcell Pavilion court for the last time. That's what this winter is like for him. A lot of last walks out of places where the audience has come to see his farewell. Or even better, maybe to see him lose.

Brey mentions how "the moment got us a little bit," referring to how the Irish seemed to rush and be out of form in Monday's bright lights. But Duke faces the moment every game. Not like last year's empty arenas.

"It's better to play with a lot of noise than with no noise," Krzyzewski says. "I've got a pretty young team. They are never nervous about their environment. We won't lose because we're nervous. Every place we go is a pretty good environment. And if we lose, it's a rushing to the court. There's a lot to look forward to."

"I'm only paying attention to our team and how we develop. I can't compare it to anybody, I don't watch anybody else. I think we're getting better."

So it would seem. Duke is now 18-3, with the three defeats by a combined six points. In all three losses -- Ohio State, Miami, Florida State -- the Blue Devils led in the last two minutes. They are not that far from 21-0. And they appear to be coming on.

As Krzyzewski leaves the press room Monday, a young boy and his father stand outside hoping for an autograph. The coach with 1,188 career wins obliges, carefully spelling out the kid's first name. Then he heads for the locker room, and the plane, and the next stop on the tour. So many goodbyes to say, so many challenges to face -- with a final team growing into its mission.

Blue Devils' next two opponents remain unbeaten at home

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (January 31, 2022)

SOUTH BEND, IND. - Duke started its travel-laden final five weeks of the regular season as it wished on Saturday, topping Louisville, 74-65.

That began a stretch where the No. 9 Blue Devils (17-3, 7-2 ACC) will play eight of their final 12 ACC games away from Cameron Indoor Stadium. This is where it's appropriate to drop the reminder that two of the Blue Devils' three losses this season came away from Durham.

But Duke took care of business against the Cardinals, building a 16-point first-half lead and watching it disappear before pulling away late behind AJ Griffin's hot shooting to win.

The road stretch continues Monday when Duke plays at Notre Dame at 7 p.m. on ESPN, with the season's biggest road game, at North Carolina, looming on Saturday night.

Neither Notre Dame nor UNC has lost a home game this season. The Irish are 9-0 at Purcell Pavilion, while the Tar Heels are 12-0 at the Smith Center.

With all that in mind, here's what we learned from Duke's win over Louisville with a look ahead to the matchup at Notre Dame as the Blue Devils reach the halfway point of their ACC schedule.

DUKE CONTINUES TO WIN IN DIFFERENT WAYS

On Saturday against Louisville, Griffin hit five 3-pointers to score a game-high 22 points for the Blue Devils. He did so on a day where freshman star Paolo Banchemo hit only 5-of-15 shots to score 11 points. The last time Banchemo scored that few points in a game was way back on Nov. 19 against Lafayette.

But Griffin picked up the slack in a game where the Blue Devils never trailed.

This was far different than two weeks earlier, at Cameron, when Duke dominated inside behind 7-1 center Mark Williams (19 points) and Banchemo (21 points) to beat N.C. State, 88-73.

Against Louisville, Williams was limited due to foul trouble. He produced 14 points in 23 minutes. But, again, Griffin made sure that was enough for Duke to still win.

This versatility is a good sign for the Blue Devils going forward.

GRIFFIN APPEARS SLUMP-PROOF

Sure, Griffin could have an off night or two. Some shooters, particularly, an 18-year-old freshman like Griffin, could fall into a deeper slump.

So far, Griffin has shown the ability to avoid that.

In his first start on Jan. 12 at Wake Forest, Griffin hit 8-of-11 shots overall, including 3-of-5 3-pointers, to score 22 points in a 76-64 Duke win.

Three days later against N.C. State, he only hit one of six shots, scoring three points.

At Florida State on Jan. 18, a foul-plagued Griffin took only five shots, making three, while producing just eight points in Duke's 79-78 loss.

On Jan. 22 at home against Syracuse, Griffin drilled five 3-pointers to score 15 points in Duke's 79-59 win.

Last Tuesday, he misfired to only hit 1-of-7 shots from the field when Duke edged Clemson, 71-69.

He followed that up with one of his best shooting days of the season against Louisville. His teammates gladly got him the ball for open shots, despite those ups and downs.

"He's our best shooter," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "He's one of the purest shooters in the country. And so I love the fact that our guys are looking for him and are so happy with him."

A 50% 3-point shooter on the season, Griffin doesn't let the ebbs and flows affect him emotionally.

"It's just falling back on the work you do and just continuing to work," Griffin said. "You can't get too high or too low. You've just got to stay strong. It's really all glory to God to help you during those times. To stay mentally strong. You know, it's not always going to be the sun shining. So, you know, you've got to just fight through it."

GOOD TREND ON TURNOVERS

Throughout November and December, Duke established itself as a team that protected the ball and rarely committed turnovers. For the entire season, the Blue Devils are No. 13 in the country according to KenPom.com, by only turning the ball over on 14.8% of their possessions. The national average is 18.8%.

Still Duke had a season-worst 17 turnovers in a 76-74 loss to Miami on Jan. 8. The Blue Devils turned it over 15 times while losing 79-78 in overtime.

They had 15 more while beating Syracuse and reduced that to 12 in the win over Clemson.

On Saturday, Duke committed just seven turnovers. That was just 10.9% of its possessions in the game.

Expect that to continue against Notre Dame. While the Irish (14-6, 7-2 ACC) are in the thick of the ACC race, they are winning despite not benefiting from turnovers. Notre Dame's defense is No. 285 in the country as opponents have only turned the ball over on 16.8% of their possessions.

WHAT ABOUT TREVOR KEELS?

Duke played the last three games without Trevor Keels, the 6-5 freshman guard who started the Blue Devils' first 17 games this season. Keels is out with a lower right leg injury that Krzyzewski said involves his calf and ankle.

On Thursday, Krzyzewski expressed hope Keels' absence was about to end.

"Hopefully, he's getting real close to coming back," Krzyzewski said.

While hope remains that Keels could play Monday night at Notre Dame, another line of thinking is another few days of rest would help him. That would mean a return Saturday night at North Carolina.

Either way, Keels' return is indeed getting close. Though Jeremy Roach has played well the last three games, producing 23 assists with just three turnovers in 106 minutes of play, the Blue Devils could use Keels' ball-handling and defense nevertheless.

Jeremy Roach continues to excel in initiating the offense in Duke's latest win

By Sasha Richie, Duke Chronicle (January 30, 2022)

LOUISVILLE, KY.—In a program with as storied a history and filled with as much NBA-caliber talent as Duke, it's easy to glance past the guys who didn't sprint out of the gate. The guys who didn't start the season with 20-point games, who don't protect the rim with stadium-rocking blocks or shoot from downtown with lethal accuracy. But the guy who has glided under the radar has also quietly developed into the player that makes the Duke clock tick.

Jeremy Roach is that guy, and maybe it's time for the Duke faithful to start watching.

"He's really one to respect of everybody, and maybe the most—he respects who he is," head coach Mike Krzyzewski said after their game Saturday.

His teammates have shined under the spotlight, and Saturday's 74-65 road win against Louisville was no different. With Paolo Banchemo collecting another double-double like they're trading cards and AJ Griffin going a mind-boggling 5-of-5 from three, Roach yet again had to play second fiddle to other Blue Devils' storylines. However, every musician knows that the harmony is just as important as the melody, and as of late Roach has played in perfect harmony for Duke.

Against the Cardinals, Roach was the cool under pressure distributor the Blue Devils needed as Louisville mounted a furious comeback. While a huge rebounding effort from the likes of Banchemo and Mark Williams certainly helped Duke's case as the Cardinals rallied from a 16-point deficit to eventually tie the score, surges of smooth offense let Duke build a win over the course of the game, never conceding a lead. Roach was at the center of all of that, controlling the flow of play and keeping the Blue Devils' offensive momentum going while playing nearly the full 40 minutes. In Duke's opening 14-2 run, he collected two assists, and as the Blue Devils started to pull ahead after letting the Cardinals come back in the second half, he found Griffin for the first of the back-to-back triples that got Duke out of the woods once and for all.

See, the Blue Devils have many that can finish, but it all starts with Roach. The sophomore has grown into a true point guard and the catalyst for the team-focused offensive strategy Krzyzewski has seemed to use this season. With Banchemo and Williams dominating in the paint and Griffin stepping into a pure shooter role, the question of who would run point seemed unanswered. For a while, it looked like Wendell Moore Jr. would fill that role, but now Roach is filling it.

"We had [Moore] running the team and [Roach] playing off, and we switched that back [after Keels' injury]. And Jeremy has really responded, and he's been a key factor for us," Krzyzewski said.

Earlier in the season, Roach lost his starting job to freshman star Griffin, but after Trevor Keels got injured against Florida State Jan. 18, he once again joined the starting lineup, and he has more than risen to the occasion. Averaging 6.6 assists per game in his last five, Roach is in the 99th percentile per CBB Analytics, and, in total, he has 33 assists and four turnovers, good for an 8.25 assist to turnover ratio, 100th percentile or the best in the NCAA at his position. Additionally, an estimated 31.9% of the field goals while he's on the floor are assisted by him, which is the most on the team and also in an A+ percentile of 98th. In short, Roach is elite, and even disregarding stats, watching him flex his adept dribbling and vision makes that clear.

Saturday, Roach tallied five assists to just one turnover. And while a turnover is a turnover, Roach's one tally against was a travel call, not the kind of egregious errant pass that makes you question decision-making. Seeing as he's coming off consecutive nine-assist games, there's little doubt that Roach is a responsible ball-handler. Plus, aside from what's contained in the boxscore, Roach was also clearly a leader on Louisville's court, directing traffic and carrying the ball, a sight that has gotten more common as he's gained confidence.

"He's been a leader," Krzyzewski said. "He really has a lot of confidence in who he is."

When it comes down to it, Roach doesn't often put up dazzling scoring numbers. In fact, he had nine Saturday, and his last "big" scoring game was an 11-point showing in Duke's final nonconference matchup against Elon. But he doesn't need to score to make a significant impact on the game. Duke's two best lineups in conference this season in terms of point differential per 100 possessions include Roach at point guard, per CBB Analytics.

While this could simply be a factor of his time played at the position before lineup changes, it's interesting to note that in its last five games, as a percentage of field goal attempts, Duke takes 21.4% more free throws with Roach on the court than off, and Duke's opponents take 4.1% less free throws with him on. These stats are in the 100th and 68th percentiles, respectively, and what they signal is that, while the Blue Devils generally play clean basketball, with Roach on the court they also play so effectively that their opponent is forced to foul them to slow them down.

Duke will have a real dilemma on its hands when Keels returns from injury. On one hand, it could return to the lineup it had before, but on the other, that would mean diminished minutes for a player who is coming into his own to Duke's benefit. Regardless of who starts both will see significant playing time, but there's no doubt Roach has turned into a special player for the Blue Devils.

Duke overcomes Louisville and Cardinals student section in hard-fought win

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (January 29, 2022)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – God bless the cleanup workers sent to Section 111 inside the KFC Yum! Center on Saturday. For all the empty Miller Lite cans scattered courtside, the crushed popcorn kernels sprinkled down every staircase, it is undeniably Section 111 – Louisville’s student section – that requires the most scrubbing and sanitation.

Good.

Because, frankly, the concrete steps leading from the court to the concourse haven’t been this well-trafficked in quite some time. And, at the risk of agitating a fan base already quite furious these days: Have they deserved to be? Staggering as it sounds, the Cardinals haven’t won an NCAA Tournament game since the 2016-17 season (!), when a certain Hall of Famer was still stalking these sidelines. (That fellow is doing just fine at Iona now, thank you very much – and the pages of passport stamps to Greece aren’t anything to scoff at, either.) Yes, that ignores the COVID-19-canceled, not-to-be 2020 event, where UL likely would’ve been a top-four seed ... but them’s the breaks everywhere else, too.

Now, could Chris Mack have used that notch in his belt? Clearly. If that’s there, after all, maybe this week he and Louisville don’t come to an amicable parting of ways, the athletic department agreeing to pay Mack \$4.8 million not to coach the Cards anymore. (Mack will rebound, surely, and coach again in the future, but for the time being ... well, doing zilch and having \$133,000 a month hit your bank account ain’t too bad.) So, c’est la vie. It is what is. And with Duke coming to town, any pity party for this still-proud program was promptly shut down. Mike Pegues, you’re in (again).

Oh, and by the way, Coach? Yeah, your first game after this tumultuous, trying week is ... *checks notes* against No. 9 Duke and Mike Krzyzewski, coaching his final contest in Derby City. Good luck with all that!

Credit where credit is due, though. A week ago, the last time UL took to Denny Crum Court, the Cards were booed off the hardwood by a crowd 16,000 strong. On Saturday? Well, Duke always draws a crowd – it being Krzyzewski’s 42nd and final season coaching hasn’t hurt attendance, either – but this was more than that. This was a fan base fired up, fervently searching for something to grab on to: hopefully a win, but at least a fight.

Even with the referees interrupting a few “chippy” conversations, they sure as hell got one.

“It was what we expected,” Krzyzewski said after Duke’s eventual 74-65 win. “Just a tight, tough game.”

At first, apparently only the Blue Devils were aware any battle was ongoing. In racing out to a 23-7 first-half lead, Duke looked as dominant as it had in perhaps any four-minute stretch this season. (Pegues, probably wisely, didn’t even wait until the first media timeout to huddle his team, after a 12-2 start by the Blue Devils.) “A lot of teams would’ve laid down against Duke,” Pegues said. “We got down big early, and our guys fought back.”

This is true. It would’ve been easy for Louisville, or any team, to stare at the Blue Devils’ starting five – even absent freshman Trevor Keels, who missed his third game with a lower leg injury – see four first-round NBA draft picks, and decide to pack it in. Not Louisville, though. Instead, the Cards went right back at Duke’s 7-foot center Mark Williams, whose length and shot-blocking savvy dictated the game’s opening minutes, and forced him to pick up two fouls. To the bench Williams went, with 7:31 until halftime. And seemingly as he did ... well, what do you know? There’s Section 111, screaming and hollering, more emotion in this one moment than seemingly UL’s entire season combined.

With Williams out of the lineup, the Cards weren’t as disincentivized to drive inside and suddenly found a rhythm of sorts on runners and short jumpers. Despite that early 16-point hole, bit by bit, UL clawed its way back into the contest, eventually coming within two with 28 seconds left in the first half. A late travel by Malik Williams, though, gave Duke one final half-court possession with 0.6 seconds left on the clock – which was just enough time for A.J. Griffin, Duke’s stud sharpshooter, to drain a falling-away 3-pointer that pushed the margin back to five. It was shocking that Griffin could even get a shot off with so little time left, but, well, there’s a reason the play was designed to go to him. “He’s our best shooter,” Krzyzewski said with a grin. “He’s one of the purest shooters in the country.”

That five-point cushion, though, was never going to last. And here, again, some semblance of credit should go to Section 111, whose nonstop heckling woke up the entirety of the Yum! Center. Right out of intermission, on Louisville’s first offensive possession, the Cards again went right back at Williams – he spent the final seven minutes of the first half saddled on Duke’s bench – and got him called for a third foul. And right about at this point, Section 111 snapped.

Louisville’s student section unfurled a massive flag, one that stretched at least 15 rows up in the stands, with a fitting message affixed to its top: VILLE’NS. Which, in coming from behind to make Duke uncomfortable, was exactly the role this raucous bunch wanted to be in. Frankly, if we’re doing a proper postmortem, this is about the time and vibe that would come back to bite the cleaning crews later. Beer didn’t just froth out of plastic cups as rows of fans bounced in their seats; it went full-on flying, spilling down the concrete steps all the way to the retractable bleachers. Like a little waterfall, if you will, only one that congealed near the court in a heap of Corona Light and slushed ice.

“After everything they’ve gone through, to be here today and support our guys, even when we were down – and we’ve been down the entire season,” Pegues said, “I am so grateful to our fans. I genuinely mean that.”

Unfortunately for Pegues, and Louisville’s program, cheering alone doesn’t cut it on the court. So though the Cards were multiple times able to bring things back to level in the second half – twice, in fact, including at 60 with 8:28 left to play – not once did Duke cede its game-long lead. And really, that 60-point tie was the last time the game was even.

Williams had just checked back in at that point, and for the rest of the contest, he more than made up for any time lost, finishing with an eventual 14 points, 11 rebounds (five of them offensive) and two blocked shots, both of which came thereafter. Between him and Paolo Banchemo (six offensive rebounds), Duke absolutely dominated on the glass late, snuffing out Louisville’s layups along with its hope; Duke’s 20 offensive rebounds Saturday were a season-best. Then, as was the case with Jeremy Roach and Joey Baker earlier this week against Clemson, the Blue Devils needed a hero to step up offensively.

Come on down, Mr. Griffin.

Griffin absolutely banged two 3s on back-to-back possessions, both from similar spots on the left side of the arc, to give Duke an eight-point cushion. Asked what he was thinking during that sequence, Griffin didn’t have any gratuitous breakdown to offer, but rather an insight into his never-say-die demeanor. “That sequence right there, you’re just really not even thinking about it,” Griffin said. “Just letting it fly and having the confidence (to do so) from my coaches and teammates. ... Just playing basketball.”

Only for Griffin, that means something else than most normal people. Because most normal people, in a high-pressure situation such as that, don’t have their hearts go steady, their blood turn to ice. Most people aren’t capable of leading Duke to its second true road win of the season, with Section 111 shouting in the background, with a perfect form, base and everything else. Most people can’t shoot 5 of 5 from 3-point land – in fact, no other Duke freshman has ever shot 100 percent from deep in a game with at least five attempts – and especially not in a high-major college game in a place like the Yum! Center. As Griffin is increasingly proving, though, he is not normal; after Saturday, he’s officially shooting 50 percent from 3 this season, even with 64 total attempts, the third most on the team.

And for Duke, that’s the best thing possible.

“He’s not a rising good player; he’s a rising star,” Krzyzewski said. “All our guys realize that.”

After Saturday, the whole world should. Griffin’s two 3s in that moment – he ultimately tied his career high with 22 points, to go along with four rebounds, two steals and no turnovers – pushed Duke well on its way to a 12-0 run, which put the game right out of reach. Eventually, the horn blared and the battle was over. Duke won, again, helping solidify its status as the ACC’s best.

But Section 111 would not go quietly into that good night.

After postgame handshakes finished, a matter of procedure as much as anything, Duke’s coaches and players made their way for the tunnel that would take them back to the visiting locker room. Where they had to walk right past? Section 111, of course. And as they did, Louisville fans hurled insults and boos and the best they could come up with right in the Blue Devils’ faces.

Banchemo, the recipient of some rowdy chants, at first ducked his head and smirked as he heard their screams. You could almost see the thought process playing out in his head: Do I dignify these people with a response? Answer: yes. Only, not a verbal one; Banchemo picked up his head, looked dead into the eyes of someone in the crowd – and faked like a crying baby, a smug smile spread wide across his face.

Seconds later, Wendell Moore – another target of plenty of hate, who even poked the bear late in the game by coming over to the student section and saying, “Y’all are watching ME!” – also exited, waving widely goodbye as he did. Theo John followed suit, after his several almost-tussles with Louisville’s Sydney Curry. Last, but certainly not least, went Williams, who offered a simple peace sign as his parting gift.

And poof – like that Duke was gone: disappeared down the tunnel and off for its flight out of the Cardinals nest.

No matter his role, No. 9 Duke needs a steady Jeremy Roach to be at its best

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (January 27, 2022)

DURHAM -- Whether in the starting lineup or coming off the bench, Jeremy Roach is a key player in Duke's rotation this season.

The 6-1 sophomore guard found himself in both roles, in and out and back into the starting lineup, for the Blue Devils over the past two weeks.

Despite that, he's still played in 76.7% of the minutes in Duke's 18 games this season. Only junior Wendell Moore (82.2%) and freshman star Paolo Banchero (77%) have played more for the Blue Devils (15-3, 5-2 ACC).

"He's had a great attitude," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said "He's a good kid. He's all team."

After two games out of the lineup, Roach became a starter once again on Saturday when Duke beat Syracuse, 79-59, at Cameron Indoor Stadium. The calf injury Duke freshman guard Trevor Keels suffered four nights earlier kept him out of uniform, so Roach stepped in. He didn't shoot well (2 of 10, including 2 of 8 3-pointers) but led Duke with nine assists while committing just one turnover in 27 minutes, 38 seconds of play.

"The shot wasn't falling," Roach said, "so find other guys and hit them. Let them knock them down with confidence."

After starting 18 of 24 games as a freshman last season with the Blue Devils, Roach started the first 17 this season.

That stopped after Miami upset the Blue Devils, 76-74, on Jan. 8 at Cameron Indoor Stadium. Roach hit 3 of 8 shots and committed three of Duke's season-high 17 turnovers. But, most notably, he fouled Miami's Charlie Moore after the Hurricanes senior guard drove the lane to hit a layup with 34 seconds to play.

Duke was up 74-71 when that play occurred. Prior to that sequence, Krzyzewski had told the team specifically not to foul and not to allow Miami to attempt a 3-pointer.

"Our thing is no threes and no fouls in that situation and we fouled," Krzyzewski said following the game. "We were too spread out, we wanted to be condensed and we were not."

Moore missed the free throw but Miami secured the offensive rebound and Kameron McGusty scored what turned out to be the game-winning basket with 20 seconds to play.

Two days later, Krzyzewski and the coaching staff made the first starting lineup change of the season, elevating 6-6 freshman AJ Griffin to a starter while having Roach as a reserve. It made the Blue Devils a taller team with more scoring punch as Griffin is a 53.5% shooter this season compared to Roach's 38%.

Roach actually responded well to the change. His minutes fell to 19 when Duke played at Wake Forest and 23 for a home game with N.C. State. But he played those 42 minutes without committing a turnover.

He scored just seven points as Duke beat Wake, 76-64, and N.C. State, 88-73.

When Keels was injured with 10:11 to play at Florida State on Jan. 18, Roach took his place. He played 29 minutes, dishing out six assists with just one turnover, as the Blue Devils lost, 79-78, in overtime.

With Keels not ready to return, Roach played steady against the Orange. In Duke's last four games, Roach has played 98 minutes and committed only two turnovers.

Any sting from not starting didn't appear to hurt him.

"Just keeping your head right, keeping your confidence right to keep believing," Roach said. "Coach takes you out of the starting lineup, you've just got to accept it. Coach knows what he's doing, so he put me back in and we kept it rolling from here."

Beginning with Tuesday's game against Clemson, Duke plays three games in seven nights with road games at Louisville (on Saturday) and Notre Dame (on Monday) forthcoming.

Keels is doubtful to play against Clemson but is progressing and could return over the weekend.

While seeing Roach hit a few more open shots would certainly help Duke as it navigates this stretch of games, the Blue Devils don't necessarily need him to be a big scorer. Banchero (17.9 points), Moore (15.2) and Griffin (11.9 points per game in ACC play) can handle that.

His defense, ball-handling and passing are more important to the Blue Devils. Seeing those areas thrive while he's not hitting shots impressed Krzyzewski.

"I'm proud of him because he didn't shoot well but it didn't affect his defense and his passing," Krzyzewski said. "That's a sign of a really good player. We need him to keep doing it."

Another step forward for AJ Griffin, Duke's best shooter with much more to offer

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (January 23, 2022)

DURHAM -- It's crazy to realize that AJ Griffin may just be growing into the full spectrum of his talent and ability. It's not crazy to think that if he can stay healthy – he missed almost all of the last two seasons, and the start of his freshman year at Duke – his NBA ceiling may be as high, or perhaps even higher, than that of his more heralded teammate, Paolo Banchero.

It'll take years to figure that out, and Banchero will certainly and justifiably have the advantage in this spring's draft, but this much is clear now: Duke's ceiling, already high, is going to be as high as Griffin can take it. As the right knee injury he suffered in October is increasingly behind him, as Griffin continues to build confidence, it's obvious that he still has so much more to offer: As a shooter, as a slasher, as a long, athletic defender.

Griffin has had some impressive games lately – Duke doesn't go on that 22-1 run at Wake Forest without him earlier this month, in Griffin's first game as a starter – but Griffin on Saturday almost single-handedly dismantled the Syracuse zone in the first half, helping fill the void left by the injured Trevor Keels and then some in a 79-59 win.

"He was the guy we wanted to play and we didn't guard him," Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim said. "He got two open looks to open the game. That's inexcusable."

Much has been made of Banchero's ability to maneuver at his size and shooting touch, and for good reason, but Griffin is stouter and quicker without giving that much height away – and also Duke's best long-range shooter and most efficient offensive player. He's shown flashes of all the components of his game at various times, and increasingly Griffin is putting the entire package together.

Griffin outshot Syracuse from long range in the first half – 4-for-6 as the Orange went 2-for-16 – and finished with a season-high five 3-pointers, but it wasn't just the unhesitant shooting Saturday. There was also a deft flip of the ball over his head of Banchero when he found himself falling out of bounds under the basket after an offensive rebound, the sign of a player exploring the space around him on the court.

"I'd really like for him to be even more aggressive," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "A.J. keeps it very simple. He's a very easy guy to play with because he keeps spacing, he plays defense, he makes simple passes. Today, he did a really good job on (Cole) Swider. That's a tough – that perimeter's a very difficult guard. And he's a threat."

That simplicity in Griffin's game is in many ways a sign of his basketball IQ, understanding where to be and where to go without wasted effort. The question for Griffin will be whether his body, after major knee and ankle injuries, can live up to its end of things. With each passing game at Duke, the answer increasingly looks to be yes.

Griffin didn't do as much in the second half, but Duke didn't need him, either. Syracuse was woefully overmatched, the two Boeheim boys combining to miss 20 shots. The Blue Devils pulled away and never looked back.

That's kind of how things are going for Griffin as well.

After playing only 12 games in his final two years of high school, this was, and is, always going to be a process. Griffin's athletic ability and basketball IQ are obvious and unquestioned. What he needs is time. Duke, with its array of weapons, from Banchero to Mark Williams to Wendell Moore Jr., and even with Keels in street clothes Saturday, has the luxury to give Griffin as much time as he needs.

There will come a moment, of course, where Griffin will have to unlock his full potential for Duke to reach its full potential, and that moment is not far off. The first game against North Carolina is a mere two weeks away, and if not then, then in March and possibly April. Either way, his time is coming.

Wendell Moore warms up (and may be waking up) as Duke dispatches Syracuse

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (January 22, 2022)

DURHAM, N.C. – Usually, thawing out comes after the snow has settled for some time.

Not quite the case at Cameron Indoor on Saturday; Duke's basketball cathedral, the night after a local snowstorm, was still blanketed by a powdery 4 or 5 inches when the Blue Devils tipped off against Syracuse at noon. (Godspeed to the poor, unfortunate souls willing to wait in line for entrance, by the way. If frozen facial hair is your thing ...)

Inside, though? Different deal. Dramatically so. Because even before the mini-blizzard (by local standards), Wendell Moore Jr. – Duke's junior captain and offensive engine, at least on its best days – had been in something of a bind. In need of thawing out himself, you could say. Since Duke's nearly two-week COVID-19 stoppage in late December and earlier this month, Moore hadn't been anywhere close to his level of play from earlier this season. Just look at the statistical disparity:

Moore in Duke's first 12 games: 17 ppg, 58.6 percent shooting, five assists per game against 1.8 turnovers.

Moore in Duke's last five games, entering Saturday: 11 ppg, 46.5 percent shooting, 3.6 assists per game against 3.4 turnovers

Want further proof? How about straight from the man's mouth?

"It was not so much that I was playing bad," Moore said after Duke's 79-59 demolition of Syracuse, "but I wasn't playing to the level that I wanted to play at."

Not great. And not coincidentally, in accordance with Moore's drop-off, Duke had lost two of its last five contests, compared with just one loss in its first 12 games. Now, pinning the blame for said five-game stretch entirely on Moore is both unfair and untrue, but also ... as one of the Blue Devils' best offensive players earlier this season, any dip in his personal performance does matter. Had mattered. Would continue to matter, as conference play continues and we collectively get closer to the NCAA Tournament. Without being hyperbolic, Moore's maturation is central to sending Mike Krzyzewski into retirement with a sixth national championship.

After these last five games, then? Maybe there weren't genuine fears about Moore's play, but there was at least some (sorta warranted) apprehension.

The thing is, the dude coaching for Duke can sense these things, too. (As much as fans seem to forget, the man who corralled all these talents to Durham in the first place does, in fact, have a strong pulse on his program.) So in the last few days, since Duke's overtime loss to Florida State on Tuesday – when Moore missed the potential game-winning shot – Krzyzewski pulled his captain to the side for some chats. Reminders, really.

"He and I have had some meetings, just to get back to who he was in the nonconference. He's a beautiful player, one of the best players in the country, and that stoppage or whatever, he lost his rhythm during that, and maybe tried to do too much – instead of doing too much of what he did before," Krzyzewski said. "I talked to him and I said, 'You know, don't bring the past into the present.' The only thing good about the past is if you learn from it. You have to learn from the past, and have it have a positive impact on the present ... and I don't think he was doing that."

Moore's response when he heard that?

"I mean, in my three years here, I've come to learn that Coach isn't wrong about many things," Moore said, laughing as he spoke. "So when he told me that, I just kinda took a step back and looked at myself."

What he saw was, like Krzyzewski mentioned, someone not playing up to his ability. Someone who, after a two-month taste of supreme success, suddenly thought his responsibilities were greater than they actually are. But on a team with potentially five future NBA first-round draft picks – among them two projected lottery picks in Paolo Banchemo and A.J. Griffin – that isn't the reality of this situation. Moore is a key cog, sure, but there are plenty of other gears doing their own grinding. He just had to fit into the greater equation, do what he does best – initiate the offense, take open 3s when they present themselves, play lockdown defense – and not overwhelm himself.

In less quantitative terms, he needed to simplify.

In even less quantitative terms? He needed to stop stressing. Smile some more. Just ... be.

Well, mission accomplished. Moore's stat line Saturday – tying for the team lead with 15 points, on 50 percent shooting, plus eight assists, six rebounds, two steals and just one turnover – was exactly the type of well-rounded effort he so often exhibited earlier this season. That it came against sub-.500 Syracuse, with the worst adjusted defensive efficiency in the conference, per KenPom, matters only a little. Once you light a match, it burns. And burns. And burns.

It just needs that initial spark to get going.

The thing that tells you this was not just a "Syracuse stinks and one guy took advantage" situation is that, at halftime, the game was still within reach and Moore had scored just one basket. Yet to go along with his measly two points, he already had amassed six assists, two rebounds and a steal. Plus-minus isn't always an incredibly accurate or useful stat, but that Moore's was tied for second best on the team through 20 minutes tells you he was making his mark even absent much scoring.

Like, say, through his defense. Moore sorta drew the short straw defensively coming into Saturday, matching up with All-ACC sharpshooter Buddy Boeheim. Boeheim – whose "Buddy Buckets" trademark is well-earned – came into this game averaging 19.2 points (fourth-most in the ACC) on 34.6 percent shooting from 3-point range.

In the days before the game, Moore and the rest of Duke's perimeter defenders sat down with assistant coach Nolan Smith to drill into how best to limit Boeheim and his backcourt mate, Joe Girard. (These additional perimeter-oriented film sessions, Jeremy Roach said, have been happening with Smith since the team returned from its COVID-19 stoppage.) In the tape, Duke saw which spots Boeheim strives hardest to get to ... and accordingly set out to impede him from getting there. That's a three-pronged problem, though: You have to stop Boeheim from catching the ball in those spots, but you also can't let him get the ball elsewhere and use ball screens to hit his hot zones ... and then on the off chance he does, you can't foul him while he's in the process of shooting. "Coach said that was a big emphasis," Roach explained. "They like to get fouled on shots and get fouled on a lot of 3-pointers." It was a good sign, then, when Boeheim attempted his first triple about two minutes into the game, and Moore didn't foul – and Boeheim missed.

In hindsight, that was certainly a signal of more to come. Boeheim ended up finishing with one of his worst games of the season: a measly seven points on 2-of-15 shooting, including just 1-of-10 from 3. Did we mention that Boeheim makes the third-most 3s per game in the ACC? And Moore just basically said, not today?

As Krzyzewski said of Moore, in understated fashion: "He had a tough assignment, and he did a good job with it."

Uh, yeah, "good." We'll go with that.

In the second half, Moore's defense finally translated to offense, as he scored 13 of his points in 15:50 of game time. Even when he missed his first 3-point attempt after the break, just 12 seconds into the second frame, he smiled running back down the floor. When he finally knocked one down from deep – one of his three made 3s on the day – he was still smiling, and briefly slapped himself on his right hip to celebrate. Or, maybe, to get himself back into the moment.

Either way, it worked. It all worked. The talks with Krzyzewski. The challenge from his other coaches. The encouragement from his teammates. One game doesn't mean Moore is definitely, absolutely, all the way "back" to his prior level of play ... but it's something. We can't see the future, but should Moore keep on this trajectory, safe to say we'll look back at Saturday as a (re)turning point of sorts.

"I mean, I didn't change," Moore said. "I didn't get taller, I didn't get smaller, didn't get faster, nothing like that. I'm still the same player. I just have to go out there with the same empty mindset every game."

For one day, at least, he did just that. Wendell Moore woke up, or warmed up, or whatever you want to call it.

Now Duke needs Moore to keep defrosting. Because it can't reach title status unless he totally thaws out.

"Today, he was smiling, right?" Krzyzewski said. "We need him to be that."

How a team meeting after loss to Miami helped Duke basketball get back on track

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (January 17, 2022)

DURHAM -- It's possible Jan. 10 could go down as one of the most important days in what will be Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski's final season as the Blue Devils coach.

"We did all of our changes," Krzyzewski said.

At 7 a.m. that day, the coaches and players met for around an hour and 15 minutes of serious, frank discussion. A practice followed in the afternoon.

That night, the players had their own conversation, with team co-captain Wendell Moore speaking up.

"Wendell talked to us," Duke freshman guard Trevor Keels said. "We all said what we had to say. Let's play team basketball from there."

In the midst of all that, the first starting lineup change of the season was decided upon.

And, that night, a non-COVID virus began impacting Krzyzewski so harshly he didn't run the team's practice the following day or coach the team in a win at Wake Forest the next night.

That's a lot of turmoil for a team that had experienced enough success to be considered a Final Four contender.

But Duke had lost 76-74 at home to unranked Miami on Jan. 8. Rare as they are, losses at Cameron Indoor Stadium usually spur the type of discussions and moves that occurred last week.

"We're changing a little bit of the identity," Krzyzewski said, "while we're getting better."

Through all that, Duke posted a 76-64 win at Wake Forest on Wednesday, with associate head coach Jon Scheyer leading the team in Krzyzewski's absence, followed by an 88-73 victory over N.C. State at Cameron on Saturday with Krzyzewski back on the bench.

Changes for the better, for sure.

As No. 6 Duke prepares to play at Florida State on Tuesday night, consider Seminoles coach Leonard Hamilton impressed with the Blue Devils' cohesiveness while changing on the fly.

"This team, in my opinion, is one of the most connected teams I've seen Duke have," Hamilton said Monday. "I've never seen them any better in terms of the execution, the effort and how committed they are."

That commitment faced a true test coming off the loss to Miami. Because of final exam schedules that all teams face in early December, the Blue Devils experienced shorter practices early in the month. A COVID-19 outbreak on the team and staff kept them away from each other after the Christmas holiday and into the first days of the new year.

The strong team bonds built through the offseason began to atrophy from simply being apart.

Duke had its worst shooting night (37.3%) while beating Georgia Tech, 69-57, in its first game of 2022 on Jan. 4. The loss to Miami, where the Blue Devils had but squandered a three-point lead in the final 30 seconds, followed.

The NCAA mandates athletes get one full day off from any team activities per week, so that occurred on Jan. 9.

By early the next morning, the Blue Devils began shoring up any issues that had begun to take hold during a one hour, 15 minute meeting with the coaches.

"A kind of come to Jesus type of thing on how we were going to change and all that," Krzyzewski said. "And then, we had a really good practice that afternoon."

But that wasn't enough. The players, sensing the importance of the moment, had their own discussion to get things out in the open.

The combination of all those talks put Duke back on track for the next two games.

"It definitely helped the team," Banchemo said. "Those were conversations that needed to be had. Us not playing hard. Us not communicating well as a team. All stuff we had to fix. So the meeting really helped because it brought our problems to light and gave us a real opportunity to fix them."

Freshman AJ Griffin replaced sophomore guard Jeremy Roach in the starting lineup at Wake Forest and scored a season-best 22 points. Roach, coming off the bench against Wake and N.C. State, played a combined 42 minutes without turning the ball over once.

Even when Griffin had a tough shooting day, hitting just 1 of 6 shots to score three points against N.C. State, the Blue Devils won handily because sophomore center Mark Williams produced a season-high 19 points while grabbing 11 rebounds and blocking a career-best eight shots.

Steady as a rock, Banchemo scored 24 points against Wake and 21 more against N.C. State.

Krzyzewski said Monday he's happy Moore, a team captain along with senior reserve Joey Baker, regained his voice on the court to keep the communication strong.

Well-connected on offense, Duke produced 23 assists on its 35 made field goals against the Wolfpack.

Defensively, the Blue Devils limited N.C. State to 41.3% shooting, including 5 of 19 (26.2%) on 3-pointers.

A Duke team that relied more on a superior transition game while beating Kentucky and Gonzaga in November is now becoming the all-around team Krzyzewski seeks.

"Before we were really running and we will still run," Krzyzewski said. "But I think we can be a better half court offensive team, and a better half court defensive team."

It's the kind of team Duke will have to be to reach the Final Four and deliver one last NCAA championship before Krzyzewski retires at season's end.

It's just what all the changes and conversations on Jan. 10 were all about.

"We're definitely trending in the right direction as a team," Banchemo said. "We're playing a lot more together, we're communicating better on offense and defense, and we're holding each other accountable, just as a team, and everybody listens to each other. Nobody's stubborn. Nobody doesn't listen. Everyone takes what someone has to say and puts it to use, so we're definitely taking good steps."

Mark Williams' 'tremendous' performance proves he'll deliver when Duke needs him

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (January 15, 2022)

DURHAM, N.C. – It's some 38 minutes before tipoff, and Mark Williams is rocking. Literally.

Perhaps it's Lil Tecca and Gunna's "Repeat It," blaring over the Cameron Indoor intercom system, that has him in such a good mood. (The song does, as the kids say, slap.) Perhaps it's Duke's impending matchup against NC State, a game in which Williams knows he'll be heavily showcased. But whatever the reason, here Williams is – on the baseline, directly underneath the net nearest the visiting bench – shifting from the balls of his feet to his heels and back again. If all that didn't already say as much, the way he's bobbing his head to the beat confirms it: Yes, the vibes here are very good.

And shouldn't they be? After thoroughly undressing Wake Forest on Wednesday – on the road, without Coach K, no less – Duke suddenly looks like the Death Star version of itself from back in November, when it beat Kentucky and Gonzaga on its way to the nation's No. 1 ranking. If anything, the Blue Devils are even better off now, given the sudden emergence of former five-star recruit A.J. Griffin. But as the program is getting back to its winning ways, much of the fascination has centered on ... well, anyone but its starting center.

Some of that makes sense, considering Duke's other four starters are all projected first-round NBA draft picks in their own right. Here's the thing, though: So is Williams, and for good reason. (For those counting at home, John Calipari's 2010 Kentucky team remains the only one in college basketball history to produce five first-rounders in the same draft ... for now.) Though Williams had scored in single figures in five of Duke's previous eight games, when the Blue Devils have needed him most this season – see: limiting national player of the year candidates Oscar Tshiebwe and Drew Timme – Big Fella always comes through.

It was no different Saturday, as Williams exploited the Manny Bates-sized hole in NC State's starting lineup. (Bates has missed basically the entire season because of a shoulder injury that required surgery.) To steal a line from longtime ACC scribe Brett Friedlander, the Wolfpack are a donut right now, with a giant hole smack dab in the middle. There is a reason, after all, that Kevin Keatts' club cedes 37.5 points in the paint per game and nine times has allowed more than 40 such points. Everyone in the ACC knows this, including Williams and Duke's coaching staff, and attacks it accordingly. Duke was no different, using its season-high 58 points in the paint to roll to an 88-73 win.

That pregame scene with Williams, though, almost proved prescient. The chorus to "Repeat It," Williams' pregame jam? Stayin' up, I get no rest, rest, rest, rest. And though, yes, the musical stylings of Lil Tecca and Gunna likely meant those lyrics in a different sense, they were absolutely applicable to Williams' play against the Wolfpack. The 7-foot-1 center frequently stayed up in the air, blocking NC State's layup attempts, and no, having played nearly 26 minutes, he did not receive much rest. Then again, he didn't need it – not when you're enjoying the success Williams did Saturday. His final stat line: 19 points, a season high; 11 rebounds, more of them offensive (six) than defensive; and eight blocks, a career high and the third most ever by a Blue Devil. In Duke shot-blocking lore, you know you've had a night when "The Landlord" himself tweets: "Love it!!!!" (That Williams had twice as many blocks as Shelden Williams used exclamation points – and that's a lot of exclamation points – is one hell of a cosmic coincidence.)

"He was tremendous," Keatts said of Williams. "I thought he was the difference in the game."

It was evident early – like, second-offensive-possession-of-the-game early – that Williams was, indeed, going to be quite active. He scored Duke's first points, a putback dunk off a missed Paolo Banchemo layup, and set the tone for the rest of the afternoon. If it wasn't clear then that Duke would be playing through its big man, it was minutes later. About 3 1/2 minutes into the game, Trevor Keels made an alley-oop pass to Williams that somehow was slightly overthrown. But Williams tracked it, caught it before it went out and – near the same baseline spot where he danced during warmups – threw a backward bounce pass to a streaking Banchemo behind him. The dunk that followed was nice, but the dime? Sheesh.

"Mark's actually pretty skilled. He's got a good feel for the game. So it wasn't like he just kind of did it randomly – he knew what he was doing," Banchemo said of that play, smirking as he described it. "I knew Mark was gonna save it, and he made a perfect bounce pass right to me. Made it easy on me. Set me right up going to the rim."

Williams had several of his own rim-rattling dunks on the day, including a number of and-1s, but that assist was as impressive as anything he did offensively. Williams knew so, too. When a reporter insinuated after the game that he might have made that bounce blindly, hoping for the best, Williams was quick to correct him. "No, I saw Paolo," he protested, with a gregarious grin. "I didn't want to put too much heat on it where he wouldn't catch it. I mean, I knew he was there. I dropped it off, and he finished it."

Though that might have been Williams' best offensive highlight, frankly, it paled in comparison with his defensive ones. Per KenPom, Williams has the nation's No. 4 individual block percentage, but it's hard to imagine there are three other players in the country doing the sorts of defensive things he is. Williams' program-record 7-foot-7 wingspan makes that possible, but it's his timing that makes it happen. Take his second-half block on Casey Morsell, for example, about 5 1/2 minutes after the break. Duke had already opened the game up by then, leading by 15 at the time, but when Williams slammed Morsell's layup attempt into the floor – like a volleyball spike, but with the "kill" going to NC State's comeback hopes – he all but put a capper on the contest. The Wolfpack rallied multiple times late in the second half to cut the margin to nine, but each of the three times they did so, Duke immediately scored on the subsequent possession to make it a double-digit deficit again.

So, why are those blocks so valuable?

Well, for multiple reasons. The first is, obviously, they prevent an opponent from scoring. Duh. But even more than that, they set a precedent. The next time NC State's players came down the court, do you think they were gleefully driving inside? Heck no. Every time Williams swatted a shot into the stands, it was the physical embodiment of a "Do Not Enter" sign. "Obviously, today it was blocked shots, but other games it might not just be blocked shots," Williams said. "It might be altering a shot, or maybe they don't take it up at all. That sort of thing."

This isn't a high-quality analysis, but keeping points off the scoreboard is good. So, too, is being a disincentive for opposing drives. (It's a bonus when, as Banchemo says, Williams blocks a shot inbounds so Duke can get the rebound and run immediately in transition.) But there's another bonus to those vicious swats, something that can wreck an offensive game plan as well as anything:

They're fun as hell. And the Cameron Crazies ... well, they like to celebrate such fun. Say, by busting your eardrums with their collective chanting. It's not too much fun to run offense when you can't hear your coach – or your own thoughts.

"Every block gets the crowd into it," Banchemo said. "His is always, like, so emphatic. He cocks back. It's a violent block every single time."

(An aside: After the game, a local columnist suggested that Williams' block on Morsell "had some violence to it," to which Williams replied, "Oh, yeah, for sure." So, he's aware.)

The point is there is no singular benefit to Williams' presence; rather, it's the accumulation of all these different bonuses. Banchemo and Keels even said they change the way they play defense when they know Williams is behind them on the floor. "I put more pressure on the ball," Keels said, "just because I know I've got somebody in the back who's gonna block the shot or clean things up." So when you consider the importance of Duke's defense – which is No. 18 in the nation, per KenPom, in adjusted efficiency – to its lofty season-long goals, Williams' contributions to that defense become magnified. As they well should.

The beauty of Duke's roster, at its best, is still its versatility: that Griffin can play as a camped-out-in-the-corner shooting guard or a small-ball power forward; that Banchemo can play center in spots while also being a primary ballhandler; that Wendell Moore Jr. can defend any position, one through four. And some games, such as against Virginia Tech, playing someone of Williams' size is a disadvantage because of smaller, quicker opponents. But to win six games in March, Duke almost definitely will have to play big at times, too – and, more specifically, need its bigs to come up big. Williams did so against Timme and the Zags, and Saturday against NC State was another example.

It's not an every-night thing because it doesn't need to be.

But the next time Williams plays a team with a big-time center or a team lacking one entirely? Well, in the wise words of Lil Tecca and Gunna: Repeat it.

How Jon Scheyer, Duke basketball's staff persevered without Coach K at Wake

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (January 14, 2022)

WINSTON-SALEM - The future, for one night anyway, arrived sooner than Mike Krzyzewski, Jon Scheyer or anyone with Duke basketball wanted.

With only about 30 hours notice, Scheyer went from head coach-in-waiting to head coach on the job for Wednesday night's important ACC road game at Wake Forest.

Suffering from a non-COVID virus, Krzyzewski fell ill and didn't lead the team through practice on Tuesday afternoon, leaving his availability for the Wake Forest game in doubt. Many, Scheyer included, held out hope Duke's Hall of Fame coach would make the trip to Winston-Salem on Wednesday.

At the same time, Scheyer prepared as if Krzyzewski wouldn't be there by leading the team through practice. Since Scheyer had been in charge of scouting Wake Forest, he had assistant coach Nolan Smith also get up to speed quickly on the Demon Deacons so he could properly instruct the players during the game.

"Nolan Smith stepped up and crammed basically for, you know, several hours there," Scheyer said, "just to know Wake more and their specials. You could see him yelling out their plays."

All of this happened with Duke coming off a 76-74 loss at home to Miami on Saturday night. The Blue Devils were preparing for their first ACC road game, having squandered a 15-point, second-half lead to lose 71-66 at Ohio State in their only other true road contest this season.

Oh and the players were working their way back into shape after a late December COVID-19 outbreak postponed two games and kept them from practicing for 10 days.

For mid-January, this game at Wake Forest checked plenty of boxes that made it pivotal for the No. 8 Blue Devils.

That Duke emerged with a 76-64 win, allowing a celebratory FaceTime call with Krzyzewski in the Joel Coliseum's visiting locker room, showed the staff cohesion Krzyzewski built that has a good chance to continuing next season when he's retired and Scheyer is the full-time head coach.

"They all came through huge," Duke junior and team co-captain Wendell Moore said. "They had 24 hours to kind of put together this scout. I mean, they did it perfectly. They really gave us all the information we needed on this team."

The 74-year-old Krzyzewski decided last spring that this season would be his last. He made the decision public in early June and Duke chose the 33-year-old Scheyer, already the team's associate head coach, as his successor.

That put Scheyer in a different position this season. Krzyzewski said he's already had Scheyer more involved in duties normally reserved for the head coach as part of the transition.

On Tuesday, the players went through an entire practice without Krzyzewski as he stayed home convalescing from his illness. Smith, associate head coach Chris Carrawell and director of player development Amile Jefferson pulled it together.

"Coach Scheyer and the rest of the staff, they did the work," Banchemo said. "They weren't really worried or really too flustered. They were pretty comfortable."

Then Banchemo, whose talents dictate that he'll be in the NBA and not still at Duke next season when Scheyer is fully in charge, said the words that should ease Blue Devil fans' worries about the future.

"They had it down," Banchemo said. "It felt like a regular practice, honestly. So it was good."

The Blue Devils played far from a perfect game. But the first lineup adjustment of the season paid off big time as AJ Griffin, starting for the first time this season, scored a season-best 22 points.

He and Banchemo (24 points) were unstoppable, at times, in half-court sets that carved up Wake Forest. Duke unleashed a 22-1 run over the final minute of the first half and the first four minutes of the second half to take control.

"Duke did an unbelievable job imposing their will on us at the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half," Wake Forest coach Steve Forbes said. "I thought they were the tougher team when the game was on the line."

The coaching staff, and by extension the team, found itself in a tough situation without its head coach on Tuesday. That Duke persevered bodes well for the rest of this season – and beyond.

The Death Star version of Duke might be back. Consider the ACC on notice

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (January 13, 2022)

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. – Remember those old coin-sorting machines?

You know the ones. Dump a handful of loose pocket change through a slot at the top – no need to differentiate dimes from nickels or anything else – and let the machine sort it for you. Simple enough concept. Coins clank, the machine whirs, and poof: You're left with nice, neat piles of money.

Well, consider Wednesday's matchup between No. 8 Duke and Wake Forest the basketball equivalent of that same basic coin sorter. Only, rather than separating one silver circle from another, it's two basketball teams vying for standing within the still-up-for-grabs ACC. Duke entered the game 12-2, on the heels of not just a surprising loss to Miami but also a program-wide COVID-19 stoppage that spanned almost two weeks. Wake Forest was 13-3, the winner of more games already this season than in five of Danny Manning's six seasons in town. (Whether that says more about Steve Forbes' current squad or Manning as a coach ... well, you decide.) The point is, these were two of the league's best teams, with Wednesday serving as something of a referendum on both.

But after what took place Wednesday inside Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum?

These may still be two of the best sides in the ACC, but they sure as shoot don't deserve to be counted in the same pile of coins.

Quite frankly, the Blue Devils who took the floor Wednesday were not the same ones who did so Saturday against Miami. That was post-COVID-19, still-getting-our-legs-back-under-us Duke. This team, which undressed the Demon Deacons entirely, won 76-64 and yet easily could have won by double that.

This, ladies and gents, was Death Star Duke.

"This win's big for us," Wendell Moore said. "Not just because we won, but because of how we played as a team. Regardless of the fact that we won by what, 12? I mean, this game was just so fun to play as a team. I mean, it felt kind of like how we played at the beginning of the season."

Like at the beginning of the season, huh? Back when Duke was outlasting Kentucky in Madison Square Garden, and out-toughing Gonzaga in Las Vegas and just generally looking like (and being ranked as) the best team in the country? Oh yeah. Kind of like that. Only, possibly, if it can be said, even better.

A large part of that was, and will be, because of a subtle lineup shift announced about 15 minutes before the game. Former five-star recruit A.J. Griffin was revealed as a starter for the first time this season, relegating Jeremy Roach to the bench. The reason? According to coach-in-waiting Jon Scheyer, exactly what you'd expect: Griffin's play of late. (Scheyer served as acting head coach Wednesday, after Mike Krzyzewski missed Tuesday's practice and this game because of a non-COVID-19 illness.) In averaging 11.7 points and 5.3 rebounds in Duke's previous three games, all while making 40 percent of his 3s, Griffin showed the sort of consistent difference-making ability that eluded him earlier this season while he made his way back from two years of significant injuries. "It's really A.J.'s emergence," Scheyer said. "He's been playing really well."

Never was that more obvious than the play that directly preceded halftime. After Wake Forest's Isaiah Mucius committed an offensive foul with nine seconds left, Moore dribbled the ball down the floor and saw Griffin camping out in the corner behind the 3-point arc. As Moore passed it, though, Wake's Khadim Sy closed – hard – on Griffin, anticipating a buzzer-beating 3. Two months ago, maybe Griffin fumbles that pass. Maybe he gives it right back to Moore. On Wednesday, though, Griffin calmly caught it, took a step to the side (to put Sy in a spin cycle) and delivered a butter-smooth 3 right at the buzzer. Money. That basket – Duke's fourth straight in four possessions – gave the Blue Devils not just a six-point lead at the break but also all the momentum heading into the final 20 minutes. (The sequence was made even better in hindsight when, asked how he knew he had enough time to sidestep and still get the shot up, Griffin said, "It really comes from (NBA) 2K.")

Perhaps it's fitting, then, what followed: the sort of dominant run usually found not in high-major hoops but in a lopsided video game. After scoring on its final four possessions of the first half, Duke also converted on its first nine (!) offensive possessions after halftime, not missing a single shot in the process. It wasn't any one player doing the damage, nor was it on any one type of play. Mark Williams dunked. Griffin floated across the lane for another feathery jumper. Trevor Keels had a tough layup through contact, and Paolo Banchero even showcased a nice hook shot. In seemingly the blink of an eye, Duke emerged from the other end of a 22-1 run with the lead, and control of the game, well in hand.

"You don't even know who's scoring," Moore said of that run, unable to stop a fat grin from spreading across his face. "You just know that Duke's scoring."

Which Duke did basically at will all game Wednesday, save for one five-minute stretch in the first half and a shorter spurt in the second. Much of that, unsurprisingly, came from the team's two most physically gifted talents: Banchero and Griffin. Banchero, who made a career-high 11 shots en route to a team-high 24 points, was the same basketball savant he's been all season. In a sign of more to come, he scored three tough inside layups in Duke's first six offensive possessions, not taking his foot off the gas the rest of the evening. (The Wake Forest fans who decided to chant "D-U-I" at Banchero early on in the game – in reference to his being cited for aiding and abetting DUI in November – surely regretted poking the bear.) Banchero made jumpers, turned downhill drives into rim-rattling dunks and was as dominant as he's been throughout the season.

"They were playing me just kind of one-on-one, so, you know, I'm confident that I can win any one-on-one matchup," Banchero said. "So I just wanted to take advantage and be aggressive."

For Griffin, though, this was new. There have been flashes, like the 13 points he scored against Virginia Tech in Duke's last pre-COVID-19 contest, but not the consistent self-creation he showed against the Demon Deacons. That buzzer-beating 3 to end the half was one thing, but how about the rest of his night? At one point midway through the second half, Griffin spun baseline and made it look simple. Effortless. As if an omniscient video-game player controlling his character had just tapped the O button. He showed more ballhandling capabilities than he's been given yet this season and never got rattled or rushed off his spot. Griffin ended up playing the most minutes (35) and scoring the most points (22) that he has in a college game.

Between him and Banchero, Duke was sporting a starting perimeter that would make half the NBA jealous. Seriously.

Add the performances of those two into the overall context of Wednesday's contest – no Coach K, on the road, in a packed-to-the-brim Joel – and it seems obvious that Duke is getting over (or is already beyond) any rust that came from its COVID-19 stoppage. It also, understandably, brings up another question: Is the Death Star version of Duke back?

"We're getting (back to our early-season form), but I'm not gonna say we're at where we want to be," Banchero said. "You know, this is A.J.'s first game starting, and he played great. So we're definitely taking steps in the right direction, but I think we're gonna be much, much better come February and March."

That might be true, but this version of Duke, with a fully unlocked Griffin, is already damn good. In a class – and a coin-counting column – of its own, at the very minimum. Wake Forest is a likely NCAA Tournament team, and for most of the second half, the Blue Devils seemed to be playing with their food.

If there's better yet to come, consider the ACC on notice. The rest of the country, too.

Because it's called the Death Star for a reason.

His time leading Duke dwindling, Coach K looks for answers after COVID pause

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (January 9, 2022)

DURHAM - A ticking clock impacts people like few things do.

Take Mike Krzyzewski Saturday night after his No. 2 Blue Devils suffered a 76-74 loss to unranked Miami at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

January losses don't prevent teams from achieving even the highest of goals. Just look back seven years this month, when Miami came to Cameron and left with a 90-74 win. Three months later, on an April night in Indianapolis, Duke won the NCAA championship.

Krzyzewski knows his team has time to get things right again, even after this latest home loss to the scrappy Hurricanes.

Yet, this is the last go-around for Krzyzewski. His 42nd Duke team will be his last, a decision he made last summer. Hence, a clock ticking like it never has before for him.

As much as no one around Duke wants to discuss it, there is pressure on this team to send Krzyzewski out with his sixth NCAA championship.

So when the Blue Devils spring a leak, like they did in committing a season-worst 17 turnovers while also allowing Miami's experienced guards to drive for many shots in the lane, it carries a little more weight this season.

"In order for us to win something special you are going to have to beat veteran teams," Krzyzewski said, peeking ahead toward his final March Madness.

The Blue Devils are not at their best, like they were when they beat Gonzaga, 84-81, in Las Vegas on Nov. 26. They were a better team Dec. 22 when they rallied from their only halftime deficit of the season to beat Virginia Tech, 76-65.

The program's COVID-19 outbreak caused an unexpected shutdown from practice and conditioning while ACC games at Clemson and Notre Dame were postponed. Duke toughed its way to a 69-57 win over Georgia Tech on Tuesday, its first game since Christmas.

The Hurricanes (13-3, 5-0 ACC) offered a different challenge, though.

Miami's backcourt features two players, Kameron McGusty and Charlie Moore, who are only still playing college basketball because NCAA granted players an extra season of eligibility due to the pandemic.

They hurt Duke on both ends of the court Saturday night. Moore scored 18 points and grabbed seven steals. McGusty scored 14 points, including the basket with 22.8 seconds left that put Miami ahead for good.

Though smaller and not as physical as the Blue Devils, Miami tallied 52 points in the paint as Duke allowed an alarming number of high percentage shots. Part of that is explained by looking at Duke's 17 turnovers, which the Hurricanes turned into 17 points.

But Miami also carved up Duke's normally stout defense in the half court as well. Knowing Miami's guard-oriented team is exceptional at protecting the ball, the Blue Devils opted to protect passing and driving lanes rather than pressuring on the perimeter.

That was the plan, anyway. But the Blue Devils were still a step slow and Miami beat them for backdoor baskets time and time again.

"The backdoors were the ones because we didn't want to contest," Krzyzewski said. "We're not going to get steals so we're playing half a man below and they still backdoored. That shows you're tired, I think."

Krzyzewski lamented his team's fatigue, caused directly by the COVID-19 pause. Yet for the second game in a row, four Duke starters played 31 minutes or more.

Trevor Keels, Paolo Banchemo and Wendell Moore all played 35 minutes or more in the last two games.

That's classic Krzyzewski zeroing in on his core players once ACC play arrives. It's served him well over the last four decades, of course.

But his top, most-trusted players are having trouble producing while regaining their wind. Moore, after a 2 of 11 shooting night against Georgia Tech, improved to 5 of 12 against Miami.

But he missed an open 3-pointer with four seconds left Saturday night that could have put Duke in front. He also turned the ball over six times.

Keels struggled with 2 of 11 shooting, making only 1 of 6 3-pointers.

Jeremy Roach, who has averaged 34 minutes per game over the last two, has hit only 4 of 13 shots during that time.

There's a fine line Krzyzewski and his staff are looking for here. They don't want to push the players too hard, possibly exposing them to injury, as they get back into shape. At the same time, these players are who the staff will count on to win the season's biggest games come March.

Duke has only seven home games left this season. That's all the games Krzyzewski has left to walk out of the locker room into the raucous crowd's din, stroll around the playing court that bears his famous name and coach the Blue Devils at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

The clock is ticking. He doesn't want to walk off that court with any more losses like he did on Saturday night.

He also wants to prepare his team as best he can for March when, to use his word, special games are won.

It's a push and pull that can flummox any coach, including one with a handful of NCAA title rings who's a few weeks away from his 75th birthday.

Mike Krzyzewski sees 'rust' in Duke's turnover-filled loss to Miami

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (January 9, 2022)

DURHAM, N.C. – Trevor Keels watched from his keister, having been knocked to the Cameron Indoor court as he let fly one final shot.

What a Band-Aid it would be, huh? A last-ditch 3-pointer – quite literally, given there were just 0.7 seconds left on the clock – to papier-mâché over Duke's pitfalls and problems against unranked Miami. Those 17 turnovers, a season high? They're unacceptable under any context, but if that shot drops ... well, at least Duke could overcome them. Getting backdoor-cut to death and spaced out like the social distancing of mid-2020? Again, not anything Mike Krzyzewski will tolerate, but at least Duke got enough stops to win.

Except, it didn't. Keels sat there, tracking his shot's trajectory, and watched it careen off the side iron, then the backboard, before falling to the floor. No good. Instinctively, Keels slowly went from seated to sprawled, leaning back and stretching his arms behind his head as the reality of the result set in.

Miami 76, Duke 74. A loss, at home, and the Blue Devils' first this season in ACC play.

Turns out, there was no magic eraser or miracle ball, after all.

"I know the main story will be about the last minute and what happened," Krzyzewski said, "but to me the story of the game was our turnovers. We had 17, and 13 in the first half, and to me it shows the rust that we have."

Rust, indeed. And that's no one-night phenomenon, either. Duke played exactly four games in December – the last of those a 76-65 win over Virginia Tech on Dec. 22 – and then ... nada. Due to a COVID-19 outbreak within the program, scheduled games against Clemson (Dec. 29) and Notre Dame (Jan. 1) were postponed, leaving the Blue Devils sidelined for the bulk of the holiday season. The team eventually returned to action with a win over Georgia Tech on Jan. 4, but that result came after exactly one practice with the entire roster. So, yeah. Far from ideal conditions right as the calendar flipped to conference play.

And especially not ideal considering Saturday's opponent: Miami, which began the season 4-3 but since had won eight straight contests entering its matchup with Duke, including its first four in the ACC. Now, how much does that mean this season? No one knows, considering the sordid state of the league. There's a reason, you know, that #OneBidACC was circulating on Twitter in the past week. But given Miami's offense, a top-25 unit according to KenPom's adjusted efficiency rankings, there was at least an argument to be made that the Hurricanes maybe, possibly could be a somewhat intriguing squad to monitor. (Ignore that No. 200 adjusted defensive efficiency, though. Nothing to see there.)

After Saturday, though, and especially the way the Hurricanes made life hellish for Duke, it's clear that if nothing else, Miami will at least be a tough out this season. (Which is more than you can say about, like, a third of the ACC.) And on the flip side? We already knew Duke could be beaten – since, you know, it already has been – but perhaps there's more post-COVID-19 coalescing that needs to happen here than previously imagined.

"They definitely played a good game defensively tonight, but at the same time, I think we helped them out a lot. A lot of our turnovers were kind of unforced errors, just lazy passes, dribbling the ball off our legs, dribbling into double teams ... just things that we know we really can't do," Wendell Moore Jr. said. "I feel like if we clean up some of that, the outcome is definitely a little different tonight."

And he's probably right. No, he's definitely right. Duke committed its first giveaway just 72 seconds into the game and already had amassed four by the first media timeout. Midway through the first half, Duke built itself an eight-point lead ... only to lose it completely in under three minutes, courtesy of two more turnovers and two missed shots. Give some credit to Miami, whose 11 steals in the first half were a program best since joining the ACC in 2004-05. "It's not like every one of our turnovers were because we were bad," Krzyzewski said. "A number of them were because they were good." At the same time, come on. Thirteen, in one half? The Blue Devils had more turnovers at the break than they'd had in all but one game this season, when they committed 16 against South Carolina State.

So you can understand why Coach K swiped his hand at the ground in frustration before he walked back to the locker room at intermission. You can also imagine the (likely) colorful speech he gave when he got there.

Whatever he said, though, message received. Duke gave the ball away only four times in the second half, two of which were steals by Moore; his seven on the night ended up as the second most by an opposing player ever in Cameron Indoor. But in the second frame, the Blue Devils traded one problem for another. Suddenly it wasn't giving the ball away; rather, it was giving Miami exactly what it wanted to do with the ball.

Which, basically, was backdoor cuts for days. At one point, Miami even had two players run backdoor cuts at the same time(!), with one passing to the other essentially under the hoop. It was dizzying from a courtside seat, so imagine what it would've been like to actually defend it. "We wanted to kind of be able to bluff when they drove and then recover, but they were really good shooters as well, so it's kind of hard," said Paolo Banchemo, who finished with a

game-high 20 points. "Either you're hugged up on your man, or you're over-helping. Credit to them. They spread us out the whole game and kept good spacing and made shots."

There was another set in particular – not a backdoor cut – that Miami used from both sides of the court to give the Blue Devils trouble. It entailed two Hurricanes going to the far side of the floor, dragging their defenders with them and clearing out space down the lane, with a ballhandler near midcourt. That meant the remaining two Hurricanes isolated on the near side of the court. Then, one of those two – usually, a big – would set a screen at about the 3-point arc for the other, who wrapped around it, caught a pass from the primary handler and found himself moving downhill with space to drive. Miami repeated it over and over, and that play especially was a key reason the Hurricanes scored 52 points in the paint. Of those 52, 36 came via layups. Hardly the dogged defense Duke had displayed up until its COVID-19 outbreak.

(To get back to that, without dwelling on it, Krzyzewski made an interesting point about our terminology surrounding the virus in sports. While we often refer to teams as being on COVID-19 "pauses," it's really more like a complete "stoppage," especially if you have a widespread issue, as Duke did.)

Between the turnovers and the backdoor cuts, though – with a few fortunate bounces usually reserved only for the home team in Cameron Indoor – Miami stuck right with the No. 2 squad in the country all night long. Conversely, despite all those deficiencies, Duke never trailed by more than eight – and even had the lead with under a minute to play. Credit Banchemo, who put on arguably the most impressive 30-second display any player in the country has had all season. In consecutive actions, he:

- Blocked Isaiah Wong's driving layup, which would've given Miami a 3-point lead with 1:17 to play.
- Wrestled the loose ball away from Wong and gathered the rebound.
- Scored inside over two guys to give Duke a one-point lead with 1:01 left.
- Stole the ball away on Miami's subsequent possession by tipping it from behind to Moore.
- And lastly, caught the outlet pass from Moore and dunked it with 45 seconds left to give Duke a three-point lead.

If that seems like a lot, it is. It's "future No. 1 overall draft pick" material, to be specific. And in the moment, it very much looked like "I just single-handedly put this game away" material.

Narrator: It was not.

Instead, Jeremy Roach committed a cardinal sin on Duke's next defensive possession, fouling Charlie Moore as he put up a prayer of a layup, which somehow rolled along the rim and in. "Our thing is no 3s and no fouls in that situation," Krzyzewski said, "and we fouled." Moore missed the free throw that followed, but with 7-foot center Mark Williams out of the game, Miami got the rebound and the extra possession it entailed. From there, with 20 seconds remaining, Kam McGusty drove straight into traffic, hung briefly in midair and popped up a floater that fell daintily down the hoop.

Duke still got three more shots in the final 12 seconds of the game – a tough runner by Keels, a 3 by Moore, and Keels' would-be buzzer-beater – but couldn't make up the final two-point margin. Miami clogged the paint for all three shots, too, practically forcing the Blue Devils to do anything but drive inside. "Someone said, well, take it all the way," Krzyzewski said. "You couldn't." And when none of those shots dropped, the final buzzer blared. Ballgame.

For Duke, there's no reason to panic. Miami now sits not just 5-0 in the ACC but also with 13 overall wins and a realistic path to the NCAA Tournament. There's no shame in losing to that squad, same as there wasn't with Ohio State. But at the same time, Saturday is something of a wake-up. Duke's players, as Coach K said, aren't in the same shape they were before their two-plus weeks off. They're not as quick, not as fresh, not as connected. And though it's a long season, it's imperative that the Blue Devils get back to what they looked like before: both for postseason seeding's sake, and also, well, the postseason itself.

"With the interruption we had, that set us back," Krzyzewski said. "We just need to keep getting better. We're not where we were before this. There's no question about that. We are not."

That doesn't mean Duke can't get back there. It doesn't mean it can't even get better than it was. But on this night, at least, it was clear that Duke does still have some work to do if it wants to achieve its ambitious goals. Marquee wins over Kentucky and Gonzaga may have convinced the general public that the Blue Devils are without blemishes, but they're not. Like every team in the country not named Baylor, this group is far from a finished, polished product.

It still can be. It still very well may be. It just isn't right now, at this very moment, in this very condition.

Even a buzzer-beater wouldn't have changed that.

Duke 'not close' to team it was before COVID break. Its defense allows for patience

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (January 5, 2022)

DURHAM - As resilient as this never-ending pandemic has forced us all to be, even the elite athletes comprising Duke's basketball roster need time to work through the disruptions.

The Blue Devils, ranked No. 2 in the country, held one real practice to prepare for Tuesday night's game with Georgia Tech. An outbreak of COVID-19, despite players and coaches being vaccinated, relegated them to isolation in a hotel rather than practicing and playing games last week.

Two games were postponed. Conditioning waned. Sharp play dissipated.

Enough players were cleared to hold what amounted to a glorified shoot around last Sunday. By Monday, everyone was back on the practice court.

So it wasn't a surprise Duke shot a season-low 37.3% as its offense really never clicked against Georgia Tech. The 69 points the Blue Devils produced marked their third-lowest total this season.

Yet Duke left Cameron Indoor Stadium early Wednesday morning with a win, something the Blue Devils accomplished because one important part of their game remained strong, despite all the issues they've faced the last two weeks.

"Defense," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said, "is really a key to our team."

That's why Duke won when it wasn't at its best Tuesday night when it toughed out a 69-57 win over Georgia Tech.

The Yellow Jackets spent most of the night seeing its shooting percentage in the 20s. Georgia Tech finished at a season-low 32.8% as each of its players missed more shots than he made. That included guard Michael Devoe, the ACC's leading scorer at 21.2 points per game, who managed to score 21 points while hitting only 8 of 19 shots, including 3 of 10 3-pointers.

"We talked about it at halftime," Krzyzewski said. "I told them, 'I know you guys are tired, but you cannot be tired on the defensive end.'"

That's an important thing for the Blue Devils to keep in mind as they navigate their way back to where they were before taking two weeks off from games and nearly that long from practice. On Monday, Krzyzewski warned against anyone trying to "binge conditioning" to make up for lost time.

Yes Duke has sports scientists and a top-level training staff to get the players back into game shape. But it won't happen overnight. Heck, Duke can't even practice Wednesday because that's the team's NCAA-mandated one day off of the week.

So the Blue Devils' offense, No. 6 in the country in efficiency scoring 116 points per 100 possessions according to KenPom.com, figures to take a few games to get back to that level.

In the meantime, be it against Miami on Saturday at home, or at Wake Forest the following Wednesday, Duke is probably going to have to tough out some wins like it did against Georgia Tech.

That's ok. This team, even with its normally potent scoring ability, is built to do just that. Georgia Tech is the fifth consecutive team Duke has held below 70 points.

It would be six teams in a row but for the lone example of Duke's defense springing a leak. That was Nov. 30 at Ohio State, when the Buckeyes shot 48.3 percent in the second half to rally from a 13-point halftime deficit to beat Duke 71-66.

"We stopped playing defense," Krzyzewski said after the Georgia Tech game, looking back to the Ohio State game. "Tonight, we did not do that."

Duke freshman Paolo Banchero is projected as the top pick in this summer's NBA Draft mostly based on his 17.1 scoring average. But the 6-10 forward is of the mind to bring it on defense, too, if Duke needs that to win. He blocked three shots against Georgia Tech to tie Duke's 7-1 sophomore center Mark Williams for the team high.

Banchero also had two of Duke's three steals against the Yellow Jackets.

"That's just kind of been my mentality coming into conference play," Banchero said, "just making a difference on that end when everything else is going wrong, just being consistent defensively and putting in the effort every time down."

Duke (12-1, 2-0 ACC) owns a sparkling record and possesses more talent than any team in the ACC. Georgia Tech coach Josh Pastner said numerous times following the game that Duke has "a really good shot at the national championship."

COVID detoured Duke's path to that goal. The road back won't be easy.

"I hope we can get out of it," Krzyzewski said, "because we are not close to being the team we were before the break. We can be, we just have to keep going."

A.J. Griffin makes the difference against Virginia Tech, and possibly going forward

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (December 23, 2021)

DURHAM, N.C. – A high-five? We're getting worked up about ... a high-five?

Damn right we are.

Because, as A.J. Griffin knows well, this high-five was never guaranteed. From your teammates, or your friends, or even your coach, sure, whatever. It's the physical version of, "Nice job." But from a complete stranger, screaming in your face, in a scene and a situation you came oh-so-close to never seeing? Well, yeah, in that case, go buck wild.

And so Griffin did, gratuitously, because he could. With 10 minutes left in No. 2 Duke's eventual 76-65 win over Virginia Tech on Wednesday, Griffin cut right across the paint with the ball and drew contact with Hokies forward Justyn Mutts. As the whistle blew, with Griffin still drifting to his right, he tossed up a falling-away runner – which careened off the glass and deftly down through the net. All hell broke loose ... only to Griffin, it probably sounded more like heaven. It was not a collection of screams, so much, but rather one ridiculous roar, a sonic shockwave screaming throughout Cameron Indoor Stadium.

And Griffin was right at the epicenter. Even better: He was the source.

So he kept drifting – swept up by his own momentum, but also the crowd's – to the far corner of the court, where he flung out his finger and pointed it straight down. Count it! Then, for no reason except cosmic chance, Griffin locked eyes with one young Crazie in particular: a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, bewildered boy absolutely in awe of the man in front of him. Without hesitation, he extended his hand to meet the boy's. High-five. Or, if we're still in the business of translating physical acts into words: hell yeah.

"You know, that's Cameron right there," Griffin said with a grin. "I love the fans. Just a great moment with them."

"Great" is one word for it. But given Griffin's backstory, there are dozens, maybe hundreds of others. This is someone who, before this season, last played a competitive basketball game as a high school junior: in late February of 2020, before the full onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. First, he suffered a dislocated knee during his junior year of high school, and then an ankle injury in what would have been his senior season. Only, because of said second injury, Griffin didn't get a senior season. Instead, he spent the year rehabbing in Tampa with his father, Adrian, an assistant coach for the Toronto Raptors (who last season relocated their operations to Florida in the wake of the pandemic).

Accordingly, Griffin enrolled early at Duke this summer to rehab and recover, to round out his game after a nearly 18-month hiatus. All of which was well and fine until a mid-October practice, in front of plenty of NBA personnel, where he made inadvertent contact with a teammate and fell to the court. He grasped at his knee. Onlookers went silent. Griffin, quickly, started crying. "It was a rough moment," recalled fellow freshman Paolo Banchemo, "for the team as a whole." Less than a month away from Duke's season-opener against Kentucky – in Madison Square Garden, no less, a short train ride from Griffin's hometown of Ossining, N.Y. – Griffin suddenly saw the game he loves pulled out from under him again.

"I never doubted (I would come back)," Griffin said, "but ... you know. You have those thoughts."

Slowly, over the course of the next few weeks, Griffin had to relearn to trust not just his body, but also the things it enables him to do. Those hurdles were as much mental as physical. Jumping is easy, right? But trusting that you're going to land, successfully, and not buckle over again? Much, much, much tougher.

And over time, Griffin did it, although his progress never tracked with public expectations. As a former five-star recruit and projected lottery pick, the consensus was that Griffin should automatically start every game, play 30 minutes, and look like a professional-in-training from Day 1. But that was never feasible, nor fair, given Griffin's unique circumstances. (Plus, considering the talent on this roster, it's not a given he would have started even if he were fully healthy.)

Of late, though, these last few games, Griffin has steadily started assuming his pre-injury form – and we're not talking pre-October setback, but pre-any-injury altogether. Like, back when the son of a former Seton Hall track star (his mother, Audrey) and a 12-year NBA professional (Adrian) could slither like a snake on the court, sprint like a speeding bullet, and jump damn near out of the gym. Griffin had yet to unveil that entire arsenal, but rather flashes: a 3-pointer here, a defensive chase-down there and so on. Almost like a still-in-the-works piece of pottery, where the general shape is there but still needs some cooling time in the kiln.

On Wednesday, though, Mike Krzyzewski cracked open that kiln. And what he found? Not just what the Blue Devils needed to beat the Hokies in their ACC opener, but what this team ultimately will need to accomplish its loftier, longer-term goals.

Because quite frankly, in the first half against Virginia Tech, Duke looked decidedly un-Duke-like. Banchemo, one of the favorites to be the No. 1 overall pick in next year's NBA Draft, had as many points (six) as he did missed shots, with three turnovers to boot. The Blue Devils, after scoring 13 points on their first six possessions, simply stalled offensively, settling for contested jumpers and 3s instead of cutting inside. Yet Krzyzewski entered the locker room less peeved than in problem-solving mode.

"He told us we were gonna have to grow up in the second half," Banchemo said. "We weren't gonna be able to wait until after the game and say, we could've done this. We just had to do it, like, now."

Krzyzewski's message, though, did not appear received in the first three minutes after intermission. Rather than recalibrating, Duke got knocked back even further; Mike Young's Hokies backdoor-cut the Blue Devils to death, building an eight-point lead in the process. "It wasn't working," Krzyzewski said postgame of his conventional lineup, which features 7-footer Mark Williams at center. With Virginia Tech forward Keve Aluma drifting comfortably around the fringes of the floor, Williams was forced farther and farther away from the basket – and his comfort zone. Quickly, Krzyzewski made a change, subbing Griffin in for Williams, building, basically, the Blue Devils' version of a small-ball lineup. (No, playing your 6-11 point forward at

center alongside a 6-6 wing with a 7-foot wingspan does not usually constitute small, but ... roll with it.) "A good ballhandling lineup," Krzyzewski called it, but that belies the full effectiveness of that fivesome. Because from that substitution on, the game was over.

Once Griffin subbed in, Duke went on a 27-7 run, punctuated by Griffin's falling-away runner. The free throw he subsequently drained put Duke up by eight, and Virginia Tech never got it closer than seven the rest of the way. "He may've been the difference in the game," Young said. And from a courtside seat, it certainly appeared so.

Now, it wasn't that Griffin suddenly went Klay Thompson-level nuclear hot, making every shot in sight, or even that he turned into mini-Giannis, physically dominating everyone else on the floor. Neither was the case. Rather, Griffin fit perfectly what Duke needed to beat these smaller, switchable Hokies. He cut to the basket, using his size and strength to finish at the rim; initiated the break off his four rebounds, gobbling up the court in giant gallops as he turned on the transition jets; and he kept everyone in front of him, from the physical mutts to the quicker Hunter Cattoor to even Aluma, Tech's 6-9 offensive centerpiece. Simply, he played within the system, got to his spots, and was judicious with his attempts. His final line – 13 points on 5-of-7 shooting, with four boards, one assist, one steal and one block – reflects that as well as anything.

Young said Virginia Tech assistant Mike Jones, who previously coached Griffin during his stint with USA Basketball, repeatedly warned the Hokies staff about his former player's potential for wrecking a game. And then, well, Griffin did it anyway. "A.J. Griffin didn't sneak up on us, put it that way," Young said. "We knew exactly who he was." Only, as Duke's perimeter-oriented lineup proved in the second half, forewarning did not necessarily foretell success.

It is probably (definitely) worth mentioning at this point that, while Griffin's runner was his most consequential play, it was not his most emphatic. The most skilled, maybe, and the one that put the game away, but if we're being honest, most likely not the sort of thing Griffin grew up dreaming about in his Duke-themed bedroom. No, that would've been what came roughly three minutes earlier, after a series of back-and-forth possessions ended with no baskets. But at the 12:58 mark, with the Blue Devils up just three, the ball found Griffin's hands with a head of steam toward the hoop. You can guess what happened next.

Elevation.

Gravity-defying dunk.

Virginia Tech timeout.

Broken eardrums for all.

That, it turns out – since Griffin is still a college freshman, and not a future-teller – was the play where it all hit Griffin. The injuries. The hours of work. The lifelong visions of a moment he, quite honestly, had started to question would ever happen. As the Hokies took a timeout, and pure adrenaline pumped through his veins, Griffin couldn't help but be overcome by emotion.

"You know, you're waiting for that moment where it's a breakthrough, and sometimes it gets hard. Sometimes you may not see it," Griffin said postgame. "I'm thankful for this whole team. Because that was emotional – an emotional night, really, just because they have helped me during this journey. It wasn't easy."

Griffin had shown flashes against Lafayette, South Carolina State, teams of that nature – noticeably, not Kentucky or Gonzaga or Ohio State – but it never looked effortless. It looked laborious, actually, in an almost robotic way. And then, on the night his team needed him most – against one of the ACC's few good, veteran teams – he made everything look the opposite. It was easy ... even knowing that getting back to this point was anything but.

Griffin briefly subbed out late in the game, but when Virginia Tech responded with a run right away, his break became more of a breather. In total, Griffin played a season-high 24 minutes Wednesday night, with two-thirds of those coming in the second half. "I was talking to Jon (Scheeyer) and Chris (Carrawell) on the bench, and I was saying, 'I wonder how long he can play.' And then, 'I wonder how long he can play' – and he kept playing," Krzyzewski said. "So he showed not just me, but himself, something tonight: that he can do that. And if he doesn't play like that, we don't win."

Griffin did play, finally, like the version of himself Duke's coaches thought they were getting when he committed in the fall of 2019. Two full years later, Griffin has lived a lifetime's worth of athletic adversity. And yet here he is, strong, tall, still standing – and landing – on the other side. "I didn't look at those setbacks as something negative," he said, "but something that was building me up."

All in one night, the old A.J. Griffin appeared. So did Duke's small-ball lineup, employed earlier this season against Campbell, but with significantly less success. (Adding a fifth lanky, skilled ballhandler, it turns out, sort of makes for an unstoppable transition offense.) And those two things together mean a third thing naturally manifests: a much scarier Duke team than the one that walked onto the floor before Wednesday night. As if the No. 2 team in the country wasn't already challenging enough to beat.

Back home in New York, Griffin's mother, Audrey, watched her son's breakout on television. He flies home Thursday, for a quick three-day holiday reprieve before the rest of what, likely, will be his only season playing college basketball. They will celebrate his performance, and Christmas, and how maybe this get-right game was just the present Griffin needed. Maybe they'll even high-five, too. If not, a text she wrote to The Athletic – accompanied by two flexed arm emojis and three "100s" – says more than any physical act ever could:

"Yes, that was A.J."

What's behind Duke's improved 3-point shooting? Better ball movement, for starters

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (December 20, 2021)

DURHAM, N.C. – Simple play, simple result.

As a normal pick-and-roll should be, right? So it wasn't strange when, midway through No. 2 Duke's 87-56 win over Elon on Saturday, Trevor Keels initiated the standard set. With the ball in his hands just outside the top of the key, Keels made the universal "come here" sign with his cupped hand, calling for Theo John to jog out of the post. John obliged, and the P&R played out as it so often does: Keels going around the screen, then a hedging defender, and side-passing the ball back inside to a cutting John. Everything according to plan.

Only, then the plan differed. John didn't put the ball straight up for an easy layup, didn't even stop to scan the floor and plan his next step. Instead, the second the rock touched his hands, it became a hot potato, with John immediately re-directing the pass to the far corner and to a wide open Jeremy Roach, who promptly drilled a 3.

Simple play, simple result.

But something sustainable?

Increasingly for these Blue Devils, yes. Sequences of that sort are slowly becoming the norm for Duke, at least if last week's three games are any indication. Now, it's fair (and somewhat necessary) to consider the caliber of opponent before drawing any grand conclusions – at No. 175 overall in KenPom's ratings, Appalachian State was the "best" of the three December opponents thus far – but don't dismiss the results flatly. Because it's clear that since bricking 28.6 percent from 3 in their lone loss this season, to Ohio State, Duke's shooting has just gotten straight-up better.

Sounds easy, right? "Just make more shots!"

Oh, if only.

That's one element of the shooting equation, sure ... just, the most unpredictable one. But there are many others, though, that Mike Krzyzewski's team has harped on during its two off weeks for finals following that Ohio State loss. Namely? Better set-up before the ball even leaves a shooter's hands – even if that's as simple as making the extra pass whenever possible.

"Really, I think we were doing that except for Ohio State," Krzyzewski said postgame. "But that's gonna be the nature of our team, and especially if you can push. And our guys like it. To me, it's the most beautiful part of the game. The most beautiful part of our game is passing, and there's connecting baskets (as a result)."

Some context: Entering last week, Duke was only making 32.8 percent of its 3s, No. 182 nationally. For a team with clear national championship aspirations, shooting looked like the swing skill upon which this team's hopes would sink or swim. And through the first eight games of the year, frankly, Duke's perimeter prowess was closer to "needs pool floaties" than Michael Phelps; in just two of those first eight contests (versus Gardner-Webb and Lafayette) did Duke shoot at or better than 40 percent from 3. The season opener against Kentucky produced a 1-of-12 effort on 3s. In the second half against Ohio State, the Blue Devils went 1-of-8 from 3 and, accordingly, let the Buckeyes chip their way back from a double-digit deficit.

Duke's focus entering its finals break was on finding, and taking, better shots, especially in the halfcourt. Assistant coach Nolan Smith said after re-watching the Ohio State tape, and seeing how many missed kick-out opportunities Duke had, shot selection stood out as something in need of sharpening.

"Obviously a lot of teams going into each game are gonna say, 'We have to make Duke make shots.' But if we make the right kicks and our shots are wide open, we know we have guys who should be shooting close to 40 percent from 3," Smith said via Zoom. "But it has to be connected shots, where it's a team shot, not individually."

And then ... this week happened. Against South Carolina State, en route to scoring a season-high 103 points, Duke drained 15 of its 27 3-point attempts. Against Appalachian State two nights later, 15 made triples. (This was just the second time in program history that Duke made 15 3s in consecutive contests.) Saturday's win over Elon wasn't quite as predicated on 3-pointers – Duke's substantial size advantage over the Phoenix meant plentiful post touches, not to mention heavy minutes for the team's reserves – but the Blue Devils still made eight deep attempts.

In late November, that would've been considered a solid outing. Now, in a week's time, it seems subpar.

That says something about how Duke's offense has shifted, noticeably, in such a short period of time. The statistics back that up, too; on the season, Duke has now made 37 percent of its 3s, good for a top-50 national ranking. But how?

First, as Smith said, taking better shots. "Taking tough 2s, or taking a wide-open 3: which one is the better shot?" Smith said. "We feel like all of our guards can get their own shot, but is that the best shot?" As it turns out, usually not. Now, that's not to say Duke's individual talents cannot make tough 2s – there are likely four, if not five, first-round NBA draft picks on this roster – because they clearly can. And they did so with ease against Elon, scoring 44 points off layups (!) against a vastly undersized opponent. "We just got in the lane more today and got more layups," Keels said postgame. "So the 3-ball, we didn't really need it as much." That, though, won't be the case as early as next week, when Duke is scheduled to open conference play against Virginia Tech.

Against ACC opponents – even this year, given the sordid state of the league – Duke is going to need the 3-ball to drop. And while it would be unwise to expect this team (or any) to suddenly start draining 15 treys every night – the current Division I leader is Eastern Kentucky, which averages 13.2 made 3-pointers per game – that element of Duke's offense is critical to the rest of it functioning at full capacity. For as good as Duke's drivers are, no college player can reasonably be expected to finish against five defenders in the paint. And as Keels says, "a lot of teams are gonna pack in on us. I mean, when you've got a (guy who is) 6-10 and a 7-1, they're gonna." The 3-pointer, then, becomes the great equalizer offensively, the looming threat that forces opponents to play Duke normally on defense instead of with some gimmick.

"If you've gotta respect them from 3 all the time," said Elon coach and former Duke staffer Mike Schrage, "it's gonna be really tough."

This is not to say that suddenly Duke is suddenly going to become 3-point thirsty. Per KenPom, only 37.3 percent of the team's field-goal attempts come from behind the arc, which is just about in the middle (No. 190 nationally) of all Division I teams. So the strategy is more about making those looks as efficient as possible, and making sure they're coming from the right people.

Making the extra pass is one way to increase the odds of those deep shots dropping; that message from the finals break has seemingly gotten through, given Duke assists on 58.2 percent of its made shots, which ranks top 50 nationally per KenPom. "We could have some hockey assists in how we play," Krzyzewski adds, "and I like that." Another such way is taking those 3s when the defense isn't set to stop them – aka, in transition. Considering Duke averages 1.209 points per possession (PPP) in transition, one of its most efficient offensive settings, that idea tracks.

As Krzyzewski said after the Appalachian State win, "because we have four ball-handlers in the game and we can advance the ball very quickly and space the court, the defensive rebound can naturally lead to the open 3, if we do it the right way."

And it absolutely can, especially on cross-court passes against a scrambling, retreating opponent. Whether it be Keels, or Roach, or Wendell Moore Jr., or even Paolo Banchemo, all have been the beneficiary at times this season of missed switches or slow runbacks. Then there's the matter of who is actually taking those 3s ... and here is where we mention that, of all those listed beneficiaries, another new one is steadily inserting his way into the conversation.

That would be A.J. Griffin, Duke's second-highest ranked recruit entering this season, but someone who also hadn't played competitive basketball the last two years due to a variety of injuries; prior to this season, Griffin's last organized game came in late February of his junior year of high school. So, yeah, it has taken him some time to ramp back up to full-speed, if one could even say he's there yet. (An October knee injury set Griffin back a few extra weeks.) This week, though, Griffin has looked as much like his old self as he has thus far in college – and he very quietly is making a claim to being Duke's best 3-point shooter. It's a small sample size, yes, but Griffin has made 46.2 percent of his 3s this season, easily the best percentage on the team. That none of his makes came against Kentucky, Gonzaga, or Ohio State is important context, but also some that should be taken with a grain of salt, considering his improving health and physical fitness. But the point is, a one-time projected top-five pick is finally getting back to his old self ... and well, well, well, what do you know? The dude can still play a little.

Even beyond Griffin, Duke now has four rotation guys hitting above or around 35 percent from 3: Joey Baker (40.5 percent), Moore (38.6), Roach (36.8), and Banchemo (34.4). Those look like sustainable figures, both individually and collectively.

Getting to this point, though, did require a serious uptick in efficiency this week. And that's where those two weeks off were so valuable. Smith said he tries not to discuss he and coach-in-waiting Jon Scheyer's 2010 title team often with Duke's current players, but in this situation, he did.

"I actually mentioned that to them. I was like, in 2010, Scheyer, (Kyle) Singler, and myself, we scored together, all three of us," Smith said. "You know, one dribble-penetration, kick. We have a good core of guards that can be exactly like that, but they have to see that. They have to know that they need each other."

No. 2 Duke's iron starting five is special. But the bench is becoming a force too

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (December 17, 2021)

DURHAM -- Since the basketball season began, Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski's starting five has not changed.

Ten games in, one starting lineup for the Blue Devils. That group has served No. 2 Duke (9-1) well as the Blue Devils lone blemish was a 71-66 loss at Ohio State on Nov. 30.

That night, Duke faltered in the second half when its shooting fell apart as it's normally potent offense lacked punch.

Thursday night's 92-67 win over Appalachian State displayed an improved version of the Blue Devils, one that gets solid play from its bench to help make that core starting five more productive.

Yes, starters Wendell Moore (21 points) and Paolo Banchero (16) led Duke's scoring attack as four of Duke's starters reached double figures. But AJ Griffin's 11 points along with eight from Joey Baker and six more points from Theo John showed those first three players off the bench can add important productivity.

"If they are playing like that, there ain't no telling how good we can get," said Duke sophomore guard Jeremy Roach, who scored 11 points himself with six assists. "It's actually scary."

Duke's consistent starting five has been the 6-5 Moore, with 6-5 freshman guard Trevor Keels, the 6-3 Roach plus the 6-10 Banchero and 7-1 center Mark Williams.

The 6-9, 242-pound John's role has been to tag-team with Williams inside to keep both centers fresh. That pattern was knocked off kilter this week when John experienced back tightness and had to miss Tuesday's 103-62 win over South Carolina State.

But he was back on Thursday night, playing 13 turnover-free minutes to tally six points, three rebounds and an assist.

Baker and Griffin, though, were the first two players off Duke's bench. The Mountaineers, an NCAA tournament team last March as the Sun Belt Conference champions, gave Duke a battle for the entire first half and the first few minutes after halftime.

Baker and Griffin, along with John, gave Duke important minutes in the first half, in particular. Over the game's first 15 minutes, neither team led by more than four points while the lead kept changing hands.

But Griffin, a 6-7 freshman, scored eight of his 11 points in the first half. John scored all six of his during a two-minute stretch when he was the only Blue Devil to score.

Baker had five of his eight points in the first half as Duke used a late 16-4 run to take a 50-37 halftime lead.

"Joey and AJ can help us because they are really good 3-point shooters," Krzyzewski said.

Duke finished the game with 28 bench points, but 19 of them came in the first half when the Blue Devils were in a fight.

Duke finally gained permanent separation from App State with a 14-2 second-half run that pushed its lead to 69-52 on a Moore jumper with 11:38 to play.

But three non-starters played a big role in keeping Duke from facing a deficit in the first half and allowed the Blue Devils to pull away in the second half.

"That was a really good game for us," Krzyzewski said. "They played really well. They played hard and are a veteran team, an NCAA team from last year with all those guys."

When Duke last won the NCAA championship, that team's motto was like the old 1970s TV drama: Eight is Enough.

That season, the Blue Devils lost Semi Ojeleye to a mid-season transfer before Rasheed Sulaimon was kicked off the team in January. That left three reserves the coaching staff used the rest of the season, which ended with a 35-4 record and nets being cut down in Indianapolis.

Though Duke has two other reserves in 6-8 forward Bates Jones and 6-2 freshman guard Jaylen Blakes, the coaching staff appears to be honing in on its starting five plus Baker, John and Griffin to handle the bulk of the minutes.

Baker and John are veteran players, though John's previous college experience came at Marquette before he transferred to Duke this season. Griffin is a freshman but he's steadily improving after missing October practice time with a sprained knee.

They are giving Duke a bench capable of delivering championships.

Duke's Paolo Banchero Is A Modern Big Man With An Old-School Shot Profile

By Josh Planos, FiveThirtyEight (December 6, 2021)

There was no shortage of polish in the first college basketball game of Paolo Banchero's career. The 19-year-old Duke forward picked apart a top-10 opponent with an array of skills seldom packaged in a 6-foot-10, 225-plus-pound frame: off-the-bounce jumpers, two-handed explosive dunks, patience and persistence, size and strength. There was a certain quietness to the performance, too: Banchero didn't lead the Blue Devils in scoring, shot attempts or minutes played, but he was undoubtedly the most instrumental player on the court.

Among freshmen at Division I schools, Banchero ranks fifth in points (17.8), 15th in total rebounds (7.3) and tied for ninth in win shares (1.4). He's shooting 33.3 percent from beyond the arc and 83.8 percent from the stripe. Two of Banchero's three biggest scoring outbursts of the season have come at major venues in top-10 showdowns: against Kentucky at Madison Square Garden in the Champions Classic and against Gonzaga at T-Mobile Arena in the Continental Tire Challenge. Banchero put up 20-plus points in each win – against the Bulldogs, Banchero outplayed Chet Holmgren, the top-rated player in their recruiting class and Banchero's main competition for the No. 1 overall pick in next year's NBA draft.

At a time when bigs in the NBA are more skilled than ever before, there's a lot to like about Banchero's ready-made toolkit and how it might translate to the next level. In eight games, he's displayed practically everything a general manager would desire: defensive versatility, low-post strength, perimeter range and off-the-dribble capability. A quick release and a tight handle are rarities for a player who for decades would simply have been asked to stand near the rim and raise his arms, but Banchero has showcased both and done so against the toughest slate of any ACC team thus far.

As Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski put it earlier this season, "He's the real deal."

It's likely that Banchero has but a few months left on campus in Durham. But while he appears to fit the ever-shifting mold for players of his size, Banchero's shot selection is unique compared to recent high-capital draft picks. There were nine players taken in the first round of the past three drafts who stood at least 6-foot-10.2. None had a shot profile in their final college season quite like Banchero's.

Banchero takes a lower combined share of field-goal attempts in the paint and at the rim than any of those nine players, according to CBB Analytics. He ranks sixth on his own team in percentage of shots taken in the paint, trailing even Trevor Keels, who is 5 inches shorter than Banchero.

Conversely, nearly a quarter of Banchero's shot profile is painted from the midrange; Kentucky's Isaiah Jackson is the only player among Banchero's comps who took more than 16 percent of his attempts from the area. No other player on Duke's roster accounts for more than 17 percent of shot attempts in the midrange.

Most surprising is that 23.5 percent of Banchero's shots have come above the break, a rarity from a big that was exceeded among our first-rounders only by Loyola's Santi Aldama, a stretch forward who lacked size on the interior and was largely deployed as a perimeter shooter.

Put together, Banchero's shot profile looks more comparable to midrange marksman DeMar DeRozan than it does to stretch big Bam Adebayo.

Much of Banchero's unorthodox abilities are the byproduct of multiple growth spurts, not unlike Anthony Davis, who learned the sport before he grew 8 inches in 18 months. Banchero grew up as a guard with ball-handling responsibilities, then he grew almost 6 inches before high school and another few inches as a freshman. There are reports that he's grown to 6-foot-11 since his arrival in Durham. The tallest player on the court is seldom able to or asked to bring the ball up the court, but in non-dead ball scenarios Banchero has repeatedly initiated the Duke offense, which takes a by-committee approach to point-guard duties.

That ability to control the pace of the game coupled with his lateral quickness and skill to quickly maneuver from the perimeter to the rim was obvious in the season opener and resulted in the benching of his Kentucky matchup, forward Keion Brooks. "He was struggling to guard Paolo," Wildcats coach John Calipari said when asked why the junior logged only 16 minutes and 40 seconds of action. "[Paolo is] really good."

Banchero is up against recent program history when the NBA comes calling. The only thing worse than Duke's record of producing NBA greats is its record of producing exceptional bigs. Since 2000, the Blue Devils have featured six first-round draft picks who were at least 6-foot-10. None has made an All-Star team, and many are either out of the league or are struggling to find playing time. Banchero may be the one to break the streak, with atypical abilities that could translate well to a league prioritizing multi-skilled bigs.

Despite a recent loss to Ohio State in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge, the Blue Devils are the No. 7 team in Ken Pomeroy's adjusted efficiency margin, the No. 9 team in Sports-Reference's Simple Rating System and the No. 13 team in ESPN's College Basketball Power Index. By all accounts, they're playing like one of the best teams in the nation – largely due to the sensational freshman out of Seattle.

One loss and one court-storming later, Duke must identify issues against Ohio State

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (December 1, 2021)

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Theo John left last.

Or perhaps there's a better word, when you're slithering along the outskirts of a basketball-court-turned-mosh-pit, ducking your head, keeping your eyes down, trying to simultaneously dart past and dance through thousands of strangers celebrating your misfortune. So, what do you call that? It's not leaving, so much, because leaving is simple. Leaving is easy. Leaving is deciding you no longer want to be in a place and making it so. What John, and the rest of Duke's men's basketball team, had to do was significantly more of a struggle. Do you think he – they – wanted to be there, caught in the crowd, scooting past the same people who booed them the better part of two and a half hours?

Of course not. So while John was never in danger, it's also not right just to say he was last to leave.

How 'bout this? He was last to escape.

The same can't be said for Duke's win-loss record. News flash, folks: court stormings only happen for a reason – and boy, did the nearly-19,000 scarlet-clad Ohio State fans at Value City Arena have one. Beating Duke at home is one thing. But beating No. 1 Duke, in Mike Krzyzewski's last season, in his last nonconference road game, after trailing by 13 at the half?

You could already feel the crowd ... well, crowding the fringes of the floor when Cedric Russell hit his final two free throws to seal the Buckeyes' 71-66 win.

"I forgot we were even playing the game anymore, really," Zed Key, Ohio State's leading scorer, joked. "I was just so excited, you know? He hits those two free throws, we're up five. I was ready to celebrate."

On the other sideline, though, the sentiment couldn't have been more different. Days after a season-defining win over then-No. 1 Gonzaga – which subsequently vaulted Duke to the top of the Associated Press poll, a milestone the program has proudly hit in 21 of 42 seasons under Krzyzewski – Duke came up with a dud in its first true road game this season. More incredibly than the final result, though, was the fashion it came in.

Over the last 10 years, Duke had never led by 10 or more at halftime and lost... until Tuesday.

185 wins, no losses... until Tuesday.

This was a team that led by as many as 15 in the second half, and still maintained a seven-point cushion with about four to play. Hell, Duke was only down three with 10 seconds left, needing one good 3-pointer to send this whole ordeal into overtime. Only, instead, it missed all those looks, and many that preceded it. After shooting a blistering 52.9 percent from the floor in the first half, Duke only made seven shots the entire final 20 minutes – including none over the final 5:18. Go scoreless the final five minutes against a team of Ohio State's caliber – really, any halfway-decent Division-I outfit – and see how many wins you come out with.

"We played a good first half, and at the start of the second half we did not get stops. We were still scoring, and then I think with not getting the stops, we weren't able to lengthen the lead a couple times," Krzyzewski said. "They just stayed right in there. It's going back and forth, and then all of a sudden, their freshness took over."

Only, that back and forth was less two teams trading blows and more one slowly chipping away at another's longtime lead. Which still doesn't really explain the how of Tuesday. Krzyzewski's final team is one thing, if nothing else: chock full of obscenely-good offensive talents. Duke entered Tuesday with (and still has) a top-10 adjusted offensive efficiency rating, per KenPom. It starts the current favorite to be the No. 1 overall pick in next year's NBA Draft, Paolo Banchemo, alongside at least two if not three other potential first-round talents. Until Tuesday, it had surpassed 80 points five times in seven games. None of these are perfect measures of a team's talent, but put together, it's clear the Blue Devils have quite a lot of it. Banchemo can virtually score at will, driving past or through defenders on his way to the rim; Wendell Moore thrives in the midrange, with an arsenal of acrobatic faders and runners; and Mark Williams, with his 7-foot-7 wingspan, is liable to dunk on anyone on any given play.

So how did Tuesday's stagnation happen?

A few reasons. First, foul trouble. It is, inarguably, more difficult to be an aggressive offensive player when you're a whistle away from riding the bench. That Duke was called for 23 personal fouls on Tuesday, compared to 14 for Ohio State, absolutely sapped some of the team's aggression attacking the rim. Rather than risk getting called for a third offensive foul, for example, Banchemo was more willing to settle for midrange jumpers late in the second half. Not that he can't make those, but he's probably not going 0-of-7 after halftime if he gets to the rim more readily. The same was true for Williams and John, both of whom needed to save their fouls for the defensive end, where Key and E.J. Liddell were giving them all they could handle.

And speaking of saving those fouls for the defensive end, that looming threat of the whistle also indirectly stymied Duke's transition offense. In the first half, the Blue Devils capitalized on Ohio State's misses and converted them into an easy nine fast-break points. In the second half? Ohio State got into more of the halfcourt sets that coach Chris Holtmann said postgame he was more comfortable with. Better offensive looks equals more makes, which equals fewer opportunities to grab a rebound and run the floor. Accordingly, Duke's second-half fast-break points: two.

"The foul trouble kind of played into what they wanted to do," Moore said. "I feel like they didn't want to get up and down in the beginning, but once we started fouling, it kind of allowed them to get their breath, come down and run their offensive sets and they executed at the end."

It's hard to flatly at the end of the game, without poring over Synergy, say that Duke's shot selection was off, but it certainly wasn't at its best even at a big-picture level. Example: Why settle, with the aforementioned offensive talents, for 12 midrange jumpers outside of the paint? Duke made just two of those shots total, one in each half. Or why – after going a very respectable, very efficient 3-of-6 from the 3-point line in the first half – chuck up eight more deep shots after halftime, only one of which went in? This, after all, is a team that only makes 32.8 percent of its 3s overall. For a gifted offensive group, 3-point marksmanship isn't exactly the best tool in the bag.

And then, as if all that weren't enough, there was the crowd. Which, maybe that sounds like some hokey excuse if you're not a Blue Devils fan, but it's true. As good as this group is, it absolutely still is young; Duke is the No. 336 team in the country in experience, per KenPom. Madison Square Garden and Las Vegas, although not Durham, weren't decidedly anti-Duke crowds like the one Tuesday night in Columbus. There were pockets of Duke blue dotted throughout the crowd, but that's it. Blotches on an otherwise scarlet blanket.

So back to the original question: Why the stagnation offensively? All those answers rolled into one. And yet, Duke still led the majority of the game, had a chance with 10 seconds left, and very well could've come out ahead in overtime.

"Things like this happen sometimes early in the season," Moore said. "We've just got to take it as a learning experience. We can't be down about it. It's not the end of the world; it's just one game. We've got many more games to go, so just keep building, keep learning from it."

If that sounds like "coach speak" coming from Duke's captain, you wouldn't be entirely wrong. But "learning experience" is a vague term, a term teams can as easily take to heart as they can toss it aside. But for a team that deservedly rose to the nation's No. 1 ranking just days ago – and likely won't fall far, if even out of the top five – there's a very clear lens through which that learning is being viewed. It is a long season, yes, but not one without end goals. With an end, period. And no one in the nation knows that better than Coach K:

"In order to win big, you have to be able to win multiple big games in a row. You know, if this was the NCAA, you win on a Friday, you've gotta win on a Sunday. So we were not able to do that," Krzyzewski said. "That's kind of how we will talk about this. In the NCAA, you're gonna win a big game on a Thursday or a Friday, and then, how can you come back?"

Duke, on Tuesday at least, couldn't. Good thing it's not March, then. Because while, yes, the fashion Duke fell apart late is concerning, there's also no indication of any long-term or languishing issues with Krzyzewski's last team. They missed shots. Got in foul trouble. Had 19,000 people raucously rooting for them to fail, for the first time in many of their lives. It happens. This team, nor any other in college basketball, wasn't going 40-0.

Instead, think on the flip side. What does it say that Duke, before December, is already framing things as how they'll apply four months from now?

That, maybe, leaving last isn't always a bad thing. Especially not the first weekend in April.

Duke beats Gonzaga: What we learned from Friday's elite-level showcase

By ESPN Staff, ESPN.com (November 27, 2021)

Any college basketball fan left disappointed by Gonzaga's wire-to-wire manhandling of UCLA on Tuesday night had to feel made whole by Friday's epic showdown between No. 1 Gonzaga and No. 5 Duke in Las Vegas. The Blue Devils won by a score of 84-81 in a game played on Nov. 26 that had the feel of a late March or early April grudge match.

The battle between future NBA lottery picks Chet Holmgren of Gonzaga and Paolo Banchero of Duke was among the must-watch elements of the contest, with Banchero (21 points on 8-of-18 shooting, including 20 points in the first half) leaving with the upper hand statistically as Holmgren (16 points on 8-of-13 shooting) also showed frequent flashes of his potential No. 1 pick-style brilliance. The celebrated freshmen were hardly the only story, as Gonzaga's Julian Strawther (20 points, 10 rebounds) and Andrew Nembhard (6 points, 11 assists, 8 rebounds) and Duke's Mark Williams (17 points, 9 rebounds, 5 blocks) and Wendell Moore Jr. (20 points, 6 assists, 4 steals) were also outstanding in the contest. The loss was Gonzaga's first in the regular season since Feb. 22, 2020, when the Bulldogs fell at BYU.

ESPN's college basketball team of Myron Medcalf, Jeff Borzello, John Gasaway and Joe Lunardi weighed in on what they saw from the Zags, the Blue Devils, both teams' dazzling freshmen and which team is best positioned for a top seed on Selection Sunday.

What was the most surprising element of Duke's or Gonzaga's performance on Friday night?

I think the most surprising element of the game was that both teams were competitive even without their stars in critical stretches. Holmgren missed the bulk of the first half after he picked up his second foul near the 10-minute mark. But Strawther (20 points), the sophomore from Las Vegas, excelled in front of friends and family members who were in the building to see him play. Rasir Bolton, the Iowa State transfer, had 15 points.

For Duke, Banchero wrestled with what appeared to be cramping issues that forced him to go back to the locker room in the second half and miss significant time. When he returned, he didn't look like the same guy after scoring 20 points in the first half in one of the most dominant efforts I've seen from a freshman. Still, other players stepped up. Williams' length was a problem for Gonzaga. Drew Timme's bucket with about 30 seconds to play was perfectly defended by the young big. Moore helped Duke maintain an edge with Banchero unavailable. Jeremy Roach made some big plays down the stretch. More than anything, I think we learned that both teams have a couple of key co-stars this season. Neither team crumbled through adversity. That's a good sign.

-- Medcalf

What did we learn about Paolo Banchero and Chet Holmgren on Friday night that we didn't already know?

That cramping might be a thing for Banchero? I don't actually think he's going to be a chronic crammer in his basketball career, but this is the second big game for Duke so far this season and it's the second game Banchero has needed to leave for an extended period of time in the second half. In terms of Banchero's game, though, he had as impressive a first half as we'll see from anyone in college basketball this season. He was aggressive offensively, looked comfortable from the perimeter, led the break with the ball in his hands -- he was phenomenal. Twenty points on 8-for-13 shooting with three 3-pointers in the first 20 minutes.

Perhaps the only two areas of Banchero's game that have raised question marks are consistency from 3-point range and whether he could be a little bit more decisive with his offensive moves. In the first half, he took 3s in rhythm and he had a couple catch-and-shoot attempts. And he also moved quickly once receiving the ball. The isolation sets from the elbow and mid-post areas are an effective piece of the repertoire, but he moved much more decisively against Gonzaga in the opening half.

As for Holmgren, I'm not sure he showed (or didn't show) anything that we didn't already know. He looked fluid with the ball in his hands, his 3-point release was fine even though he was 0-for-3 from behind the arc -- and passed up a wide-open corner 3 late in the game -- and he blocked shots. He had some early foul trouble, but was more disciplined in the second half and barely sat on the bench over the final 20 minutes. He showed some physicality and aggressiveness on the offensive glass and finishing around the rim. I think one thing to note was Williams really impacted the game in the first half, and arguably overshadowed Holmgren. We know the areas of improvement with Holmgren, mainly his strength and body, and that didn't change on Friday night.

-- Borzello

Duke's first month has included impressive victories over Kentucky and Gonzaga. Is there any reason this team can't win a national title, and if so, what is it?

No reason at all. First, Duke showed it's more than just Banchero against Gonzaga. After an incredible 20-point first half, cramps and perhaps an adjustment or two by the Bulldogs limited the potential 2022 No. 1 pick to a single free throw the rest of the way. Yet the Blue Devils were able to prevail thanks to big games at both ends of the floor from Moore (20 points, six assists and four steals) and Williams (17 points, five blocks and two steals).

Second, this group is different than some other Duke teams of the recent past. Mike Krzyzewski's teams have been consistently excellent on offense for a very long time. That being said, what has tended to distinguish his national title contenders from the "mere" Elite Eight teams in Durham has been defense.

Holding Gonzaga to 81 points in a 79-possession game and especially harassing the Bulldogs into 17 turnovers most certainly qualifies as excellent defense. The Zags knew they were in for a long night early when they gave the ball away on their ultimate bread-and-butter play, a Nembhard pick-and-roll with Timme setting the screen. Six Duke players recorded at least one steal against Gonzaga, and Williams is plainly one of the best rim defenders in the nation. That kind of D plus the scoring and explosiveness of Banchero definitely gives Coach K a shot at closing his career with his sixth national title.

-- Gasaway

What weaknesses in Gonzaga's game did Duke expose on Friday?

Duke's first-half performance could be the blueprint to slow down Gonzaga moving forward -- although not everyone has a Banchero or Williams up front. But there were some worrying signs. One, Duke beat Gonzaga in the transition game in the first 20 minutes. The Blue Devils got back defensively, eliminating the Zags getting easy baskets off of makes or misses, forcing them to play in the half-court. And then going the other way, Duke had success beating Gonzaga downcourt and the Zags made some mistakes in terms of getting back and getting set in a half-court defense.

Foul trouble was another major issue for Gonzaga, and that stemmed from Duke being aggressive going to the rim. Texas completely avoided the paint in the first half when it played Gonzaga, and UCLA had trouble finishing at the rim. That allowed Gonzaga's perimeter defenders to be aggressive and disrupt opposition offense. But Duke has three physical drivers in Banchero, Trevor Keels and Moore, and they went straight at Holmgren and Timme -- and Williams was a legitimate go-to post presence for the Blue Devils. Timme picking up his fourth foul on an ill-advised reach-in when Gonzaga was starting to pick up momentum in the second half changed the game.

Two other issues Gonzaga had offensively: 3-point shooting and turnovers. The Bulldogs aren't a great outside shooting team, but they're such an incredibly skilled passing team that they're still able to keep defenses chasing shadows in the half-court. But when things slowed down and Gonzaga had to make shots, they didn't fall. The Zags shot just 6-for-21 from 3. Nembhard has been arguably the best point guard in college basketball so far this season, but Duke was very aggressive in its ball-screen coverages against him, limiting the time he had to make decisions and find teammates. Nembhard controls the tempo as well as anyone in the country, but Duke forced him to speed up his decisions.

With all that said, I'm not overly concerned about Gonzaga moving forward. Duke is a legitimate national title contender, the Bulldogs struggled to make shots and there were major foul trouble issues. And it was still a one-possession game.

-- Borzello

Gonzaga was considered a firm overall No. 1 seed per ESPN's latest Bracketology projection, and Duke was a No. 1 seed as well. What are the bracket implications of this result for both teams?

We saw a pair of No. 1 seeds in action when Duke knocked off Gonzaga, and both would be on the top line if Selection Sunday was today. The Blue Devils certainly solidified their position with the victory, and the Bulldogs -- who entered the game as a comfortable No. 1 overall seed -- don't fall far enough to drop off the top line.

The more revealing question is this: How likely is each of these teams to be a No. 1 seed four months from now? And, even in defeat, the odds favor Gonzaga. The Bulldogs will be favored in every remaining game on their schedule. The same cannot be said for Duke, with another monster test coming Tuesday at Ohio State in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. It is the only true road game for either the Zags or Blue Devils in non-league play.

Officially, our tourney odds chart gives Gonzaga roughly three chances in four to be a top seed and Duke a little better than a 50/50 chance. Unofficially, I have a hard time identifying three better teams in all of college basketball -- and it would take at least three to knock both the Blue Devils and Zags from the top of the bracket.

-- Lunardi

Paolo Banchero Makes Statement In Win Over Gonzaga: 'He Will Be The No. 1 Pick'

By Adam Zagoria, Forbes.com (November 27, 2021)

Two weeks after announcing his presence to the college basketball world with an impressive performance against Kentucky at Madison Square Garden, Duke freshman Paolo Banchero helped solidify his status as the presumed No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft with another breakout performance against No. 1-ranked Gonzaga in Las Vegas.

"He will be No. 1 [because of] his size, strength and ability to score at all 3 levels," one of the 60 NBA GMs and scouts said after Banchero's performance Friday night in No. 5 Duke's 84-81 win over the Bulldogs.

In going for 21 points, five rebounds and two assists while battling cramps in the second half, the 6-foot-10, 250-pound Seattle native displayed his full arsenal. He pulled up for jump shots in transition, drained 3-pointers (making 3-of-8) and bullied his way past the 7-foot-1, 195-pound Holmgren for baskets.

"It was Paolo Banchero and it really wasn't even close. He looked like the No. 1 pick today," ESPN draft analyst Mike Schmitz said on air after the game.

"He had 20 first-half points and he did it in a variety of ways. A lot of NBA shots from him, making transition pull-up 3's, scoring in mid-range spots and he just big-bodied Chet Holmgren. He took him to the woodshed and scored over him in the post.

"Just showing that versatility, that confidence, the ability to come out in front of a packed crowd. Every NBA general manager, president, all of them sitting here courtside watching this 1 vs. 2 matchup and he looked like the No. 1 pick. He looks like a big-bodied Carmelo Anthony and somebody who could step into an NBA game tomorrow and start."

Right now, the Houston Rockets, Orlando Magic and Detroit Pistons own the three worst records in the NBA – and thus each have a 14 percent chance at the No. 1 pick. The New Orleans Pelicans are fourth at 12.5 percent, followed by the San Antonio Spurs at 10.5 percent, per Tankathon, which has Banchero No. 1 on its mock draft followed by Holmgren.

Get your Tank Slogans ready. Here's a couple to try on for size: "Keep your wins low for Pao-lo," "Lose all your flow to land Pao-lo," and "Don't care-o for Ban-cho."

En route to helping Duke seize a 45-42 halftime lead, Banchero was dominant in putting up 20 points and making 3-of-6 from deep.

He then experienced cramping in the second half – just as he had in the win over Kentucky Nov. 9 in the Champions Classic.

Without him, two other Duke players helped themselves in the eyes of NBA personnel. Mark Williams, Duke's 7-1, 242-pound sophomore center, was dominant in the paint, finishing with 17 points, nine rebounds and five blocks while 6-5 junior wing Wendell Moore Jr., who returned to campus after testing the NBA Draft waters, helped Duke close the game and finished with 20 points, six rebounds and six assists.

"Mark came on during the last month of the season [last year]," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "He had 23 [points] and 19 [rebounds] against Louisville, and then we got COVID. He's just continued to build on that. I really believe that Theo John has helped him, and he helped us today too with those two buckets when Paolo was out. Theo is the best teammate and he's tough. He started at Marquette, and for them to be able to play and work together, he's playing against a high-level talent every day. Theo talks to him during the game, and it's helped him. Because we play fast, Mark, his stride – how he runs, how he runs – has changed. Instead of a walk-up offense, we run. That's good for him. He's going to keep getting better. Again, he and Chet – it's tough to get a shot off close to the bucket."

As for Moore, Coach K added: "Wendell – he was only 18 [when he arrived at Duke]. Two of our kids, Trevor [Keels] and AJ [Griffin] are 18. They're not 20, they're 18. Wendell is 20. He spent seven weeks this April and May changing how he ran, how he walked. He busted his butt with our medical people. He's an inch taller, he's a better athlete, his force and how he runs has changed and he took a look at himself and said, 'These are the things [I need to improve on], how I walk, how I run,' and it's worked out. But you have to be open to that, and then you have to work. He's worked really hard. That kid is really having a hell of a year. He's my captain. I love what my guys did. I love my team."

As for Holmgren, he finished with 16 points, seven rebounds and three blocks and showed some flashes of brilliance, but was also overpowered by Banchero in the paint.

"He just needs to get stronger and that's going to come naturally," ESPN's Schmitz said. "You saw a handful of possessions today where he just wasn't physical enough to deal with the strength of the Duke players. They're just stronger and they have more experience.

"He's never going to be this big-bodied guy but he's going to evolve physically as his career moves on. If you look at a young Giannis or a young Kevin Durant or a young Anthony Davis, we've seen skinny players before and he's going to fill out in time. He's never going to be the guy who going to put up the same box score numbers as Paolo, he's more of an all-around impact type of guy and that's why I like to compare him to Evan Mobley. Mobley wasn't putting up these eye-popping scoring stats but he impacts the game defensively with his passing and his inside-out game, so Chet is going to be just fine but Paolo was the story tonight and made a strong case that he deserves to be the No. 1 pick."

As for his thoughts on the matchup with Holmgren, Banchero said:

"Chet's a great player. Like you said, we've played against each other before. I think he played well. He made some tough shots. Obviously, you know he's a game-changer on defense. I had a couple of layups that usually, against anybody else, I would score, or it'd be a dunk, but because Chet's down there I wasn't able to finish like that. That's just an example of how he changes the game. He also brings a skilled game on the offensive end so yeah, great player for sure."

How Wendell Moore's words, as much as his actions, keyed Duke's win over Gonzaga

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (November 27, 2021)

With superstar freshman Paolo Banchero off getting IV fluids to calm his cramping quads and a lead having disappeared, No. 5 Duke faced a make-or-break stretch of basketball Friday night.

The din of sold-out T-Mobile Arena, even though the participating teams were both more than 1,000 miles from home, grew even louder as top-ranked Gonzaga had finally grabbed a three-point lead over the Blue Devils.

One voice rose above them all and, in this case, it was not that of Duke's Hall of Fame coach, Mike Krzyzewski.

During a timeout with Gonzaga in front and the Blue Devils having committed a turnover, it was Wendell Moore who spoke up, spoke loudly and spoke forcefully.

"The leadership of my captain, I think, was the key to the game," Krzyzewski said. "Wendell Moore was absolutely spectacular in his leadership, especially at the timeout when they took the lead and we had turned the ball over. The things he said and his demeanor and what he said to his team, he really led us to a victory."

Moore scored 20 points with six assists and hit five key free throws over the final 1:11 to stave off Gonzaga and give the Blue Devils an 84-81 win.

Those are the counting stats, the stuff the play-by-play and the box score show. Krzyzewski offered a glimpse of something beyond those numbers.

'SAYING THE THINGS I SHOULD HAVE BEEN SAYING'

With 11:24 to play, Gonzaga had not only climbed back from Duke's nine-point first half lead, the Bulldogs were up 64-61. Duke's Joey Baker had just lost the ball while attempting to drive down the lane. Moore fouled Gonzaga's Julian Strawther after he'd secured the ball for the Bulldogs and an official timeout arrived.

The Blue Devils gathered around the coach but it was Moore who said the important words, even if he sheepishly feigned forgetfulness when later asked to repeat them.

"I guess in PG words it was just that we had to pick it up," Moore said with a laugh.

That's ok. Krzyzewski was glad to jump back in and fill in the gaps.

"You know, sometimes when a leader says things he doesn't remember what he says," Krzyzewski said. "But I remember what he said. Be strong with the ball. Let's get going. We can't be giving them layups. He was saying the things I should have been saying but when it comes from a player, it's better. It's better and especially that moment."

Following the timeout, Gonzaga didn't score for the next 90 seconds or so of play. While the Blue Devils strung together stops, they scored five points in a row on a Mark Williams basket and a Joey Baker 3-pointer to bolt back in front 66-64.

The Zags responded with three easy baskets – layups by Anton Watson and Nolan Hickman sandwiched around a Chet Holmgren fade-away jumper – to take a 70-66 lead with 8:40 to play. But Gonzaga would make just one field goal over the next seven minutes. With Banchero having returned to the game, Moore started the push that put Duke in front for good with a jumper at 8:06. His two free throws with 4:31 left gave Duke a 75-73 lead and the Blue Devils never trailed again.

Krzyzewski, though, looked back to that timeout. With Banchero out, Gonzaga was in position to open up a lead too large for Duke to overcome. Instead, Duke stayed within striking distance and finally made its move.

"That was a critical moment," Krzyzewski said. "I've been in a lot of games, we could have gotten knocked out right there."

WINNING WITH A LIMITED BANCHERO

But Duke didn't. Banchero's 20 first-half points, scored with a variety of moves that wowed all the NBA scouts and administrators in attendance, helped the Blue Devils lead 45-42 at halftime.

When his cramping got so bad he said he was afraid he'd fall down, Banchero left the game for treatment.

As it turned out, he didn't make a shot after halftime and his lone point on a free throw gave him 21 points, one more than Moore.

Duke won anyway, a sign they've got a little something extra that turns talented teams into great ones.

The win might not have happened had Moore not found his voice to use the captaincy bestowed upon him by his teammates in that crucial timeout.

As a result, the Blue Devils have the kind of win that can propel a team to the highest accomplishments in the sport.

Wendell Moore Jr., Mark Williams and Duke's supporting cast stuff Gonzaga

By Brendan Quinn, The Athletic (November 27, 2021)

LAS VEGAS – Wendell Moore Jr. was not having it. None of it. With under 12 minutes remaining between Duke and Gonzaga, a few botched Blue Devil possessions swung what had been a five-point lead three minutes earlier into a three-point deficit. The unraveling, not coincidentally, coincided with Duke mega-star Paolo Banchemo hobbling off the court, his quads spasming and cramping. As the Blue Devils surrendered a lead he helped build with 20 first-half points, Banchemo sat in the locker room yelling at a television. An IV was hooked to him, replenishing his fluids. The whole evening felt like it might be slipping away.

That's when Moore raised his voice. The Duke captain took over a team huddle at the under-12 media timeout. Mike Krzyzewski and all of his 1,176 career wins were not needed. Moore railed away, telling his teammates to be stronger with the ball, to stop allowing layups, to dial things up, to stop turning the damn ball over.

"I guess, in PG words, it was to pick it up," Moore recounted later.

"He was saying the things I should've been saying," Krzyzewski said. "But when it comes from a player, it's better, especially in that moment. That was a critical moment. I've been in a lot of games, and we could've been knocked out right there. But what that kid did at that timeout was big-time. Really big-time."

Duke looked unbeatable on Friday night in Las Vegas, beating Gonzaga 84-81, and was so with two very different versions of itself, a fact that should strike fear across the college basketball landscape. In the first half, it was Banchemo looking like the best player in the game and a potentially iconic Duke player of the Krzyzewski era. In the second half, though, when it came to winning time, it was everyone else.

It was Moore, demanding everyone be better and doing his part by scoring 16 points after the break, including 7 of 8 from the stripe. It was Mark Williams, making play after play after play – blocking shots, altering shots, rebounding, running, dunking. It was Jeremy Roach, having the guts to go one-on-one against Zags guard Rasir Bolton on the biggest possession of the night, faking right and driving left, tucking the ball like a running back as he strode through the lane, and flipping a layup off the glass to give Duke a three-point lead with 41.2 seconds remaining. It was Trevor Keels, grinding through some offensive woes, but playing all 20 second-half minutes, delivering lock-down defense and drawing six fouls. It was Theo John, an old vet, stepping in while Banchemo writhed in the locker room and giving the Devils two huge buckets. It was Joey Baker, hitting two 3s, including a bank.

Add it up and Duke left Vegas with a resounding statement on Friday. In the best game of college basketball's nascent 2021-22 season, Krzyzewski's team posted a win that establishes the Blue Devils as a clear-cut national title contender.

Duke's season-opening win over Kentucky was nice.

But this was something different.

On this same court that, three days earlier, top-ranked Gonzaga led No. 2 UCLA 24-8 before some fans arrived to their seats, Duke jumped on Gonzaga early, building a 27-18 lead and turning the building into Cameron Indoor West. That lead came upon Banchemo's broad shoulders. The 6-foot-10, 250-pound smokestack did whatever he wanted. He scored on every defender Gonzaga put in front of him, whether it was Drew Timme, Chet Holmgren or Anton Watson. He made shots on the move. He drove to the basket, not necessarily going around opposing defenders, but going through them. Banchemo has a penchant for creating space off the dribble with little thrusts into his defender's chest. He puts you on your heels and doesn't stop till you're on your ass.

"We just followed his lead," Moore said of Banchemo's first half. "When he's scoring it like that, our offense is at a high."

The second half, though? Banchemo didn't score his first point until a free throw with 6 minutes to go. He was 0-of-4 in 13 second-half minutes.

Yet, Duke still won, handing Gonzaga its first regular-season defeat since a February 2020 loss at BYU.

How? Start with a guy like Williams. The soft-spoken 7-foot-1, 242-pound center was dynamic, scoring 17 points on 8-of-9 shooting, grabbing nine rebounds, blocking five shots, altering countless others, and earning two steals. He changed the game, buffered Gonzaga's ability to score at the rim, and put his fingerprints all over one of the best non-conference victories of Krzyzewski's tenure. Per ESPNStatsInfo, when Duke entered the game as an 8.5-point underdog, it marked only the second time in the last 20 seasons Duke had been that large of an underdog. (2007 at North Carolina, +9.5, was the other)

"He was a huge impact," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said of Williams. "We let him get to what he does really well. If you help up and they're able to throw those lobs to him, he's going to make every one of those dunks. He protected the rim well. We knew that coming in – that he's an elite shot blocker. I was impressed that he was able to throw in a couple of hooks and post moves. You know, in a one possession game, those are huge."

Williams is now averaging 14.8 points and 8.5 boards over Duke's last four games. This version of the sophomore changes the Devils' ceiling. Set him as the anchor with Banchemo and Moore at the forward spot and Duke's athleticism, skill and defensive versatility in the front court is off the charts. The fact that the Zags still managed to score 1.03 points per possession is a testament to just how freakishly good they are. Other teams won't replicate what Gonzaga did. Duke will instead starve them of oxygen.

"I think our guys felt just how good Duke is," Few said. "Their transition game was equal to ours and we don't run into many transition games that are equal to ours."

The emergence of Williams and Moore are testaments to what comes with work.

Around a year ago at this time, Williams was going through the (sometimes painful) gradual evolution of being a freshman center at a program like Duke. By the end of the year, all his potential finally found some time to manifest on the floor. He averaged 16.7 points, 7.8 rebounds and 1.7 blocks over the Blue Devils' final six games. He then bypassed the NBA Draft process entirely, opting to work on his body, his agility and his skill level.

"He's just continued to build on (the end of last season)," Krzyzewski said. "His stride. How he runs. How he walks. It's all changed."

So has Moore. He spent seven weeks last spring dedicated entirely to rewiring his natural instincts. "There wasn't really any downtime for me," he said Friday.

"Changing how he ran, how he walked," Krzyzewski said. "He busted his butt with our medical people. He's an inch taller. He's a better athlete. His force and how he runs has changed. You have to be open to doing that and you have to be willing to work."

It all shows. Moore is a better shooter, better passer and a more dynamic creator.

That's why Friday in Vegas was a byproduct of something larger than Banchemo's limitless potential. Duke went up against a team that many believed to be the best in the country and reminded it what the gold standard looks like. Few has admittedly modeled much of what he does at Gonzaga to what Krzyzewski has done at Duke. "There are many times we ask, 'Well, what do they do at Duke?'" Few said.

Sometimes, though, Duke is simply Duke. That's been the case since Krzyzewski beat UNLV in 1991. Maybe there's something about Vegas that makes this program prove itself.

When it comes to this year's Duke team, one that will forever be remembered – for good or bad – as Krzyzewski's final chapter, such a balanced performance against the Zags proves that this whole thing can end with the storybook. Watching that second half against the Zags, you had to be left asking, if the supporting cast as a whole is as good as Banchemo as an individual, then how can Duke be anything other than the best team in America?

For the record, no one is saying Duke's supporting cast is some kind of plucky supporting cast. Moore, a former five-star recruit, averaged almost 10 points per game last year and was on this year's preseason Naismith watch list. Williams was a McDonald's All-American and could be a first-round pick in the spring. Keels is a potential lottery pick. Roach is another former five-star recruit and averaged 9 points and 3 assists as a freshman. John played 123 games at Marquette. Oh, and there's AJ Griffin, a freshman who barely plays due to lingering knee and ankle issues, but might be a lottery pick in the spring, too.

But there's only one Paolo Banchemo. And he can take Duke as far as those around him allow him to.

As of now, it looks like that could be all the way.

Duke takes an all-hand(ler)s approach to its point guard position

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (November 19, 2021)

DURHAM, N.C. – If the 40-point final margin didn't make it clear, only so much can reasonably be gleaned from Duke's 92-52 win over Gardner-Webb on Tuesday. Duke looked very much like the No. 7 overall team in the country; on the other hand, Gardner-Webb looked ... well, like KenPom's No. 219 team in the country, a winless outlet that's yet to crack 70 points this season. One of these things, clearly, is not like the other. Shocker.

But that doesn't mean we should take nothing away from the blowout. Because there is something, in fact – perhaps not a new development but one clearly confirmed after the Blue Devils' fourth game, and win, of the season. And it happened, as strange as it sounds, on the very first play of the game. Like, the opening tip. Mark Williams, Duke's 7-foot sophomore center, did what he does, and slapped the ball backwards to sophomore guard Jeremy Roach. But rather than bringing the ball up the floor, Roach – Duke's supposed point guard – passed almost immediately to junior Wendell Moore, who had run back to meet him behind halfcourt. Moore then brought the ball up ... only to return it to Roach on the wing, who initiated Duke's first play of the game from there. The result of that action (a turnover in the paint) obviously matters more than its inception. But why did Duke start like that? Really, that short sequence raises a fascinating question about the composition of this team:

Does Duke have a point guard? Simple question. Not-so-simple answer.

In which case, best to go straight to the source. "You don't have the so-called point guard," Mike Krzyzewski said before the season began. "You really have four ballhandlers, and then if Jaylen (Blakes) is in there, he can do that also."

Krzyzewski, the proponent of positionless basketball that he is, doesn't care for clear-cut labels. But he has a point, one that statistics and the eye test support. Duke truly doesn't have one point guard; it has three, maybe four, and in another sense, none at all. Or as freshman Trevor Keels puts it, "we don't try to put a position on ourselves. We don't really call it point guard, shooting guard, small forward. All four of us can bring the ball up the court, including Paolo, so whoever gets the ball right there is pushing it."

First, consider the analytical evidence. A point guard's job is to set up his teammates, right? Well, it's only four games, but Moore, Keels, and Roach are Duke's three assist leaders, with 21, 15, and 11 dimes, respectively. No other Blue Devil has half as many. And in the team's first three games of the season, that trio accounted for at least 75 percent of Duke's total assists. It isn't the same pecking order of production on a night-by-night basis, either. Moore had the most assists against Army (10) and Campbell (five), but Roach's six topped the box score against Gardner-Webb, while Keels and Moore had three apiece in the season-opener against Kentucky. Everyone is getting in on the fun, proper positional labels be damned.

And you know what? It's working, for a multitude of reasons. First, it means there is no one guy doubling back after every defensive rebound just to bring the ball up the floor. In years past, maybe that role is filled by a Tre Jones-type talent. Not so in Coach K's final go-around. "We're not locked in on trying to get one person the ball to start the offense or anything like that," Moore said. "It just really gives each guy a chance to go out there and be comfortable and be himself." So if Moore gets the rebound, he's grabbing and gone. But so too are Roach and Keels when a miss clangs their way, or even off made shots from an out-of-bounds perspective.

Why that matters? Because it enables Duke to do what it wants to – what this roster is designed to do – much more quickly and conveniently. "It kind of allows us to run more of an unconventional offense, which is one that we kinda like to run, which is really just a lot of transition," Moore added. "Just a lot of quick reads, hand cuts, things like that, without having to set up." The stats support that synopsis. Per Synergy, the Blue Devils average 1.003 points per possession (PPP) overall – good for the 84th percentile nationally – but that number rises to 1.145 PPP in transition opportunities. With the number of large, lanky athletes on this team, it makes sense that Duke would want to play that way ... but wanting to do something and actually doing so are two totally different things.

Keels and Roach aren't just comfortable alternating on- and off-ball roles, but they're comfortable doing so with each other specifically, given their overlapped time at Paul VI Catholic High School in Virginia. If anything, the revelation through four games has been Moore, a 6-foot-5 wing now moonlighting as a big lead guard. Moore served as a secondary ballhandler the last two seasons, but his handle wasn't quite tight enough to consistently initiate offense. Now? It is – and in his third college season, he has the know-how of where to get the ball to set up his teammates. That Moore, who had 112 assists to 109 turnovers as a freshman and sophomore, is now No. 6 in the ACC in assist rate, per KenPom? It's telling not just of his improved play, but of a shifted role altogether.

Then there's the matter of Paolo Banchemo, arguably the (literal) biggest mismatch in all of college basketball this year. Trained as a guard throughout his basketball life, when Banchemo sprouted to 6-foot-8 as a high school freshman, and 6-foot-10 by his senior season at O'Dea High in Seattle, he didn't lose any of the skills he'd studied growing up; now he just had them in a much larger body. So, yes, Duke is absolutely comfortable with Banchemo boxing out another big and then running the floor as a point forward. Hell, Duke's willingness to accept and embrace that aspect of his game is the reason he's in Durham.

"Coach made it clear from pretty early that we're gonna have four guys on the court who can grab it and go, or catch an outlet, stuff like that, handle the ball," Banchemo said earlier this season. "That's how Coach has been building the offense and everything: around that."

And while more difficult to quantify, the same is true on the defensive end. Banchemo can switch out to the perimeter, to guard opposing guards and wings, but all three of Moore, Roach, and Keels do consistently. "Switch" is the optimal word there, too, considering their comparable defensive success. Moore has been one of the team's best on-ball perimeter defenders the last two seasons, as was clear by his three steals against Campbell – it does help, of course, that he has nearly a 6-foot-10 wingspan – but Roach and Keels have the goods, too. Keels had six steals against Army last weekend, and Roach had two against Kentucky and its veteran, transfer-laden backcourt. "Me, Trev and Dell, we take the defensive end real serious," Roach said Thursday, in advance of Duke's game Friday against Lafayette, "so we're switching pretty much any matchup we want, and just kind of manhandling people on the defensive end."

Now, it bears repeating that this is after four games, and only one of them against a team in KenPom's Top 150. (Campbell is close at No. 166 – one spot ahead of Jeff Capel's Pittsburgh club.) So, we'll see if this pace proliferates against No. 1 Gonzaga next week, or the opening of ACC play soon thereafter. Perhaps by March, Duke will need one of these three to emerge as the de-facto point guard, rather than playing the position by committee.

For now, though? The train is humming along on schedule, with organic touches for all three guards. And while Krzyzewski and his staff can still scheme plays with the best of them, sometimes – with a team this physically talented – the best play is none at all.

"It's a dynamic that I think can keep growing on this team," Krzyzewski said. "When guys touch the ball, and we don't have to run something for them to touch the ball? It's very good."

Mike Krzyzewski who? How Coach K's career began at Duke in the 1980-81 season

By John Gasaway, ESPN.com (November 19, 2021)

Duke named Mike Krzyzewski its new men's basketball head coach on March 18, 1980. Coach K's first Blue Devils team posted a 17-13 mark in 1980-81 and lost in the NIT to Purdue. It was the first of what would prove to be three consecutive seasons in which Duke finished sixth or worse in the ACC and did not reach the NCAA tournament.

Coach K's early struggles have long since become a familiar part of his legend. Then, in the 1982 recruiting class, Johnny Dawkins, Mark Alarie, Dave Henderson and Jay Bilas arrived, and the rest is history. So the story goes.

But those who were connected with that first team in 1980-81, from players to reporters to Duke Athletics staff, say there was a little more to it than that. They knew Coach K when he was new, 34 years old and learning the ropes in the ACC.

As Coach K prepares to retire after the 2021-22 season as the winningest coach in men's college basketball history, that first season in Durham merits another look. Today, when members of that 1980-81 team are asked if they ever imagined back then that their new coach would go on to win five national titles, they typically respond with a shake of the head. No one could envision any coach having that degree of success.

KENNY DENNARD (senior forward in 1980-81; played three seasons in the NBA for the Kansas City Kings and Denver Nuggets; CEO of investor relations firm Dennard Lascar): I saw Coach at his K Academy this past summer. He had his people there, of course, and he got me and Gene [Banks] to come over. He pointed at us and he said, "I wish I could have had these guys when I was in my 40s, because, when I had them, I didn't know how to coach elite players."

And he's telling this to his crew, and I'm standing there thinking, "That's the nicest thing you've ever said. I'm getting a little misty."

VINCE TAYLOR (junior forward in 1980-81; played one season in the NBA for the New York Knicks; most recently assistant coach at UCF): When Coach K came to Duke, he was in his 30s, man, with a team that just went to the Elite Eight. You're coming into the ACC, where Dean Smith owns the league. And you're coming from Army. That's tough.

DENNARD: The thing you have to understand is that, when Coach K arrived, we were used to winning. Gene Banks and I went to the national championship game as freshmen on the team that had Jim Spanarkel and Mike Gminski and those guys. Coach [Bill] Foster had us rolling after some lean years for Duke.

You know how Foster got Gene, right? No. 1 player in the country, coming out of Philadelphia, Digger [Phelps] is all over him, everyone's all over him and instead Gene comes to this little bitty school called Duke that finished last in the ACC four straight years.

GENE BANKS (senior forward in 1980-81; played six seasons in the NBA for the San Antonio Spurs and Chicago Bulls; Gaston College athletic director): Bill Foster saw me at a summer league game in the suburbs, and I had 30-plus points. Top-rated coaches were there and some spoke to me, but Foster walked right by me and said nothing. If I remember correctly, I think I called Duke and asked why he didn't say anything. Coach Foster got on the phone and straight up said, "Didn't think you were good enough to play for us." And then he hangs up.

I'm standing there, and I say, "Mom, Duke says they're not going to recruit me." Then the assistant coach called back in hysterics, telling me about Bill's whimsical manner. I thought it was cool after it was explained to me.

JOHNNY MOORE (assistant sports information director in 1980-81): No question in my mind, the three most important recruits in Duke history: Art Heyman, Gene Banks and Johnny Dawkins. Duke was struggling when they got all those guys, but they all reached the Final Four. They changed the program.

TAYLOR: Why did I go to Duke? Gene was like the No. 1 player coming out of high school. And I said, man, this guy can go anywhere and he chose Duke. I thought this was the place for me, especially because it was a great academic school.

DENNARD: We actually won the 1980 ACC tournament as the No. 6 seed. Then Coach Foster announced he was leaving [to become head coach at South Carolina], and I agreed to do an interview before the NCAA tournament. Foster's gone, right? We don't know who the new coach is, and this won't come out until the season's over.

This guy had called me from "Tobacco Road," an 11x17 newspaper that's folded in half. He says they have some really, really thoughtful pieces, important student-activist-type stuff. So he comes over with a six-pack of Heineken, and we decide it would be a good idea to do a nude photo with a basketball in front of me.

Then we go to the NCAA tournament, make it all the way to the regional final and lose to Purdue. I'm not blaming the coaching staff. Well, I am blaming the coaching staff. We were in zone, and [Purdue] just held the ball. We lost four or five minutes that way.

After that game, I was trying to figure out who the new coach would be. We all thought it was going to be Tom Davis from Boston College.

"Who?"

Krzyzewski played for Bob Knight at Army from 1966 to 1969, and served as an assistant under him at Indiana in 1974-75. He was then head coach for five seasons at Army, where he compiled a 73-59 overall record. When Krzyzewski was hired at Duke in March 1980, an Associated Press story on the news began: "Duke basketball fans who struggled with 'Gminski' the past four years have a new tongue-twister to contend with ..."

MOORE: I picked up Mike Krzyzewski at the airport and dropped him off at [Duke athletic director] Tom Butters' house for the interview.

BARRY JACOBS (author, longtime journalist who has covered the ACC since the late 1970s): The day that Duke hired Mike was the first time I heard his name. NC State hired Jim Valvano at the same time. Frankly, there was some talk to the effect of, "Why didn't we get Valvano? He's just as young. Why not at least get the young guy whose name you can spell?"

TAYLOR: I'll never forget, I was in my apartment and some reporter called me. Normally, the school would let you know if somebody's going to call. I don't know how they got my number. And this reporter says, you know, "The new coach at Duke is going to be Mike Krzyzewski." And I just go, "Who?"

Literally, I didn't know him, and I had never heard his name. So my quote was in the paper the next day. They set me up pretty good. The headline just said, "Who?" Then the article said I couldn't pronounce his name, which was true. But it was also true of probably 98% of people at that time. Coach K even joked about that.

MOORE: People were thinking, "We've reached No. 1 each of the last two years, and we're hiring the 9-17 guy from Army? What the hell is going on?" Well, Tom Butters was basically John Wayne as an athletic director. He made his own decisions whether they went against the norm or not. Butters talked to Bob Knight, and Knight sold him. Butters thought Mike fit the mold to go out and recruit for Duke.

Though classes were in session at Duke, the new coach arrived on campus before all of his players did. After playing straight through the school's spring break, and then exiting the tournament in the Elite Eight, Dennard fled campus in search of sun and sand.

DENNARD: I'm at this bar in Key West. The guy on the local news on the 19-inch TV says, "Duke University has announced today that Mike ..." and it sounded like "Kadger-OO-skee ... is going to become the next head basketball coach." I thought, "Oh, man, I remember him. He recruited me at Army." Then I thought, "If they've announced him, that probably means he's on campus and I should be there."

MIKE TISSAW (sophomore forward in 1980-81; professor of psychology at SUNY Potsdam): The first time I met Coach K was in Tom Butters' office. I think all the players that were going to return the next year were there. I unfortunately went to the meeting with my goatee and mustache and my hair down to my shoulders, wearing a tie-dye T-shirt. No sleeves. I walked up to Coach K and shook his hand. He was smiling, and he was kind of looking me over. Finally, he said, "I hope this is temporary."

Later that day, I'm thinking, "Wait, does he mean my appearance? Or me being on the team?"

JIM SUDDATH (senior forward in 1980-81; Hardwick Caldwell Chair of Christian Ethics at the McCallie School in Chattanooga): We had your typical "We're the seniors, here's the new coach, shake hands" conversation.

CHIP ENGELLAND (sophomore guard in 1980-81; longtime San Antonio Spurs assistant coach since 2005): I always think of Coach K introducing Mickie [Krzyzewski, his wife] to the team. They were fired up. That's the energy you need to bring.

BANKS: I was trying to figure [Krzyzewski] out. He was young looking. He talked to me along with Kenny. He said, "There's a line between men being men and boys being boys. I found out you two guys didn't just cross that line, you threw up all over it." And he was kind of joking and he said it with a smile, but we knew he was making a point. That broke the tension, and it was cool.

How Coach K's career began at Duke in the 1980-81 season (cont.)

By John Gasaway, ESPN.com (November 19, 2021)

DENNARD: I got back from Key West, and it was parents weekend at Duke. "Tobacco Road" had just come out. It had this foldout picture of me and the basketball. Anyway, five thousand copies drop on campus. It's everywhere. It got a mention on "The CBS Evening News," and I received a two-page letter from the Duke Divinity School criticizing me. But Coach K didn't say one word about it to me. Now, he'll tell you to this day he knew he had his hands full.

BANKS: I toned things down a little bit with Coach K. It was team first.

JACOBS: You know how the officials will come over and chat with you on press row during timeouts? Well, Kenny would talk to me during breaks in the action. I don't think I remember any other player doing that before or since.

Dennard and Banks were almost adults, they had played for a coach who kept a loose rein, they were big men on campus and they were good. Kenny was one of the few players from the state of North Carolina that Dean Smith wanted and didn't get.

TAYLOR: I knew that a new coach coming in, let me put it like this, he would have his hands full with Gene and Kenny. It's a good thing social media hadn't happened yet and, keep in mind, those are my guys. Kenny was a free spirit.

MOORE: I tried not to keep up with [Dennard and Banks] so I wouldn't have to fill out any affidavits. They were very, very free spirited.

SUDDATH: I roomed with Kenny on campus, and on road trips I was Gene's roommate. That was one absolute wild year in my life.

"Are you with me?"

Krzyzewski's first game as Duke head coach was a 67-49 win at home over Stetson. Throughout the early stages of the 1980-81 season, Coach K worked with his assistant coach Chuck Swenson to blend the principles he learned from Knight with his own observations of what worked best for his players against ACC competition.

TAYLOR: You have to realize that Coach K came in having coached under Bobby Knight. He was very direct. Coach K vowed that we were always going to play man-to-man like Knight. No zone. We ran motion just like Knight.

MOORE: [Before Coach K] Every time we played Big Ten teams we were getting beat. They were so physical and they were playing man-to-man. We knew this was coming.

ENGELLAND: The motion offense was fun for me. Coach K was no-nonsense. Looks you in the face, tells you what's going to happen.

TISSAW: I thought he was a brilliant defensive coach. I was really into what Coach K was trying to do. He said the best play in basketball is drawing a charge. You get a stop, you force a turnover and the opponent picks up a foul.

Coach K introduced a drill at practice where you had to take a charge, and he would jump right in and do it with us. One time I had the ball when he was in the drill, and he was defending me. I'm thinking, "What do I do here? I don't want to knock over my coach. Will he still be doing this drill when he's 50?"

BANKS: We had a road game against NC State, and Coach completely changed the offense. He put me at the point and set up a new play called the pentagon. Three at the top, two at the free throw line. It looked like a stall but it wasn't. If I saw an opening, I could take it to the basket. He said, this guy is All-ACC, I want him to have the ball.

DENNARD: Coach K said, "We're starting fresh. Five passes, and then get the ball to Gene." I think I averaged six points the next three weeks.

TISSAW: There were games that season where we were outmatched inside. I do recall being concerned about having to guard [Virginia's] Ralph Sampson or [Maryland's] Buck Williams.

BANKS: For our home game against Maryland, Coach K was real fired up. Red in the face. He wanted warriors, he wanted soldiers. He yelled, he took off his coat. "Are you with me?"

"The North Carolina win was the pinnacle"

Duke reached the last game of the regular season with a 14-11 record. North Carolina was paying its first visit to Cameron Indoor Stadium since Krzyzewski became head coach. The student section wore T-shirts reading: "Dennard and Banks, so long and THANKS!" With two seconds remaining, Sam Perkins went to the line for the Tar Heels and the score tied at 56.

DENNARD: Perkins made both free throws, and before I even had the chance to call timeout, Coach Smith called one. I was stunned. We got set up, advanced the ball to half court and Chip [Engelland] called our timeout.

SUDDATH: That was masterful coaching to get the ball up the floor with the timeout in two seconds at the end of regulation.

DENNARD: In the huddle, Coach K said, "Everyone thinks the ball is going to Gene." So he drew up the play for me to pass to Chip in the corner for the shot. Chip was a great shooter and it looked good on paper. But it wasn't going to happen.

MOORE: Chip took a last-second shot against Clemson as a freshman and missed. Kenny wasn't going to let that happen again.

ENGELLAND: With that final huddle in regulation, there's Kenny's version. I never thought that play was for me, but it sounds great if it was. As for that shot at Clemson the year before, that was from the hash mark. It wasn't like a clean look off a diagrammed play. The ball was batted, and I had to scoop it up at the hash mark and shoot it.

DENNARD: When we broke the huddle after the timeout, [Gene] and I looked at each other.

BANKS: Kenny and I didn't even talk about it. It was in the flow.

ENGELLAND: The right read if you're Kenny? Throw it to Gene Banks! He's the leading scorer in the ACC!

DENNARD: I gave a slight ball fake to Chip in the corner. Then Gene made the perfect catch and the perfect turn and launched the perfect rainbow jumper over the fingers of Perkins. It swished through the net and we went to overtime.

SUDDATH: For some reason I played most of the overtime. I got the rebound away from [North Carolina's] Al Wood in OT, and it went to Gene for the winning shot.

DENNARD: The fans went crazy!

TISSAW: What I remember is that I tried to take a charge on Jimmy Black and it didn't go well. I was on my back on the floor and someone came down on me. It just made mush of my ankle. There was a Springsteen concert in Greensboro that night, and I went to it on crutches.

MOORE: Great day in Duke basketball history. Dean Smith's 50th birthday. Springsteen was playing in Greensboro that night.

DENNARD: I found myself at the Springsteen concert in the 10th row.

TAYLOR: The North Carolina win was the pinnacle. When Coach K won that game, I think that gave him unbelievable confidence. He could look at Dean Smith and say, "I beat this guy."

ENGELLAND: It was the heyday of the ACC. We had what would be an NCAA tournament team now.

We went to the NIT. Gene broke his wrist. We won a couple games. Yeah, we lost to Purdue, but it was without Gene. I really liked this team. It had grit. It tried to adjust, and Coach K adjusted to us, too.

"Good thing there was no plus-minus stat"

Despite losing to Duke in the final game of the regular season, North Carolina would advance to the Final Four before losing the championship game to Indiana. Banks and Dennard graduated and entered the NBA after the 1980-81 season. The next year, North Carolina won the 1982 national championship on a game-winning shot by freshman Michael Jordan -- who would later play alongside Banks on the Chicago Bulls from 1985 to '87.

Then in 1983, NC State won the national title under Valvano, a coach who had been hired in Raleigh at the same time that Krzyzewski arrived in Durham.

As North Carolina and NC State won their titles in consecutive years, Duke, meanwhile, posted a 21-34 record in Coach K's second and third seasons.

DENNARD: Those first two years after Gene and I left were pretty hard for Duke.

TAYLOR: [Krzyzewski] told me one time, and I really appreciated it, he said, "Vince, you were a great player, we just didn't put enough guys around you." And he was talking about my senior year.

How Coach K's career began at Duke in the 1980-81 season (cont.)

By John Gasaway, ESPN.com (November 19, 2021)

DENNARD: I remember two of my teammates with the Kansas City Kings, Phil Ford and Hawkeye Whitney, were from rivals of ours in the ACC [North Carolina and NC State, respectively]. They were always giving me grief. They would be reading the sports section, and they'd say, "Seriously? Duke lost to Appalachian State last night? How long is that coach of yours going to last?"

ENGELLAND: I scored a thousand points at Duke, but sometimes when I see Coach K I tell him I probably allowed 1,500. He just laughs. Good thing there was no plus-minus stat back then.

SUDDATH: To say that I was a Duke basketball player who gave Coach K his first win over UNC is a strong moment for me.

DENNARD: When Coach K announced his retirement this year, he and I got together on the phone. He said, "Do you remember the time we were at Clemson and you and Gene came down to the training meal at the hotel with no shirts on?" And I went, "No, I don't. Is that something we shouldn't have done?" It stuck in his brain after 41 years that we had the audacity to come to the training meal with no shirts. But, you know, we were Adonises, we were pretty proud of what we looked like.

BANKS: I don't remember anything about not wearing shirts at the hotel at Clemson. I'm sorry.

ENGELLAND: Going to Duke was one of the four or five best decisions I've made in my life, but it wasn't a storybook the whole time by any means. Sometimes it's better when it's not a storybook.

A.J. Griffin Says He's Fully Healthy; Could Be A Key Piece For Blue Devils

By Adam Zagoria, Forbes.com (November 18, 2021)

After suffering a sprained right knee in early October, Duke freshman A.J. Griffin says he is fully healthy. And while that is good news for Griffin and the Blue Devils, it is probably bad news for the rest of college basketball.

If he plays up to his potential, the 6-foot-6, 222-pound forward from Ossining, N.Y., could be a critical piece alongside fellow freshmen stars Paolo Banchemo and Trevor Keels as the No. 7 Blue Devils try to send coach Mike Krzyzewski out with his sixth NCAA championship on his farewell tour.

"I feel like [my knee] is right where I left off...and I feel as confident as I was, probably even more now just from the confidence I got from my coaches who have been helping me during this time," Griffin said Thursday on a Zoom call.

Coming out of White Plains (N.Y.) Archbishop Stepinac High School and the PSA Cardinals AAU program, Griffin – the son of former Seton Hall star and current Toronto Raptors assistant Adrian Griffin – was a 5-star Top 20 recruit in the Class of 2021. He committed to Duke as a junior two years ago this month, choosing them over Kentucky and Villanova. At the time he was a projected Top 10 pick in next summer's NBA Draft. While some sites still list him in the Top 10, ESPN's latest mock has him at No. 25.

Blessed with a tremendous frame and a strong work ethic, Griffin was beset by knee and back injuries throughout his high school career. He played only 12 games as a junior and did not play at all last season during the pandemic; he lived with his father in Florida for part of the season, bonding with his dad, working out and taking classes online.

He was sidelined again in October with the knee sprain, but returned earlier than expected for opening night against Kentucky in the Champions Classic, playing 11 minutes and scoring two points with two rebounds.

Coach K praised him after the Nov. 9 game, knowing that he has a ways to go before he's fully on track.

"A.J. in the second half, he gave us a lift," he said. "So if he comes around...We don't know our team completely."

When Griffin first signed with Duke, Coach K said: "He's an outstanding basketball player that is also an elite-level athlete. He defies one position, and physically he's ready to play right away. AJ is a very strong player, he's fun to play with and we're excited to have him and his family in our program."

In Tuesday's rout of Gardner Webb, Griffin played a season-high 16 minutes, notching five points, six rebounds and two assists.

"A.J. has been improving game-by-game," said Stepinac coach Pat Massaroni, who was in the stands at the Champions Classic. "Since he has arrived on campus he has been locked in. He had a slight bump in the road with a minor injury so he is getting back to the AJ we know on the court."

He added: "He can defend 1-4 and brings shot-making ability, athleticism, and play-making."

After starring when he did play in high school, Griffin is learning to come off the bench and bring energy with the second unit. Fellow freshmen Banchemo and Keels along with junior Wendell Moore Jr. have been the team's stars and leading scorers so far.

"It just feels like high school all over again," he said. "You gotta play your role and I'm happy with any role I have on the team. You always gotta be open to do whatever it takes for the team to win and if that means I gotta sit out, I'm happy with that. I'm just trying to win every single game and as long as we're winning, I'm happy."

Asked how much better he can get as the season progresses, he said: "I feel like one just staying healthy and building every single game, I feel like not only me but as a team can get a lot better. I know coach sees the potential in every single one of us, and it has to come from us wanting to get better every single day and I believe that we can all reach that potential that Coach K sees in us and that just comes with working out and staying grounded every single day."

A.J. speaks regularly with his father, who has been busy with the Raptors but hopes to get out during the NBA All-Star break to see A.J. compete live as well as his sister Aubrey Griffin, who plays for the UConn women.

"We have a special bond and he knows that I'll never quit," A.J. said of his father. "Even when I go over these humps [with injuries], he's right there with me and encouraging me and letting me know that it will be worth it in the end and you just gotta keep pushing and working hard and you will see the breakthrough. I just continue to keep that in my head every time I hit a roadblock."

After games, the two talk and Adrian is a straight shooter about what his son needs to work on.

"Yeah, he usually talks to me if he can because they're always on the road," he said. "But he gives me some advice after a game, telling me the truth about how I played and I'm truly grateful for that because I want to learn as much as I can and it's just really good to hear from my dad. He just doesn't talk tell me as my dad, he tells me as a real coach and how he would say it to one of his teammates."

It's only November, but if A.J. Griffin stays healthy and continues to improve, he could be a key piece as the Blue Devils look to send Coach K out on a high note.

Why Wendell Moore's historic night was just what Duke needed in Cameron opener

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (November 12, 2021)

DURHAM -- For all the pageantry of Mike Krzyzewski's first home game of his final season coming against the only school that means more to him than Duke, his Blue Devils lacked something Friday night.

Krzyzewski used one of his favorite words, saying, "We didn't have the verve that I would like."

In the end, Duke beat Army West Point, 82-56, a final margin that belied how competitive the Black Knights were against the No. 9 Blue Devils.

Paolo Banchero played a big role in Duke pulling away as he contributed 18 points and 12 rebounds. Another freshman, Trevor Keels, was rock solid defensively with six steals in addition to the 10 points he scored.

But the player who lifted Duke the most on what was a blah night for long stretches was the team's most experienced player.

Wendell Moore produced just the fifth triple-double in the long, illustrious history of Duke basketball by scoring 19 points, grabbing 10 rebounds and collecting 10 assists.

"I thought Wendell, really, had a helluva game," Krzyzewski said.

It's only the third time one of Krzyzewski's players at Duke pulled off a triple-double. Shelden Williams had 19 points, 11 rebounds and 11 blocked shots against Maryland in January 2006. In February 2019, RJ Barrett had 23 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists against N.C. State.

Now Moore joins the exclusive club, doing so on a night when his team, coming off a 79-71 win over No. 10 Kentucky on Tuesday night, didn't play with the same fire.

"Obviously, it felt really good," Moore said of his accomplishment. "I wish we could have won in a more dominant fashion than we did. Army's a great team. They came out here and gave us a good fight. At the end of the day a win may be a win, but we want to have great performances."

Moore certainly turned in a great personal performance to lift Duke on a night when the Blue Devils as a whole weren't always great.

The 6-6 junior from Charlotte made 7-of-13 shots and only turned the ball over once in his 34 minutes and 53 seconds of play. He also had two steals.

No one expects triple-doubles to happen on a regular basis, of course, but this is what Duke's coaches and Moore himself felt the Blue Devils needed from him – stuffing the stat sheet in different areas while playing solid, if not spectacular, basketball.

"From day one this year he's been really good," Krzyzewski said. "You don't get to see him every day. He's just a really good basketball player. He's our leader. He'll do anything that we need to have done."

On Tuesday night against Kentucky, while Keels and Banchero combined for 47 points, Moore contributed 12 points with four rebounds and three assists. Far from a triple-double but still the extra things the Blue Devils needed to beat a fellow top-10 team.

He did all that despite needing intravenous fluids to combat cramping during the second half. His recovery plan between that game and Friday worked.

"A lot of fluids," Moore said. "A lot of stretching. Really just getting a lot of fluids and food really, doing everything I can to recover."

A team captain along with senior Joey Baker, Moore is showing so far the confidence his teammates heaped on him this offseason is warranted. His two strong games show he can be a better player than the one who averaged 7.4 points as a freshman and 9.7 as a sophomore.

"It all starts with my teammates," Moore said. "They've instilled so much confidence in me during this preseason. I feel like I can do anything with them behind me."

A general hypothetical: What if Duke's Mike Krzyzewski had stayed in the Army?

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (November 12, 2021)

DURHAM -- In 2006, Mike Krzyzewski went back to South Korea in one of his first trips with USA Basketball, taking the national team to the Army's Camp Casey ahead of the world championships in Japan. It was a return not only to the demilitarized zone, but the path not taken.

He'd been there for the first time in 1970 as a recent graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, just out of artillery school. When he returned, he was an accomplished basketball coach, climbing the record books, with three national titles to his credit and another two yet to come, not to mention three Olympic gold medals.

It's an interesting hypothetical to consider as Krzyzewski's final season at Duke continued with Army visiting Cameron on Friday night, a sort of personal farewell to arms: What if he'd chosen a different uniform?

"That would never have happened," Krzyzewski says now. "I always knew I wanted to be a coach. I loved the Army. More so, if I didn't coach, I would have been a teacher. I had my sense of duty and all that. But I didn't have a passion."

He even spent his last few years in the Army coaching – first in Korea, and then at the West Point prep school before leaving the service as a captain and joining his old Army coach, Bob Knight, as a graduate assistant at Indiana in 1974. His alma mater hired him as head coach after that 31-1 season, and the rest is history.

But what if it wasn't?

Of the 148 West Point alumni honored with the Distinguished Graduate Award, Krzyzewski is one of 36 recognized for contributions outside the military. Ninety-nine recipients retired as generals. Very broadly speaking, that's his peer group.

"He probably would have become a general," said Pat Harris, who played for Krzyzewski at Army and later followed in his footsteps as basketball coach at West Point. "There's no stopping him. He's the type of individual that adjusts well to soldiers, to players, to personnel and I think that his flexibility truly would have helped him to be successful in the Army, too."

Harris knows of what he speaks. Not only do his personal ties to West Point run deep, two of his children served in the military as well. His son, an infantry officer, is still in the Army, stationed at Fort Bragg. Like Krzyzewski, Harris served as a field artillery officer immediately after leaving West Point. It was something they discussed as coach and player.

"He had mentioned several times that if he hadn't gotten into basketball he could have stayed in the Army," Harris said. "He enjoyed the whole thing about leading people. That's what he does in the sport of basketball. He would have had an excellent opportunity to do the same thing in the Army."

Others close to him aren't so sure. Over the course of his Duke career, Krzyzewski has frequently chafed under the strictures of the NCAA bureaucracy and railed against it, especially when it comes to what coaches can and can't do. He has shown increasing exasperation in recent years at the NCAA's failure to adapt to the quickly changing basketball world, and called for action in areas like name, image and likeness long before the NCAA was forced into change.

When it comes to bureaucracy and standing orders, the NCAA is truly following the so-called amateur model compared to the military. His daughter Jamie Spatola told the N&O's Steve Wiseman that she wasn't so sure her father would have handled that well.

"I don't know that there are any leaders that my dad admires more than military leaders," Spatola said. "He has a profound respect for service. But I don't know. I don't know if there's too many rules. I don't know. He might have been frustrated by the bureaucracy. He can feel frustrated about that at times."

There is no question, though, that some of the military lineage has run through Duke's program over these four decades. There is perhaps no better example than his relationship with Martin Dempsey, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff – now in his second term as chairman of USA Basketball and a Rubenstein Fellow at Duke – but it manifests in smaller ways as well.

Duke forward Joey Baker, the son of a Fort Bragg special forces sergeant, can recognize that influence implicitly.

"The things he's brought along with him from West Point are kind of instilled into the program and the culture here at Duke," Baker said. "The things that he tells us as players on a daily basis are very consistent with those values, I'd say."

And entering his fourth season at Duke, Baker can envision what might have happened if Krzyzewski had heeded a different call.

"I think with his attention to detail, his commitment to excellence, just his overall character, it would have lent himself to being an elite soldier, someone that serves our country in the best possible way," Baker said. "I obviously could see him being a high-ranking general, something of that sort, in the long run."

Paolo Banchemo is Paving the Way For Generations to Come

By Alex Squadron, SLAM Magazine Online (November 10, 2021)

Sitting at the podium in Duke's Scharf Hall, the legendary coach Mike Krzyzewski makes clear that, in what will be his final season before retiring, there will be no talk of "lasts." In fact, the word has been all but banned from his team's vocabulary for the foreseeable future. Coach wants to "live, not savor," focus on the present and remain in the moment.

OK, so no "lasts"—but there should be plenty of talk of "firsts" in Durham this year, especially since freshman phenom Paolo Banchemo arrived on campus. The Seattle native already made history by signing a name, image and likeness (NIL) deal to become the first college athlete featured in the video game NBA 2K. He is also the first player to join the Blue Devils from the state of Washington since Quin Snyder in 1985. While countless talented prospects have come through Duke's program, Banchemo is perhaps the first with his specific skill set at his size—he is a legitimate 6-10 but can do just about everything on the floor. Oh, and Banchemo might very well be the first overall pick in the NBA draft come June...

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Right now, on a muggy evening in late September, Banchemo is at Cameron Indoor Stadium for his first ever SLAM cover shoot. Lil Durk blasts from a nearby speaker, breathing life into the gym. After all, it's past 7 pm and things have been moving nonstop for Paolo since the morning. During media day, when he was swarmed by writers and cameras, the news broke that he had agreed to another exclusive NIL deal with the trading card company Panini—the first of its kind, too. He had his first official Duke practice in the afternoon and then an hour or so to get ready for our shoot. Once we wrap-around 9 pm—he's off to study for an upcoming exam.

There are, of course, high expectations for Banchemo, who was a consensus five-star recruit and the No. 3 player in the Class of 2021, according to ESPN's rankings; and with those expectations naturally comes pressure, particularly in what will be Coach K's last—err, 47th (including his five seasons at Army)—season. But you wouldn't know it at all from being around the freshman. Banchemo is laidback and soft-spoken, but still manages to exude the type of cool confidence that says, Why worry? None of the outside noise appears to be getting to his head. He is just taking it day by day and, like his coach, staying in the moment.

Traces of his journey to this point are tattooed across his burly right bicep—the downtown Seattle skyline in intimate detail, with Mt. Rainier edged in the background; the name of the street where he grew up and his family continues to reside; the location of the Rotary Boys and Girls Club, where Paolo first picked up a basketball. "I carry [Seattle] with me everywhere I go. Seattle is always going to be in me and a part of me," Banchemo says. "Part of my mission is to try to put Seattle on the map and get us as much recognition as I can."

Being a proud Seattleite is part of being a Banchemo. Paolo's parents, Mario and Rhonda, met when they were both athletes at the University of Washington—Mario, a walk-on tight end on the football team, and Rhonda, a star center on the basketball team. Mario is of Italian descent, which led Paolo to receive Italian citizenship in February 2020. Rhonda graduated from UW as the program's all-time leading scorer and eventually became the first player from the state of Washington to be drafted to the WNBA. She spent a year in the W, seven years competing overseas and 11 years as a high school coach in Seattle.

Unsurprisingly, Paolo was a multi-sport athlete as a kid. He was a track star in numerous events and initially dreamed of going to the NFL. His stellar quarterback career culminated with an invitation to the FBU All-American Game in eighth grade, which annually features the best prospects from across the country. Playing in the historic Alamodome, Banchemo threw for more than 200 yards and three touchdowns in the first half alone. "I don't think there's any doubt that he was a high DI, high major quarterback prospect," says Mario. "And if you ask Sam Adams [Paolo's coach and a former NFL player], he'll tell you that he was a league guy."

A massive growth spurt in middle school, however, gradually steered Paolo closer to basketball. And the hometown heroes he once admired from afar—Jamal Crawford, Isaiah Thomas, Nate Robinson, Zach LaVine, Spencer Hawes and many others—started to embrace him in their Seattle hoops brotherhood. He has since trained alongside several of them, battled against them in the city's Pro-Am (The Crawsover) and been in constant communication with them over text. They provide valuable advice and inspire him to keep pushing, just as Rhonda and Mario have always done. By her own admission, Rhonda is the stern and brutally honest one, nipping his every mistake and keeping it real with him when others won't. Mario instilled lessons of discipline and hard work, accompanying Paolo to the gym at 5 am each morning to train before school.

The result of all that? Well, even as an 19-year-old kid, Banchemo is already paving the way for generations to come—both on and off the court. As a player, he is the prototype for the modern and future NBA: a strong, dynamic, versatile forward who can score at all three levels, make plays for others and guard every position defensively. During his junior year at O'Dea High School (Paolo did not play in his senior season due to the pandemic), he averaged 22.6 points, 11.0 rebounds, 3.7 assists and 1.6 blocks. He is still getting accustomed to his 6-10 frame and working on the type of quick post moves that once made his mom unstoppable; but he can just as easily shoot from deep and rise over smaller defenders for midrange jumpers as he can finish with force at the rim. He genuinely loves to set up teammates—passing, he says, is his favorite part of his game—and has a lot of good ones to facilitate for at Duke, from returners Wendell Moore Jr, Jeremy Roach and Mark Williams to fellow freshmen Trevor Keels, AJ Griffin and Jaylen Blakes and Marquette transfer Theo John.

"I don't think there's anything on that court that I can't do," Banchemo tells SLAM. "I'm going to always play hard. I'm going to always get my teammates involved. But, like I said, I can score, pass, defend. Just going to be able to do whatever the team needs me to do."

"He's special. He's unique," says Amile Jefferson, a former forward at Duke who now serves as the program's Director of Player Development. "He fits the modern day prototype of if you could make your dream player. He's 6-10, 255-260 [pounds], can handle the ball, can shoot it. When you watch him, you don't understand how massive he is. When I used to watch tape or footage of him, I used to be like, Wow, he looks like a guard. But he really looks like a center coming at you with speed, handles, unbelievable athleticism. It's almost like when people create a 2K player—you make him the biggest, the strongest, the fastest, and then you also give him a jumpshot. You're like, Alright, this is not real. I'm playing a game. But then you see this kid, and he's almost like a real life version of that."

"We've had a lot of really good bigs, but he's up there with the best of them, just as far as his versatility. I think that's what separates him," Duke assistant coach Nolan Smith says. "The fact that he can put it on the floor, he can shoot the three, he can play inside, he can score at all three levels. That's what makes him very, very different from a lot of guys I've seen with my eyes in this basketball game."

Outside the game, Banchemo is blazing a very, very different path as well. Due to recent changes in NCAA policies that now enable college athletes to profit off their NIL, he suddenly finds himself becoming as much a trendsetter in business as he is in sports. The family sat together shortly after the NCAA's announcement and mapped out a strategy that made the most sense for Paolo. Every opportunity wasn't worth pursuing, they established. It was, and still is, about finding the ones that fit best—that stay true to who Paolo is and what he really wants. In August, he signed with an agency (CAA Basketball) to help represent him in all NIL negotiations.

"Our perspective was always that any opportunity that we're going to take advantage of should be foundational, should be things that lead to other opportunities," Mario explains. "Before NIL was finalized, we had discussed pursuing opportunities to be involved in NIL type of deals for no money, just to introduce Paolo to it and sort of build his brand and put him out there in an authentic way. With NIL, obviously there are more opportunities to do that and also be compensated."

"For him, specifically, it was, Don't worry about chasing the dollars here. At Duke, you're already affiliated with a premium brand. If the opportunities don't meet or exceed that brand, then you don't want to do them. You want to be focused on things that are authentic and things that can further you and be foundational, that you can build on as you continue to grow and progress through your collegiate—and hopefully ultimately—professional career."

"Just not saturating," adds Rhonda. "Wanting him to be one-of-one or the first. We thought that was important. Not that you don't want to be associated with other players who may also sign deals with the same companies, but we wanted Paolo to be the first. With that said, you can't be the first at a million things. You can be the first at a few."

Nothing can, and nothing will, get in the way of basketball, though. Paolo understands that none of these deals would be possible without his commitment to the game. Business opportunities won't distract from his primary goals: winning Player of the Year, being the No. 1 pick in the NBA draft, sending Coach K out with a national championship. "He's not one of those dudes who's just focused on that he could make millions of dollars," says freshman guard Trevor Keels, Paolo's suitemate in the dorms. "He's going to focus on the time right now. And he knows we gotta win a national championship." Following a disappointing 2020-21 campaign, the new-look Blue Devils ranked ninth to open the season, and beat No. 10 Kentucky 79-71 in the Champions Classic on Tuesday night. Banchemo finished with 22 points and 7 rebounds in the victory.

He might be soft-spoken, but you can also tell that beneath his calm exterior, Banchemo is eager. When we dim the lights in Cameron Indoor Stadium blue, just as they will be for the school's annual "Countdown to CraziNESS" event soon after our photo shoot, you can see his eyes widen. A smile slowly takes over his face. He can't wait much longer.

We ask him to deliver a message to the Duke faithful and basketball fans across the country anticipating his debut.

"As far as Duke fans, you're going to see me playing extremely hard, playing with energy," he says. "Seeing us [all] play extremely hard and play with energy. We got a lot of talent all over the floor, all over the squad. I think it's going to be a great year, a fun year. So just be on the lookout for that. Don't miss it."

"And then basketball fans in general," he continues. "Some might not know me, but they will soon."

Coach K said goodbye to the only place that competes with Cameron

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (November 10, 2021)

NEW YORK -- With a quick point, a subdued wave and a pause for his wife to exit the stands and join him, Mike Krzyzewski stepped off the court, through the narrow passage through the stands and into the bowels of Madison Square Garden, turning his back for the last time to an arena floor that has meant more to him than almost any other.

There was very little overt celebration of Duke's win over Kentucky, the first of this final season and the 1,171st of Krzyzewski's career, nor any sentimentality in his departure. The floor went unknissed, the crowd at large unacknowledged, the moment unadorned.

That final MSG exit had more resonance than the odd halftime ceremony during the opening game Tuesday, when an ESPN executive presented Krzyzewski with a framed Champions Classic poster and the two seemed to wrestle over who would carry it off the court.

Krzyzewski waved to the crowd then but there was more than a little awkwardness to it, the honoring of a coach amid a game between two other teams whose fans aren't particularly fond of him, the crowd still absent most of the Duke fans yet to arrive.

But there was never any doubt on what this meant, not only to this latest iteration of Duke but this final iteration of Krzyzewski's many visits to the Garden as a player and coach.

"We wanted to get this win, especially for coach in his first game," Paolo Banchemo, Duke's star freshman said. "It was a big game for us. Coming in felt like we had a chance to make a statement with this game."

That's a bit of a twist on "first" but in this already prolonged season of farewells, one where the word "last" has been proscribed from the Duke vocabulary, this evening was one unquestioned and indisputable finality. Krzyzewski may watch Duke play again someday at Madison Square Garden – it's the only place he has indicated he might – but he will never again stalk this sideline.

He played here a handful of times at Army, then coached four games here with Army and more than 10 times that with Duke, but the next time he comes to Madison Square Garden he'll need a ticket, like any other schlub. Duke will be back in New York, in March, but in a different building in a different borough.

Krzyzewski exits this particular stage with a 79-71 win, and in keeping with the latter years of his time at Duke, he has a freshman to thank for it, just not the one anyone expected. With Banchemo missing a big chunk of the second half to cramps, Trevor Keels took over for the Blue Devils.

Stockier and sturdier than some of his rookie predecessors at point guard, Keels had no trouble with the pace or physicality Kentucky demanded of the Blue Devils. Banchemo is a special player but Keels is going to be a different kind of problem in the ACC.

When Kentucky made a push heading into the final five minutes, Keels hit a jumper in the lane, Mark Williams had a big block and Banchemo scored in the paint to restore the Duke lead to a comfortable margin. It showed the ability to fend off impending crisis Duke so lacked a season ago – and delivering a big win for the ACC on what turned out to be a dismal opening evening.

The curious poster from ESPN was the first of what figures to be many momentos in this season of farewells but the real gift Tuesday was this visit, beginning his final season with a pilgrimage back to the only arena that means anything close to what Cameron means to him over the course of his career.

"It felt so good, with the Garden crowd, playing against an outstanding team," Krzyzewski said. "They're tough. And we're tough. That was a big-time game."

It's a relationship between man and building that predates his time at Duke and taps the true roots of his basketball career, which brought him to the ACC from the regional sect of basketball that for many years served as its northeastern counterweight.

As far as Duke is concerned, Madison Square Garden has an importance of its own, beyond whatever it may mean to Krzyzewski. For a large swath of the fan and alumni base, it's a far more convenient venue than Cameron itself, and Duke has always kept MSG as a Manhattan pied-a-terre.

Krzyzewski has coached more Duke games at MSG than anywhere but Cameron and the Greensboro Coliseum, and fate and coincidence collided to deliver two of his biggest milestones on this floor: He passed Bobby Knight in 2011 with a win over Michigan State in the inaugural instance of his event, sharing a hug with his former coach in the aftermath, and he reached 1,000 wins with a win over St. John's three seasons later.

But the Garden held deep meaning for Krzyzewski long before he even arrived at Duke, before he'd won his first game there, because he came of basketball age at Army, as a player and coach, in an era when the Big East had yet to stratify basketball in the northeast into haves and have-nots, and that entire basketball universe revolved around Madison Square Garden. It was that way for an entire generation of New York-area coaches – Coach K and Jimmy V and Louie and Dr. Tom and P.J. and on and on – who would become known by a single name.

Jim Valvano and Krzyzewski moved south a week apart in 1980, trading the big city for the ACC, but the depth of feeling for the Garden still resonates for Krzyzewski today, all these years later. He played five games there as a cadet and went 1-3 as a coach at Army before leaving for a new opportunity at Duke.

Forty-one years later, the final act of that tenure started in this place that in some ways represents where it all began, a place that has always been special to Krzyzewski and will remain special to Duke after he's gone, even if it won't be the same.

Keel Mode is active: Behind Duke's big win were two freshmen ready for the moment

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (November 9, 2021)

NEW YORK – Keyosha Keels is speechless. Can this really all be happening? A jazz saxophone solo blares over the loudspeakers at Madison Square Garden, and as thousands of fans funnel toward the exits, just past 11:30 in the evening, they're all talking about one thing:

Her son.

And rightfully so. Because in No. 9 Duke's 79-71 win over No. 10 Kentucky on Tuesday – in the late-night Champions Classic slot, the one reserved for college basketball's best stars – Trevor Keels shone as bright as any. People will point to his 25 points, which led all scorers, and sure, that's certainly impressive. Keels made driving, falling-over layups, needed his way right through the middle of Kentucky's defense. Hell, he even knocked down Duke's lone 3-pointer of the evening. But consider the circumstances he did all that under, and suddenly, it's doubly impressive. Maybe more.

Actually, definitely more.

That's because, while Duke came out of halftime with a narrow 39-35 lead, the Blue Devils watched it evaporate entirely in minutes. Kentucky forward Oscar Tshiebwe – the West Virginia transfer who finished with 19 rebounds, 12 of them on the offensive glass, and 17 points – caught consecutive lobs over Duke's 7-foot center Mark Williams, instantly silencing large swathes of the Garden crowd. And then to make matters worse, three and a half minutes into the second frame, Paolo Banchemo – Duke's top-rated recruit and an early favorite to be the No. 1 overall pick in next year's NBA Draft – asked out of the game with what turned out to be cramps. In the moment, though, as Banchemo cut through the crowd and headed back to Duke's locker room? It was as if MSG's ceiling fell out and collapsed right on the Blue Devils' bench.

Only, not for Keyosha and her husband, Roland, sitting several rows behind Mike Krzyzewski and his team. Because they've seen this song and dance before, so they know what the next notes sound like. In high school, starring for Catholic powerhouse Paul VI just outside of Washington, D.C., Keels watched two of his teammates, fellow Division-I recruits Jeremy Roach (Duke) and Anthony Harris (North Carolina), go down with ACL injuries. And what did he do? Become arguably the top talent in the DMV and a five-star national recruit.

"I'm just thinking, it's time," Roland tells The Athletic. "Paolo went out with an injury, it looks like Wendell (Moore) had an injury – so I just knew that it was time for Trevor to step up. He's done it before, so it was just time for Trevor to show the world what he's capable of."

And did he ever. Surprisingly, with Banchemo out of the lineup, the Blue Devils managed to reclaim their lost lead... and even took things a step further, shockingly building upon it. Over the next 5:32, with a substantially smaller lineup, Duke went on an 18-6 run fueled in large part by Keels, who scored 10 of those critical points. And some of the shots he made... Sheesh. Now, does Keels' 6-foot-5, 230-pound stature give him an advantage over 5-foot-10 UK point guard Sahvir Wheeler? Obviously. But while Keels could bully his way past Wheeler, he also had to have the finesse to thread through the rest of the traffic thereafter – including Tshiebwe, who also had two blocks, lying in wait at the rim. Not many college basketball players in the country, not to mention freshmen, can hit a step-back against Kentucky's length from the top of the key.

"I use my body a lot," Keels said, smirking all the while. "You get in the lane, you can't just go in there full-steam ahead. You've got to read the defense. I think that's what I do well."

Safe to say Coach K agrees. Back at ACC Tip-Off last month, Krzyzewski hinted that Keels could have this sort of impact. "He's really good," Krzyzewski said then, with the exuberance of a high schooler shoddily trying to hide a secret. Only, cat's out of the bag now. Keels didn't just grab the spotlight in a town known for them; he stole it, stomping all over the opposition in the process. And as if Keels' performance wasn't provocative enough, he also went out of his way to tell Kentucky's roster

about it. After an early layup in the first half, over Tshiebwe, Keels gave the Kentucky big man a bit of an elbow as he ran back down the court. In the second half, after backing down Wheeler in the post and scoring as the shot clock expired, he ran down the court with his hand at shin level. You must be this tall to try defending me.

"He likes to feed off the opponents' energy. That means the world to him," Roland says, flashing the smirk his son so clearly inherited. "The more trash you talk, the more he gets into the game."

If you're looking for a term for Keels' cocktail of performance and passion and pissing-people-off, well, there's a ready-made one – and it's in gigantic letters, tattooed across the width of his shoulder blades: Keel Mode. It's a play on words, his parents explain, meant to mean Kill Mode. On Tuesday, at Madison Square Garden, they were one and the same. "It's like a superpower," Roland adds. "You tap into it, and he's there."

Now, much to the chagrin of the Duke fans in attendance, Keel Mode isn't an unlimited energy boost like in some video game. You try doing all the scoring Keels did – not to mention his tenacious on-ball defense, fighting over screens and even once forcing Wheeler into a backcourt violation – and not getting tired. So with 11:52 left to play, and Duke up by a comfortable margin, Keels finally went to the bench... right in time for Banchemo, who received an IV in the locker room, to return to the game. Banchemo's mother, Rhonda, said he looked "a little tender, a little ginger," when he checked back into the game, but you wouldn't have known that from the box score alone. Because when Keels checked out of the game, he didn't just sub out of the lineup; he passed the baton, and the offensive burden, back to Banchemo.

And at that point, the 6-foot-10, 250-pounder – who technically plays forward, but with the skillset of a smaller wing – did what Krzyzewski recruited him for, all the way from Seattle. He grabbed defensive rebounds, immediately initiating the break once he did, and seemingly scored at will. We're talking spin moves inside, pull-up jumpers, even a step-back or two. Two blocks over from Broadway, Banchemo wasn't the singular show of the evening, but he was a show nonetheless. "He's the real deal," said Krzyzewski, who has produced more NBA lottery picks than any college coach ever. "There's no question about it."

It bears mentioning that, yes, at one point, Kentucky did pull the game back and make things closer. A 15-point lead dwindled to four, re-igniting one-half of the Garden's blue-blooded crowd. But you know what happened next? More Keel Mode. More Banchemo going berserk. And from the 69-65 point, with six minutes to play, Keels and Banchemo scored eight straight points to re-plunge the dagger into the Wildcats' heart. Keels said the team had hoped to do that with the prior 18-6 run – "we got to put them away right here," he said the team discussed at the time, "step on their necks" – but the decisive blow ultimately didn't come until the closing minutes.

All that matters, though, is that it did. And in the fashion that it did, in the Champion's Classic, against Kentucky, it naturally swirled memories of the last Duke team with freshmen this fun and fiery: the 2018-19 team, headlined by a trio of eventual top-10 picks: Zion Williamson, R.J. Barrett (who was courtside Tuesday, along with several of his New York Knicks teammates), and Cam Reddish. Four years ago Williamson and Barrett became the first pair of Duke freshmen to drop over 20 points apiece in their debut.

As of Tuesday? Keels and Banchemo – who finished with 22 points, seven rebounds, and two steals – are the second.

So, that's some company to keep. That elicits emotions, energy – and, yes, expectations. Season-openers are ripe for "statements," for immediate takeaways, with Tuesday being no different. So, what were Rhonda's? "I think it says one, the team is not just about Paolo. I think Trevor showed that he can play, too," she said. "I think Theo (John) did a great job defensively, and was really in there banging. They all made tough shots, they all made timely shots. I think this team is for real."

Keel Mode is active: Behind Duke's big win were two freshmen ready for the moment

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (November 9, 2021)

She isn't the only one, nor were the tens of thousands in attendance Tuesday. Krzyzewski thought so, too, as far back as this spring – and, no, it's not a coincidence that this star-studded squad will be his last. Just as Roy Williams, his Hall of Fame counterpart on Tobacco Road the last 18 years, walked away from the sport abruptly in April, Coach K could've done the same. Instead? He committed to one final go-around, one final swing at winning a sixth ring. He concocted a succession plan, one which would take him off the recruiting trail all summer and really let him focus on his players. On building a team. Krzyzewski said after the game that amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which robbed last season's Blue Devils of most of its summer workouts, he re-learned the value of relationships and preparation. Not missing a practice all summer long allowed him to do that. And Tuesday was at least a piece of proof that that strategy might pay off.

"It's a good point, and I do: I feel closer to this team, where I know them, than I have really in the last decade, and I have been really close with teams," he said. "We didn't go to the transfer portal for other players. We specifically told our guys that we're not doing that, and they're our guys. Just a bunch of different things to build that level of trust and camaraderie."

Those things, clearly, are valuable, as this Duke team looked much more like the ones of old, the ones fans have come to expect. The ones whose title dreams are tangible, not tough to imagine. And when the final buzzer sounded, and the jazz started playing, and the win was certified, that was only further confirmation. Now, can this endure? We'll see. One win, even with these stakes and storylines, does not a season make. But if Keels and Banchemo – and fellow five-star freshman A.J. Griffin, who played 10 minutes as he continues rehabbing from a knee injury sustained in October – keep up this pace, then... well, the mind starts to wonder. Maybe Krzyzewski's final squad really can be something special. "We're going to play together. We're going to play hard all 40 minutes," Banchemo said. "And yeah, I mean, we're going to play like Duke."

That didn't mean much last season, admittedly; the Blue Devils stumbled and struggled their way to the program's first non-NCAA Tournament season since the mid-90s. But after Tuesday? After Keel Mode, and Banchemo looking beastly, in the best sense of the word? This is a team that shot 1-of-13 from 3, only had seven assists on 31 made baskets, was obviously out-rebounded... and yet still won convincingly, against a top-10 team littered with experienced transfers. It's early, but at least in this moment, all things seem possible – even Krzyzewski's sixth title.

Which, more than anything else, is why Keels committed to Duke in the first place. For moments like these, for the brightest spotlight in the sport. Maybe that, as much as anything, was why it took Keyosha a minute or two to say anything. Everything her son had dreamed – for himself, for his team, for his Hall of Fame coach – suddenly seemed within reach. Trevor Keels tasted it all Tuesday, and the world was witness to his will. How do you think his mom felt from five rows off the floor?

"I'm super proud," Keyosha said, smiling. "Extremely, extremely proud."

The making of Paolo Banchemo, Duke's newest freshman superstar

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (November 9, 2021)

DURHAM, N.C. – No one knows, exactly, how the 4-year-old boy wound up onstage. But there he was, front and center, fake-strumming a guitar and crashing a community festival concert. The artist he upstaged, a local jazz musician named Michael Powers, became so enamored with the toddler's enthusiasm that he gave him a free live concert DVD to take home.

"I kid you not," Mario Banchemo says now, "Paolo watched that DVD five times a day."

Paolo, for the uninitiated, is Mario's son. But if you've heard the name Paolo Banchemo (pronounced ban-care-oh) before – and you will, soon, if you haven't – it likely wasn't in the context of childhood capers. Instead? It's as this: the freshman centerpiece of Coach K's final Duke squad; one of the top three recruits in all of college basketball; and, according to industry insiders, the frontrunner to go No. 1 in next year's NBA Draft. He's a 6-foot-10, 250-pound guard crammed in a center's body, as capable of crossing up defenders as he is dunking them into oblivion. It's an overused aphorism, sure, but there simply aren't scores of human beings with his blend of size and skill – and he doesn't turn 19 until Friday, three days after the Blue Devils' opener against Kentucky in the Champions Classic.

But before all this? Paolo was, like countless kids, a wannabe rockstar. Or, jazz star, technically, but same sorta deal. He'd watch that Powers DVD over and over again, drumming along to the beats. At first, it was using his hands; before long, Mario had slipped the cardboard pieces off two clothes hangers from the cleaners to form makeshift drumsticks. Paolo wasn't playing an instrument, per se, but he remembered the beats and practiced the timing. Mario and Rhonda, Paolo's mom, would drive all around their hometown of Seattle, following Powers wherever he was scheduled to play. One day, that meant hauling over to Eastern Washington to listen to Powers at a winery. "The looks we got," Mario jokes, "when we showed up at this jazz performance, at a winery, with a 5-year old? People thought we were the worst thing on the planet." Five minutes into Powers' set, though, Paolo's miniature drum routine on his lap pillow stole the show. "He just went berserk," Rhonda says, laughing. "Whenever the music would stop, he'd stop and have one stick in the air, waiting for the music to start back up."

Paolo's interest in drumming came as something of a surprise, his mom says, since the family is not musically inclined. Sports were more their thing. Mario walked on to Washington's football team as a tight end, working his way up from junior college; Rhonda was a prized basketball recruit in her own right, ultimately leaving UW as the school's all-time leading scorer before playing in the WNBA and other professional leagues. The Banchemos nourished Paolo's musical passion nonetheless, signing him up for drum lessons and even buying him a drum set for their home. (Parents of young drummers will surely empathize with their eardrums.) They supported it, relentlessly and rigorously.

Within two or three years, though, Paolo's interest in drumming faded. Or more accurately, it was swallowed up by his surging (and probably inevitable) attraction to basketball. His parents' son, after all. "Listen, I'm 6-1, my husband is 6-3 1/2," Rhonda jokes. "We both knew what hopefully was going to happen." He was 6-foot-7 as a high school freshman. Athletically, he was born on third base.

And yet ... so too are swarms of kids, who can jump high, run fast, do all the things that high-level achievement requires. Paolo had the advantage of two parents who knew the sweat and the sacrifice it took to play Division-I sports, and one who knew what was required to thrive at that level. If he really wanted it, they would push him – a little too hard sometimes, in Rhonda's case. They would also go to great lengths to put him in position to succeed, as they did by driving their would-be preschool drummer all over the Pacific Northwest. Still, there was only so much they could do. "Our responsibility was just to put him there; it was his responsibility to do well while he was there," Rhonda says. "The kid had to be the one that's doing it. We were just the taxi and the bankroll."

Therein lies the essence of Paolo Banchemo. He had a head start physically, sure. He had the right support system at home. Maybe that gets you 75 percent of the way to greatness. The other 25 percent, though? That required the willingness to challenge himself, to do things like choose a college nearly 3,000 miles from home because he thought that would be best for his development.

"What drives me?" he tells The Athletic. "It's just, like, a natural want to be great. I just knew from the jump I wanted to do that. And I work every day. You know, I don't gotta put my mom in a new house. I don't gotta get anybody out the struggle. It's just, straight up, see how far I can take this."

Last month on fall break, Paolo went back home to Seattle and did the normal things college kids do when they leave campus. Spending time with his younger siblings. Visiting his favorite food spots. Getting a haircut from his old barber. As Paolo's luscious locks got trimmed down into something tidier, Mario and the barber asked him how things were going at Duke.

"He was just talking about how they'd had a film session, and Coach K was just in him the entire film session," Mario recalls. "The whole team is there, all the coaches are there, and he's just telling him, 'This right here? This isn't good enough. You can't have bad days.' But it's funny, because he's telling me how Coach K was letting him have it, but Paolo was telling me

this story from the perspective of, I knew what he was doing. I was scoring. I was performing at a certain level. But (Krzyzewski) was saying if you want to be great, you have to be at this level."

Apparently, the story made the rounds in Paolo's basketball circle. "Coach K just ripped him up," says Darryl Hennings, the director of Paolo's grassroots program, Seattle Rotary. "Just ripped into him about four or five really small details. Well, small to him, but to (Coach K), he made it seem like it was a huge deal. And it just kind of made P realize that K wasn't gonna let him take any shortcuts."

That, with coaches like Hennings and his own parents, is what Paolo is used to. Being held over the edge of a competitive cliff and dared to look down. That's the very reason Paolo opted for Duke in the first place. Other coaches, his parents say, told him he could do whatever he wanted if he picked their school: take 15 shots a game, play any position, you name it. But at what point in his life had he ever experienced that before? Consider, Paolo first learned the game from his mom, way back when she was an assistant coach at Holy Names Academy, an all-girls school on the east side of Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood. Paolo would tag along to his mom's after-school practices and, from her and the head coach, longtime family friend Lee Adams, witnessed their incredible focus on fundamentals. "I think the boys, because they're so athletically-inclined, sometimes they miss those," Rhonda says. "But bounce passes, backdoor cuts, screening, just the real basic fundamentals, he got those every day. Every day. And then we put him out there with the girls (when he got older), and ... they were better than he was, so he had to really kind of think about it: how to score on them, how to be successful with girls who were quite a bit older and faster and stronger."

So from the start, Paolo wasn't receiving preferential treatment. Duke, and Krzyzewski specifically, never promised any either. And that's why, some three weeks before Paolo committed to the Blue Devils, he walked into his parents' bedroom upstairs and told them he was leaning – hard – toward Duke. "Duke was, we thought, on the fringes. Just outside," Rhonda says. "Of the three (other main finalists, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Washington), we thought Duke was four." What Rhonda and Mario didn't know was how often Coach K was reaching out to their son. During the NBA playoff bubble at Disney in 2020, Paolo constantly received texts from Krzyzewski about things pro players were doing that he could also incorporate into his game. That outreach not only showed Paolo how much Krzyzewski wanted him, but it told him that Coach K had really studied his skillset, and understood the things he was capable of. "A lot of people saw him as a versatile big," Mario says, "and I think he sees himself as a little bit more than that." One clip Krzyzewski sent Paolo that proved that was of LeBron James transitioning from point guard to center. Basically, Coach K saying: Hey, you can do this, too.

But it was one specific phone call, Paolo says, that got the idea of Duke stuck in his head. Krzyzewski and Paolo would speak by phone three, four times a week at that point, but on this particular call, Krzyzewski had a specific message to relay. "He told me I was a pro wherever I went, there's no doubt about that," Paolo remembers. "But he was like, 'If you want to maximize your potential, you have to come here. Players like you don't just come around, and players like you need to be pushed to get the most out of your talent.'

"That right there, that kind of just set the decision for me."

Why did Krzyzewski feel it was important to convey that? "Because we wanted to tell him that he still had a lot of development to go," Krzyzewski tells The Athletic. "He's still a young player, and he needed to be in an environment where we were going to coach him hard and make sure that he developed his potential, not just use his talent, and where he might discover other talents – a talent of communication, of leadership, things like that. And he was very excited to do that, and still is excited about doing it."

There, of course, were other things about Duke and Krzyzewski that appealed to Paolo. He valued that, in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, Krzyzewski and his staff were vocal about the Black Lives Matter movement. Especially considering Paolo's own experience with racial profiling and social injustice – at a concert in high school, he and a friend wrongfully had guns pulled on them when police believed they were sitting in a stolen Jeep – it was important to him and his family that coaches valued social justice. On the basketball side of things, Paolo appreciated that Krzyzewski had coached several of his all-time favorites: James, Kobe Bryant, Kevin Durant, and more. "And knowing those players respect him? And those players love him as a coach?" Paolo says. "It was a no-brainer."

The pre-fall break film session, then, was proof Paolo made the right choice. Krzyzewski said he'd challenge him, push him, same as everyone else in Paolo's life – and, well, here it was. "He stayed true to his word. He doesn't take it easy on me," Paolo says. "He's on me about a lot of stuff. But it's all good. Like, I love it. You know, I'm used to hard coaching, so you don't ever take it personal. You just take it. You get the message from it; you don't take the tone of it, or the extra stuff that he adds into it to get under your skin. You just take the message. And you roll with the message, and you build off that."

And on Coach K's side of things, what does it tell him when a player of Paolo's pedigree seeks out that tough coaching? Well, Krzyzewski calls it something different.

The making of Paolo Banchemo, Duke's newest freshman superstar

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (November 9, 2021)

"I think truthful, to use another word that starts with a T. His mom's always been truthful with him: you played well, you didn't play well, you were soft, you need to do this," Krzyzewski says. "Anybody has a better chance to develop if they're told the truth all the time, and his family does that. So I already know that that's how he was brought up, so we tell him the truth, and he's acceptant of the truth. He wants to hear it. So I love that about him, and that's why he's getting better, and he has a chance to continue to get better. He won't fulfill his full potential while he's at Duke; he's going to keep getting better and better."

It's an interesting dichotomy Krzyzewski brings up: tough versus truthful.

And, phew, is that line ever fine. Rhonda will be the first to tell you: At times, it blurs all too easily. But given her own basketball background and the genetic gifts Paolo inherited, some push and pull between the pair was always almost inevitable. Watching Rhonda's Holy Names practices, Paolo learned about the standard his mom held for training. "If you're practicing, don't practice bad shots," she told him. "Don't be over there doing trick shots and doing 'Dude Perfect' stuff. If you're going to be over there shooting, shoot it right."

That attention to detail was how Rhonda propelled herself to the playing heights she did. Hennings, who went to Franklin High in Seattle with Rhonda, still recalls how they and the rest of their class would play pickup every lunch period. "And Rhonda, she was pretty much always on the team that ran the court – the boys and everybody," Hennings jokes. "That's just kind of the fire that she had." Paolo learned that lesson early on. Mom wouldn't relent, or rest, or really relax at all unless he was constantly striving and being pushed.

Much like Rhonda, Mario wasn't going to let Paolo wait until late in the game to recognize what necessary effort looks like. On youth teams, Paolo played alongside a number of fellow future collegians, including Gonzaga's Nolan Hickman, Arizona's Shane Nowell and Ohio State defensive lineman J.T. Tuimolou. Their team dominated so dramatically that winning was almost guaranteed. And if that was the case, his teams' collective talent always coming out on top, how would Paolo come to prioritize the grind? "Where can we take him," Mario wondered, "for lack of a better term, to get punched in the mouth?" Encouraging Paolo to play up multiple age groups, so his physical advantages were neutralized, was just one answer.

Another was that, sometimes, that meant Mario or Rhonda had to become that challenge, be the people who demanded more even amidst Paolo's surging success. Say Paolo held an opposing center to 11 points, for instance; Rhonda would be all over him that the other kid shouldn't have even had 10. "As I got older and started playing real AAU games, she'd be there yelling," Paolo says. "Giving me the business after games in the car ride home. She was one of those parents. I hated it back then. Plenty of games where I was upset."

Ask Paolo, and he'll tell you that as early as middle school, he figured he was good enough to probably play in college. Then after his freshman season at O'Dea, he was dominating on the EYBL circuit with Rotary, outperforming other stars in his class. "That's when I realized I could possibly get to the NBA," Banchemo says, "and that was my set dream from that point." The following summer, having sprouted to 6-foot-8 and well over 200 pounds, Paolo was named MVP of the NBPA Top 100 Camp. "We all knew he could play," Hennings says, "but we didn't know he was one of the main guys in that class." That was the same weekend college coaches could begin contacting recruits. Naturally, Paolo's phone blew up. "The floodgates opened," Mario says, "and then it was like, this thing is real."

But even as external praise for Paolo picked up, it didn't always mesh with what Rhonda was telling her son. "I was very critical, I won't lie," Rhonda says. "I probably stopped screaming at him in the 11th grade. For a while, if he wasn't rebounding, I was one of the loudest people in the gym telling him what he needed to be doing – and he hated it."

Adams – then one of Paolo's assistant coaches at O'Dea – recalls a moment mid-game where Rhonda yelled something out. He considered turning around to respond, "Hey, it actually wasn't his fault!" But she persisted, just like her dad did to her when she was a promising high school player. Rhonda remembers her relationship with her father devolved, at one point, to where she wished he wouldn't even watch her play anymore.

And then one day, Paolo came asking for the very same.

"It actually impacted our relationship negatively. He was like, 'I don't want you to come to any more of my stuff: like, my games or anything.' So for a year, I didn't," Rhonda says. "And it was hurtful, but it wasn't. I understood it."

His mom had always loved him, supported him, but it had gotten suffocating. Paolo knew his headspace was split: He'd be focused on his games, absolutely, but when Rhonda called out? He'd turn around. Break focus. To reach the heights he now thought he could achieve, well, he couldn't have that. "There were some tough days," Hennings says. "He would think he played well, and he'd come off and she'd kind of tear into him about what he didn't do." Coaches tried getting through to Banchemo that his mom had always been that way. It was tough love, but love was the undercurrent for any criticism. And another thing: Sure, she was a great player in her time, but so are you. "I told him, look, you have to find a way to balance it out to where

you're fulfilling your expectations. If you feel good about what you're doing, if you feel good about the effort you're putting in," Hennings explains, "then you have to be accepting of what she says, but then kind of let it roll off your back."

Eventually, Rhonda returned to the sidelines at Paolo's games – and initially, she still struggled not to call out to her son on the court. Until one day, Mario turned to his wife and said something that seemed to get through: "I think he's gonna be alright." After all, Paolo already had the accolades by then, as well as the attention of every major program in the country. He was working with three separate coaches – Hennings, Kerr, and his trainer, Mike Knight, whom he calls a big brother – to iron out any real or perceived problems with his play. If that wasn't enough, if that wasn't satisfactory, would anything ever be?

"I was probably too hard on him because I felt like other people weren't," Rhonda says. "It took a while for me to realize that he was as good as people said he was."

While Rhonda will never stop giving her son pointers – how could he shoot 1-of-4 from the free-throw line during Countdown to Crazy? – she did stop yelling. She didn't have to be his obstacle anymore.

"That's actually when I really knew I was getting kind of good," Paolo says. "She would get on me about smaller stuff: more of it was like playing hard, talking. Once I started doing those things, I just started playing well every single game. So that's when I realized I was getting better – when she didn't have to say that stuff anymore."

Mario vividly remembers, up until Paolo's junior year of high school, waking his son up at 5:30 in the morning to go work out. Paolo would design the drills, map out the whole routine, and Mario would rebound as necessary. By Paolo's junior year, though?

"There was a shift there," Mario says, "where I didn't have to get him up anymore; suddenly he was coming to get me up."

Credit goes to the final figure responsible for helping Paolo reach this point: Knight, the former Division I player and overseas professional whom Paolo began seriously working with as a junior. Knight was there to propel Paolo's game, but also his mentality. Having first met Paolo in the eighth grade, he'd seen what his pupil was physically capable of; the trick was reinforcing that to Paolo and getting him to realize that there is no stopping him at his best. "There's no cap on P," Knight says. "I call him 'Thanos' on the court, because I feel like when he does all that he's supposed to do, all the Avengers would have to team up to have a chance to beat him. He has that kind of thumbprint on the game."

Like all Paolo's coaches, and his parents, Knight didn't take things easy. He'd have Paolo do 45 minutes of band work before even picking up a ball, and then 100 jumping jacks with resistance bands after a grueling multi-hour session. As Paolo persisted, he steadily adopted that can't-be-contained attitude Knight was harping on. "It's the mindset of work," Paolo says. "Being at peace, but then having that peace be my confidence. Going out there knowing that nobody can stop me: It's me versus me. That's what (Mike) always tells me, so that's how I think."

Around the same time, Paolo became borderline obsessed with film. Kerr had taught him how to break down his own deficiencies at O'Dea, but Paolo and Knight took that to another level. Their text thread is littered with game tape, from some of the greatest to ever play: Hakeem, Kobe, Jordan, LeBron. Paolo still watches his favorite current players, too, with former Blue Devils star Jayson Tatum high on that list. For those yet to watch Paolo play, the names he studies say something about the type of player he envisions himself: Tatum's shooting and savvy around the perimeter; Jordan and Kobe's midrange magic; Hakeem's wiggles and shakes deep in the paint; and LeBron's ability to facilitate and lead as the ultimate playmaking big. There is one other, too, who feels worth mentioning, especially considering the comparisons Paolo gets to him: Zion Williamson, the last Duke freshman superstar to physically dominate college basketball in the way Paolo plans to.

Like with Tatum, Paolo says he and Williamson have chatted since he enrolled this summer. One topic of conversation, naturally, was Duke's game against Kentucky. Williamson set the standard for a season-opening coming-out party in 2018, when he torched the Wildcats for 28 points on 11-of-13 shooting, seven rebounds, two assists, one block, and a steal in a blowout victory. Now, in the first matchup of these teams since that beatdown, Paolo has the platform, and the preparation, for a similar debut.

"(Zion) obviously did great things here, so it's a good comparison," Paolo says. "But I'm trying to do what he did and win a national championship. So I'ma do it my way: play my game, be a team player, and everything will take care of itself."

The ‘crazy good’ moment that fostered Coach K’s approach to his final Duke team

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (November 7, 2021)

Michael Savarino settled onto a couch in his grandfather’s office June 2, in the midst of a history-making week at Duke University.

That same day, the Blue Devil basketball players and their parents learned during a Zoom call with Mike Krzyzewski that he planned to retire after the 2021-22 season.

That news struck Savarino in two ways – one as a Duke basketball player and another as Krzyzewski’s second-eldest grandchild.

“Wow,” Savarino said, looking back. “It’s really coming to an end. But he’s going to be on to better things. He’s going to be even more of a family guy than he already is.”

But the 74-year-old coach had one bit of family business to add to his plan.

In his office, on the sixth floor of the Schwartz-Butters Athletic Center, Krzyzewski settled into a chair facing his grandson on the couch. Savarino enrolled at Duke in 2019, spending his first two seasons on the Duke roster as a walk-on while becoming more and more of a leader to his teammates

“He’s earned his stuff,” Krzyzewski told the News & Observer in an exclusive interview. “None of those guys think of him being my grandson.”

Krzyzewski and his assistant coaches noticed Savarino’s hard work and the respect he’s gained among his teammates, just as they have with other walk-ons who’ve routinely been put on scholarships over the years

“Michael, you’ve worked your fanny off man. You’ve been terrific,” Krzyzewski told Savarino. “Going into next year, we’re going to need your maturity and your leadership and how you interact with the team.”

Retelling the story, two months later, Krzyzewski stopped in the middle to say, “I get chills thinking about it.”

Now, back to June 2, when Krzyzewski told Savarino, “I want you to know. I want to put you on scholarship this year.”

This isn’t about a player earning a scholarship from an expensive private school and thus relieving a crushing financial burden from his family. Savarino’s mother, Debbie, is Krzyzewski’s oldest child. She graduated from Duke and has worked in the basketball office since 2002, currently as an assistant athletics director for special projects and director of the Legacy Fund.

Instead, it’s about a lifelong dream coming true.

Michael Savarino began sobbing as he absorbed the news.

“I just broke down crying,” he said. “I probably cried for 10 minutes. It was one of the best days of my life. One, it’s a dream to come here. But to play on scholarship is a whole new level. I can’t describe it at all.”

Krzyzewski went to his grandson and hugged him. A thought entered his mind about the entire team for this season, the final one of his career before retirement.

“I knew at that moment what I wanted this year to be,” Krzyzewski said. “I want every kid on my team to feel that way.”

Not focusing on how to get better for the NBA, he said, not focusing on any individual honors, just totally bought into this Duke team and its season and accomplishing as much success as possible and enjoying it together in Krzyzewski’s final year.

To have that clarity while sharing in his grandson’s joy meant everything to Krzyzewski.

“Imagine having that moment with your grandson?” he said. “It was beautiful. Not good. Crazy good. So damn good. Those are like the real special, really special, moments. For me to share that with him.”

Coach K's plan for his life after coaching has been decades in the making

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (November 7, 2021)

DURHAM -- Mike Krzyzewski spent the first part of a Tuesday last month talking Duke basketball with reporters at the ACC's Tip Off event in an uptown Charlotte hotel.

The main topic of the day was his impending retirement and how he's preparing his 42nd and final Blue Devils team for the new season.

That afternoon, he headed back to Durham and, a little after 4 p.m., sauntered into Durham Academy's Moylan Field to meet up with his wife, Mickie, and other family members.

Game planning and practice review took a back seat as he focused on Emmie Savarino, his 17-year-old granddaughter who was playing in the final home game of her Durham Academy field hockey career.

With that, he transformed from Hall of Fame coach to, as his 10 grandchildren refer to him, Poppy.

"The grandparent thing is part of it," Krzyzewski said, during an exclusive interview with the News & Observer, about his decision to retire from coaching.

By next spring, Krzyzewski will make the full transition out of coaching when Jon Scheyer takes over the Duke program, allowing a then-75-year-old Krzyzewski to stop devoting countless hours to the game as he has over the last 42 years while turning Duke into one of the nation's elite basketball programs.

"He was at tons of my basketball games when I was a kid," said Jamie Spatola, Krzyzewski's youngest daughter and the one of his three children who took up the sport that has made his name famous. "He's always done that."

But now there will be more time for it, which Krzyzewski is ready to embrace while at the same time promising not to overdo it and funnel his competitive fire through them.

"Well, I won't be a helicopter grandparent, getting on the coach's ass," Krzyzewski said during an exclusive interview with the News & Observer. "But just to show interest."

That goes for no matter what extracurricular activity his grandchildren pick, be it Emmie's field hockey or 11-year-old John David Spatola's ninja warrior competitions or, yes, the basketball that 12-year-old Rem Frasher already plays so well.

"But also if they would be involved in theater or whatever," Krzyzewski said. "You want to show an interest. Not just show an interest, you are. I am interested in them. We are lucky to have 10 grandkids."

The Krzyzewskis keep up even when they can't physically be present. Mickie honed her IT skills finding live streams allowing her and her husband to watch from home.

So even when Emmie's sister, Carly, plays a volleyball match for Saint Mary's School in Raleigh, her grandparents are watching.

"Sometimes this tech work is a tedious process but they do it," said Debbie Savarino, Carly and Emmie's mother and the oldest Krzyzewski daughter. "Two 75-year-olds figuring out the tech stuff to watch their grands. The best."

THE LONG ROAD TO RETIREMENT

In many ways over the decades as Krzyzewski's family grew in Durham, he and Mickie have prepared themselves for the time that will arrive next spring, when it's time to step away from coaching.

Their West Cornwallis Road home, just across the Orange County line, abuts Duke Forest. They have a pool, basketball court and bocce ball court.

Lindy Frasher, his middle daughter, lives less than a mile away with her husband, Steve, and their three children. Peter and Debbie Savarino and their family live around 4 miles away. Jamie Spatola, her husband Chris and their three children are 6 miles away.

None live more than 15 minutes away from their parent's home, a fact that Krzyzewski treasures.

"All 10 of my grandchildren are here, in the area," Krzyzewski said. "They come over to swim all the time. So that's been a cool thing."

He paused for a second, realizing how normal it's become for families to spread and scatter all over the country and thus appreciating his situation even more.

"Really? In this day and age?" Krzyzewski said. "That doesn't happen."

He and Mickie have their favorite vacation spots, like Las Vegas where they escaped last April between the end of the basketball season and his retirement plan announcement. Or heading to Napa Valley, California, where they headline an annual V Foundation for Cancer Research fundraiser.

He'll take time to enjoy more of those trips, which he could only sample while coaching Division I basketball at Army West Point and Duke continuously since 1975.

STAYING PUT ON CAMPUS

That said, he will have plenty to do at Duke after his coaching days end. He's under contract to work as an ambassador for the school, a position in which Duke president Vince Price said Krzyzewski will be "an advisor and counselor to me and to my colleagues across campus and beyond."

"The thing about retiring," Krzyzewski said, "we are involved with so many things. I'm going to stay in this office. We're on the sixth floor. We have this (Duke basketball) Legacy Fund that we're running. I'll be involved, just like I am now, in so many aspects of the university. Probably a little bit more, although we are pretty involved."

An adjunct professor at Duke's Fuqua School of Business for the last two decades, he'll continue to work with students there in addition to speaking to students around the campus in other disciplines.

"We are going to be a part of Duke's continuing journey, like President Price said, for as long as we are around," Krzyzewski said.

For years he's given speeches around the country through the Washington Speakers Bureau, where his booking fees are more than \$70,000.

Out of the spotlight, he makes calls or prepares hand-written notes to people fighting cancer or other life-threatening diseases, usually complete strangers.

He'll continue to host his SiriusXM radio show, which airs weekly during the fall and winter. It's called Basketball and Beyond with Coach K and, perhaps, it will involve more of the beyond topics starting next year.

"In the future, they've talked about maybe doing something different," Krzyzewski said. "I've really enjoyed that show. I've gotten to meet so many people. And people want to be on. So that's good."

HELPING SHAPE COLLEGE BASKETBALL, NCAA

But basketball, the sport that took him from his inner-city Chicago neighborhood to West Point for what he calls the education that changed his life to now being among the most accomplished, famous and wealthy people in his profession, will still be part of his life in one way or another.

Coach K's plan for his life after coaching has been decades in the making (cont.)

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (November 7, 2021)

"I'll probably get involved in some way with basketball," he said, "but maybe at the NBA level, if I could, with consulting or something. You never know."

Jamie Spatola has one particular task for her dad to tackle.

"Part of me wants him to help figure out college basketball," Spatola said. "In some ways, it feels like it would take someone with that universal authority to be able to have an impact."

Krzyzewski doesn't hide his frustration with how the NCAA manages basketball. He's often said the sport needs a czar while quickly saying he doesn't want the job.

"People have been saying I've been vying to run the NCAA," he said. "No way. No way. I've tried to do it behind the scenes for 40 years. For 40 years."

College football runs its own playoff system separate from the NCAA. That leaves March Madness, the men's and women's basketball tournaments, as the main source of income for the organization.

This month, a virtual constitutional convention will take place aimed at massively overhauling the NCAA's structure. The NCAA Board of Governors will consider proposals from the constitutional committee in December and voting on a new structure could take place in January.

Krzyzewski's problem is with all these meetings, where changes and improvements are discussed behind closed doors and too often no progress is made. That's allowed a system to perpetuate that, at its best, hasn't always been fair to all people and, at its worst, has been more sinister, Krzyzewski said.

"Always some nameless committee where you can say anything you want and you are not held accountable," Krzyzewski said. "There are different agendas in that meeting and I don't want to get into it. But all I know is our sport is primarily black. A lot of stoppages along the years have been because of that. I believe that. And by the way, a lot of African American coaches believe that."

Because Krzyzewski said such things while coaching Duke, the natural conclusion many drew is he was doing it to somehow help the Blue Devils win more games.

Like last December, before the COVID-19 vaccines were available and cases and deaths were spiking, when Krzyzewski raised the idea of pausing the season for a few weeks until vaccines could be administered. Alabama coach Nate Oats suggested it was only because Duke had already lost home games to Michigan State and Illinois.

"Do you think if Coach K hadn't lost the two non-conference games at home he'd still be saying that?" Oats said.

Oats later apologized. Still, maybe when Krzyzewski is done coaching, accusations of him being self-serving might disappear.

But it shouldn't matter, because as his family and others closest to him say, it has nothing to do with wins and losses.

"This is real," Jamie Spatola said. "Whatever you think of the value of sport in society – perhaps it shouldn't hold the esteem that it does – it sure is a place to teach young people and to remind ourselves of certain fundamental values of how to treat people and work together. He means that. He's not just trying to win games."

Of course, he has won games – 1,170 of them, more than anyone who's ever coached college basketball.

Basketball will always be a part of what he's doing.

"My aunts and mom have literally grown up in basketball, just like me," said Michael Savarino, Krzyzewski's second-oldest grandson who is in his third season playing for his grandfather with the Blue Devils. "Obviously, completely different childhoods but their childhoods being completely surrounded by basketball. You eat, sleep and breathe it because of coach."

COACH K'S TREASURED FAMILY TIME

But even while building a coaching career in basketball with few, if any peers, Krzyzewski has always been close to his family – maybe closer than they realized.

"He doesn't have a ton of one-on-one time with each of my children and that's one thing I hope for more in retirement," Jamie Spatola said. "But when we are together, he does observe them individually. I'll find myself being 'Oh, my dad really doesn't know my kids well.' But he will pull me to the side and say something so poignant about one of my kids I'll be like, 'Oh my gosh how does he know that?' I know that's his gift. He sees people. He sees people's gifts. He sees people's insecurities, people's pain. And he often knows what to do and he's always willing to take the time to do it."

Tuesday night, when Duke opens the season with Kentucky in New York City, Krzyzewski will be back in basketball mode. From now until the end of the season, it will be all about leading this Duke team to its goal of winning championships.

Then, the basketball coaching part of Krzyzewski's life will be done.

"It's good," Krzyzewski said. "I'm happy. I hope you can sense I'm happy. Really looking forward to this year but I'm also looking forward to the future. My cup will runneth over by the end of this year with maybe college basketball. And I've had a damn big cup and I'm grateful for it, really. You are lucky."

A dog named Blue: Coach K's final season will look different without his companion

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (November 7, 2021)

DURHAM -- After Duke's plane returns to RDU from New York in the wee hours of Wednesday morning, Mike and Mickie Krzyzewski will head back home in the dark, and when they turn up the circular driveway of their house, that face won't be there waiting.

The dining room window next to the front door will be empty. The familiar yellow face, ecstatic at the coach's return, won't be there for the first time in more than a decade.

Krzyzewski will go through his final season as Duke's head coach without his constant companion for the last 12 1/2 years, a yellow Labrador named Blue who watched more film with the coach than any of his assistant coaches.

Took more walks than any of them, too.

"He was my guy," Krzyzewski told the News & Observer. "When I came home, the walks, I work outside a lot, watching tape – he's there. I miss him."

Blue died in Krzyzewski's arms this summer, a week after being diagnosed with lung cancer. It's a measure of Krzyzewski's grief that he brought it up, unprompted, during an August media briefing. He had sporadically mentioned Blue over the years – "I don't have a doghouse. I have a dog. His name is Blue," Krzyzewski said in 2013 – but never like that. It was an unburdening, a rare moment of uncontainable private grief displayed publicly for a perpetual companion.

"Always. And a good one," Krzyzewski said later. "And also, not just as a guy, but also at my age you don't just have somebody new to fool around with. He was good. A great dog with the kids. People. He was just a good guy. Just a real good guy."

Anyone with a dog – any pet, really – has their own relationship with it, but there's something different with coaches who have dogs: A working companion during all the late hours, a walking partner during constitutionals to blow off steam or clear one's head, an unfailingly friendly face after the hardest losses, or when even when the die-hardest fans and wealthiest boosters have lost faith.

If you need a friend in coaching (or many other cutthroat pursuits), get a dog, the saying goes.

Krzyzewski has had three.

The first two – a black Lab named Defense and a chocolate Lab named Cameron – were family dogs, companions for his daughters as much as a coach who didn't have dogs growing up and had to learn to love them.

"Defense was my dad's first pet," Krzyzewski's daughter Jamie Spatola told the N&O's Steve Wiseman, a phrasing that could potentially apply to basketball as well.

Blue, who was born just before Krzyzewski won his fourth national title in 2010, was different. The girls were long out of the house. When Krzyzewski got home from work or the road, Blue was always there, waiting impatiently for his walk.

"As soon as I came in," Krzyzewski said. "Even though I'm talking to Mickie, he was like, 'Let's go. Let's go.'"

When you've been somewhere as long as Krzyzewski has been at Duke, there are fundamentals that become constants, a routine that becomes a comfort as much as it is a means to an end. That's changing for Krzyzewski now. He's already off the recruiting trail, almost but not quite fully disengaged from that process. While fully invested in the Xs and Os of this Duke season, his interactions with successor Jon Scheyer will necessarily increase as part of the transition.

These are small but jarring changes for someone as set in their (successful) ways as Krzyzewski has been. And yet none of them will be as personally disruptive as this final season spent without the furry, floppy companion who was by Krzyzewski's side when no one was watching.

Blue's role will not be filled during this season. "We haven't recruited anyone to replace him," Krzyzewski joked in August, because Mickie wants to travel with the team during this farewell season and it wouldn't be fair to a new dog to spend that much time alone.

Selecting a replacement for the irreplaceable Blue will be one of Krzyzewski's first and more important post-retirement tasks. Even if he was unsure, his family may insist upon it.

"That man needs, he needs a dog," Spatola said. "He needs a dog."

'Best version': Paolo Banchemo reps Seattle in his journey as Duke's next star

By Max Rego, Duke Chronicle (November 4, 2021)

Six-foot-10, 250 pounds. A locomotive in transition and a skillset that NBA general managers crave. An understated, yet confident demeanor. A desire to take the torch of his city's basketball lore and run with it. This is what defines Paolo Banchemo.

As the No. 4 recruit and a candidate for the top pick in next year's draft, Banchemo will be the second-most followed storyline in Blue Devil land this season—I think you can guess the first. But without the breathtaking highlight reels or stunning reclassification a la Zion Williamson or Marvin Bagley Jr., it almost seems like Banchemo is flying under the radar entering the season, as ridiculous as that sounds. So let's pull back the curtain on the preseason second-team All-American, starting with an atypical recruitment.

'Couldn't decide'

Back in August of last year, when Duke got the golden ticket in the form of Banchemo's commitment, recruiting analysts were, quite frankly, shocked that the Seattle native turned down his home-state school of Washington, where the Banchemo name holds some considerable weight.

His dad, Mario Banchemo, was a tight end for the Husky football team, while his mom, Rhonda Smith-Banchemo, scored 2,948 points and snagged 803 rebounds en route to becoming the first Washington player to enter the WNBA. With that type of legacy at a place so close to home, no one would have blamed the 6-foot-10 forward for keeping his talents in Seattle. But once Duke, Kentucky and Tennessee came calling, the decision ended up coming down to the wire.

"I'm not gonna lie, for a minute, it was like a four-way tie, like I couldn't decide where I wanted to go for a long time," Banchemo told Duke men's basketball alum Andre Dawkins of the Field of 68 podcast network.

As the summer before Banchemo's junior year became crunch time for his schools of interest, the continued push from head coach Mike Krzyzewski, associate head coach Jon Scheyer and the rest of the Duke recruiting team eventually paid off.

"Towards the end of July, they really started to separate themselves from all the other schools, and I kinda had my mind made up," Banchemo told Rivals.com on the timeline that led up to his late summer decision. "And my parents, they were happy with my decision, and they told me just to wait, just two weeks to think about it some more and whatnot. I waited, thought about it, and my mind didn't change, so I committed."

While the latter stages of the process were even more complicated thanks to the pandemic forcing visits to become virtual, Banchemo was ready to announce before his senior season even got started, committing to the Blue Devils on Aug. 20.

Now he's here, ready to try his hand at leading Duke back to the Final Four and giving Krzyzewski a shot at one last title. Despite that daunting task, Banchemo is well-equipped to handle everything that comes with this unique and expectation-laden journey.

'Best version'

When Jason Kerr, a 29-year veteran of the Seattle high school basketball coaching scene, first met Banchemo, the latter had not even started middle school yet. But even then, when it came to the basketball court, the young gun showed that he was special.

"I was working out one of my former players rehabbing from the knee injury, and Paolo was in the fifth grade, and so his dad just kind of hit me up and said, 'Hey, can [Paolo] jump in the workouts?' And I said, 'Sure.' So he came through a series of workouts, and even all the way back to then, didn't behave, or play to what his age was, he was able to pick up on techniques and instructions and things at a pretty high level," Kerr told The Chronicle.

Kerr, now the head basketball coach at O'Dea High School since 2015, coached Banchemo there for the last four years, with the two securing the 3A state championship in 2019. Throughout that time, Banchemo, whose fairly laid-back nature masks his competitive drive, showed his coach how much the game truly meant to him.

"Winning takes priority over everything," Kerr said of Banchemo's internal motivation. "It's what makes him a team first guy, it's what makes him a really good leader. It's what makes him the first one at the gym and the last one to leave. He's driven to be successful, and whatever it is, even if it's, 'I'm trying to be a good friend to my boy over here.' He's gonna be the best version of that because it's just kind of what motivates him."

Some of the traits that define his basketball makeup, particularly the ability to get back up off the mat, he learned from his time as O'Dea's backup quarterback his freshman year. On 36 attempts, Banchemo threw for 191 yards and three touchdowns and was part of an Irish club that captured the state title.

Despite the limited stats, that year on the high school gridiron still went a long way for the freshman.

"I learned a lot of things. Football was my favorite sport growing up, for a long time, and I would just say toughness, really," Banchemo said during the team's September media day on what he learned from his first love. "Basketball, no one can actually come out here and hit you."

After a growth spurt, though, it became all hoops, and the accolades soon started to roll in. The Washington native put up 20.4 points, 10.7 rebounds and 4.0 assists per contest across his sophomore and junior campaigns, landing him on the radar of every top program in the country and earning him recognition as the Gatorade National Junior of the Year in 2020.

'Carry on that legacy'

Committing to Duke meant committing to moving all the way across the country. O'Dea, a Catholic all-boys school in Seattle's First Hill neighborhood with an enrollment of just 507 students and an insulated environment compared to the grueling nature and bright lights of big-time college basketball, has produced just three pro basketball players. But the five-star was not only ready for the adjustment, he's actually looking to thrust O'Dea, and Seattle, further into the spotlight, despite being tucked in the northwest corner of the country.

"Seattle's a [basketball] hotbed," Banchemo said. "Me, Nolan Hickman, Jaden McDaniels, Kevin Porter... we're like the newer generation. But as you know, there's Jamal Crawford, Nate Robinson, so many other pros that have already played. So we just trying to carry on that legacy, and best believe there's a lot of players behind us too."

In heartbreaking fashion, Seattle lost its NBA franchise when the Supersonics left for Oklahoma City in the summer of 2008, but hoops is still a high priority in the Emerald City. Recent standouts include Porter of the Houston Rockets, Denver Nuggets' ascending star Michael Porter Jr. and former Gonzaga sharpshooter and current Washington Wizard Corey Kispert, not to mention retired NBA veterans such as Crawford—the three-time Sixth Man of the Year—dunk-contest legend Robinson, Brandon Roy and Aaron Brooks.

Despite this admirable list, if you ask a casual fan which cities produce the most NBA talent, they might bring up New York, Chicago or Philadelphia. Those are all suitable choices, but Seattle also deserves some love.

"For those of us up here, some of us would maybe say out loud that, 'Hey, we deserve more credit,' but I think those that are a little more tightly associated to it already know what we're doing, and we're just gonna keep doing it," Kerr said.

'Best version': Paolo Banchemo reps Seattle in his journey as Duke's next star (cont.)

By Max Rego, Duke Chronicle (November 4, 2021)

Those aforementioned Seattle natives, active and retired, have all accomplished a great deal in the sport, but Banchemo, well, he has a chance to one day outshine them all. Deemed a "mismatch nightmare" by Sam Vecenie of The Athletic, and someone with "an ability to push in the open court"—a trait that very few 6-foot-10, 250-pound players have—by Mike Schmitz of ESPN, the ceiling for the 18-year-old is apparently limitless.

"I'm versatile. There's nothing I can't do, is what I would say," Banchemo said when asked about his skillset.

Banchemo was aided in the journey toward that repertoire and the sterling accolades by his parents, with mother Rhonda in particular providing some tough love. A former coach herself, in addition to her past on the court, the matriarch of the family kept things in perspective for the budding superstar.

"She's always been the one to just be there to humble me," Banchemo said. "Like I said, never too high, never too low. If I ever had a good game, she would always give me stuff that I have to work on even though I had a good game. Just growing up, she still critiques me on a lot of stuff, so she's always gonna be there."

Now that Banchemo is here, though, don't expect him to stray too far from his roots. The camaraderie that has been bred in the Seattle basketball community is real, as former local stars often take the up-and-comers under their wing and show them the path.

"Down the road, he's going to be that older guy I already know that is gonna reach backwards and grab that next young talent and kind of get them up there," Kerr said.

When asked about who he models his game after, Banchemo typically mentions his appreciation of LeBron James, but he acknowledges that his skillset is not a facsimile of the future Hall-of-Famer. Carmelo Anthony, Ben Simmons and Anthony Davis are all players that the former five-star has picked traits from, showing that while he may put up similar statistics to a lot of previous potential top draft picks, he arrives at them in unique fashion.

That gives Krzyzewski, in one of his final strategic balancing acts, a plethora of options on how to deploy his greatest weapon.

"His versatility is tremendous, and we've had a lot of success in the past three decades or more of using a very versatile big in different parts of the court, and he can do that," Krzyzewski said at the team's media day. "He's smart, and he's easy to play with."

All the hours spent watching tape and all the ways that he is utilized on both ends notwithstanding, when push comes to shove, it's his ability to still have that kid-like passion that keeps basketball as enjoyable as when he started.

"I've been going to the gym every day since I was a young kid, so it's nothing new to me," Banchemo said. "I'm just out here at Duke, with a new great team and coaches, but at the end of the day, the work that gets put in every day is the stuff I've been doing since I was a young kid."

And if the clock starts ticking down toward zero, do not be surprised if Banchemo has the ball in his hands, tasked as the one to make the key play. After all, his mantra for high-stress situations, "kNOw pressure," is tattooed on his right forearm. The double-entendre signifies the need to understand the gravity of the situation, while simultaneously brushing off any negative feelings in the heat of the moment.

"Nah," Banchemo says with a smirk when asked about whether he tends to feel nerves. "I literally have it tattooed on me.... That's just kind of the mindset I have. It's never really pressure, it's all fun. It's basketball, I'm gonna go out there, I'm gonna be locked in, I'm gonna play as hard as I can to win, and usually when I do that, odds turn out in my favor."

With this crop of players, it is possible that Krzyzewski's career ends with one last title run in New Orleans. If that is the case, then you can bet all the money in the world that the O'Dea alum will be the conductor of the symphony, the catalyst of the chemical mixture, the producer of the motion picture.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is what defines Paolo Banchemo.

46 years of family: Coach K on and off the basketball court

By Sasha Richie, Duke Chronicle (November 4, 2021)

When Duke men's basketball head coach Mike Krzyzewski announced his forthcoming retirement in a press conference in early June, he said, "My family and I view today as a celebration."

It was a celebration of an illustrious career, one that has seen five NCAA championships, three Olympic gold medals as head coach of the United States men's basketball national team and 1,170 collegiate wins, the most of any head coach in college basketball history.

However, the day of Krzyzewski's retirement was also a celebration of a four-decade long tapestry woven with the threads of the entire Krzyzewski family. Duke men's basketball and the Krzyzewski name have become synonymous, and as Duke faithful everywhere reflect on 41 years of Coach K, it also becomes time for the Krzyzewskis to reflect on the program that they have been so intimately tied to.

"For us, there is no greater joy than being part of our players' respective endeavors through basketball, and more importantly, their lives off the court," Krzyzewski said at his retirement press conference. "Our family is eternally grateful to everyone who contributed to our career for the past 46 years. So, to the countless members of our extended family, thank you very much."

'Our career'

While the announcement of Krzyzewski's imminent retirement sent shockwaves through the basketball world, it was really the final step of a career that has prioritized family since the very beginning, even when their family was a small one of just two, Krzyzewski and his wife Carol "Mickie" Krzyzewski.

The two met when Krzyzewski was still a cadet at West Point, and, though they humorously recall that Mickie was Krzyzewski's third choice for their first date to a Chicago Bears game, they have been a team for 52 years now, having wedded in 1969. Three daughters and nine grandchildren later, it's still the two of them at the head of the table both in the family and in Duke men's basketball.

"It's always been, for the two of us, our career," Krzyzewski said, referencing him and Mickie, at the Blue Devils' media day in September. "When [then-athletic director] Tom Butters, God bless him, hired me, he mentioned to Mickie, 'I just want you to know, I'm not hiring your husband, I'm hiring your family,' and that was a really big-time thing to say to a 33, 34-year-old couple getting ready to take a real big jump into the ACC."

Krzyzewski joined Duke as head coach in 1980 with his wife and three young daughters in tow, a quintet he, according to his grandson Michael Savarino, lovingly refers to as "the starting five." However, though the Krzyzewskis had each other by their sides, braving a new environment was not all smooth sailing for the young family. Despite Krzyzewski having been head coach at West Point for five years, the Blue Devils were a whole new mountain to climb.

In an interview with The Chronicle from 2015, Mickie recalled how, after moving into their first house in Durham, she had picked a wallpaper for the bathrooms, but when installers came to put it up, they questioned her choice. At first, Mickie was surprised, thinking the men were criticizing her interior decorating taste, but then they explained and it turned out that the wallpaper she'd chosen was Carolina blue. In that moment, for the first time, she understood the gravitas of joining a program like Duke with such rich traditions and realized the long road they had ahead of them.

"To all of that, we were a little naive. I was not familiar with North Carolina, I hadn't ever really been here," Mickie said in that earlier interview. "We moved in and were just really kind of bright eyed about everything."

'Part of everything'

Beyond the history, simply adjusting to the intensity of the ACC while raising a family was a journey for them, but looking back, Krzyzewski says that, because of his family's unwavering support, that journey has, "been pretty easy, really."

While Krzyzewski credits his family's support, Mickie credits Krzyzewski and his proactive effort to bring the family into the program from the start and carrying on throughout his entire tenure at Duke.

"He let us be part of everything. When the girls were little and they were on a team trip, they were allowed to ride on the team bus. We still, to this day, go into the coach's locker room," Mickie said in the 2015 interview. "Our daughters and our grandkids, we see him as soon as possible after a game and no matter what, win or lose, he's got a hug and a kiss for each of the grandkids."

She believes that openness was key to not only surviving what could have been a difficult situation, but thriving in it.

"He allowed our family to be a part of his career...I credit him for being smart enough, secure enough and loving enough to let us in," Mickie said.

However, while an intentional effort, involving his family in his career as a coach was also a labor of love, as Krzyzewski got to share his passion with his daughters.

"Debbie [Savarino] was young, really young, and when they used to have Super Eight projectors, I'd be home watching, and she would watch film with me, and at the end I'd do all those figures on the wall," he said at the Blue Devils' media day.

Years later, Krzyzewski is still proud that all his daughters know the game of basketball, and his oldest, Debbie Savarino, even serves as an assistant athletic director at Duke today. But it all stemmed from that early decision to, as Mickie called it, "open the door" between his career and his family, and that decision has paved the way for a lifelong relationship between the Krzyzewski family and the program.

'I just break down crying'

Given how profoundly family has influenced Krzyzewski's career, it's fitting that he is sharing his final season with his grandson Michael.

"I was blessed to be able to grow up around the program, and I'm blessed to be in it," Michael said, reflecting on his time with Duke men's basketball since joining the team as a walk-on in 2019. "I feel like I know [Krzyzewski] so much better, as a coach and as a grandfather, just from being around him every single day. Like, I literally see him everyday. So having little interactions like that is something I'm incredibly, incredibly grateful for, and I wouldn't have it if I didn't come here."

It wasn't always a given that Michael would join his grandfather at Duke despite demonstrating basketball prowess from a young age, but when it came time to decide, the decision was obvious.

"I visited a ton of schools. But everything I was looking for was right in my backyard, like everything I wanted in a school," Michael said.

Now, he's glad he made that decision, as the experience of sharing three years with his grandfather, including Krzyzewski's final season, has been "bittersweet," and he points to the day before Krzyzewski announced his retirement as being "one of the best days of [his] life," as it was a turning point in their relationship.

Michael says that on that day, Krzyzewski called him into his office and told him two things: that he was going to announce his retirement the next day and that he was putting Michael on scholarship.

"He just told me how important I was to the team and the role, the specific role I've been playing and how good of a job I've been doing and how he wanted me to elevate that role even more, and how I need to be a little more vocal, I need to be a leader," Michael recalled. Then Krzyzewski told him he was putting him on scholarship, and "I just break down crying. I probably cried for about 10 minutes," Michael said.

46 years of family: Coach K on and off the basketball court (cont.)

By Sasha Richie, Duke Chronicle (November 4, 2021)

Still, despite the bond they've formed over three years with the Blue Devils together, Michael joked, "I'm definitely not his grandson when we walk into the gym, or when we're on Duke's campus at all."

"When we walk in the gym, he's 'Coach.' When we walk out...he's completely different. And that just shows how he can turn it on and off. And not many people can do that," he said.

'No Duke hanging in the house'

It's that line that Krzyzewski has been able to draw between family and basketball that has made the family so strong. Even as the Krzyzewski family has grown in and with Duke men's basketball, family has always come first.

"The things that we would hang in our house or on our fridge was stuff that the girls had accomplished. So there was no Duke hanging in the house. We tried to make sure that they knew that they came first to us and that they were more important to us," Mickie said of drawing that line from the moment they joined the Blue Devils and had to decorate their new home in Durham. To this day, Michael says there is "never, ever" basketball at the family dinner table.

Still, even as he built a home filled with "lace and pink" for his daughters instead of Duke blue, Krzyzewski's family has guided his career at every step.

In an interview for Time Magazine in 2001, Krzyzewski said, "Over the years, the girls have exposed me to an environment where they share their feelings, and I've tried to teach my players to do the same thing. I tell them it's not guys doing girl things; it's being a real person—to hug, to cry, to laugh, to share. If you create a culture where that's allowed, all of a sudden, you have some depth," speaking on the influence his daughters and family have had on his coaching.

That family legacy continues. Aptly named "The Brotherhood," Duke men's basketball is head-to-toe a family affair. Aside from the Krzyzewski family's involvement at every level of the organization, Krzyzewski has made sure that family is a priority for not only himself, but for his players and staff.

In his interview with Time Magazine, Krzyzewski said he looks for how recruits treat their parents as a way to discern character, and he makes sure that players know they are not just joining a team but joining a family.

In his book "Leading with the Heart," Krzyzewski writes, "As a basketball coach, I have no problem telling a team, 'I love you guys,'" a lesson he says he learned from his own family growing up.

Now, with just one more season of Krzyzewski-led basketball, all of the Duke community can reflect on those lessons too, lessons borne out of Krzyzewski's intense and intentional love for his family.

Even as the Blue Devils say goodbye to arguably the greatest college basketball coach ever, they will always carry the legacy of the Krzyzewskis, every single one of them.

The many ways to watch Duke before Coach K retires

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (October 27, 2021)

DURHAM - So you want to see Duke play basketball at Cameron Indoor Stadium this season, the final one that Mike Krzyzewski will be the Blue Devils coach?

The first chance is Saturday, when the Blue Devils play an exhibition game against Winston-Salem State at 1:30 p.m. at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

It's Duke's only exhibition game this season and, while it doesn't count in the standings, it does provide the full Cameron Indoor experience for an actual game at a fraction of the cost.

Tickets on secondary market sellers like VividSeats.com begin at \$134 for the Winston-Salem State game while Stubhub.com has them for as low as \$90.

Of note, VividSeats.com is a Duke partner for its secondary market ticketing while StubHub.com is one of several independent secondary market sites.

Better deals remain available to watch Duke's first regular-season game, Nov. 9 at New York's Madison Square Garden. Tickets to watch a doubleheader that starts with Michigan State vs. Kansas at 7 p.m. and concludes with Duke vs. Kentucky begin at \$72 on Vivid and \$81 on StubHub.

But, if the goal is to see a game at Duke's famed, but small, home arena, expect to pay much, much more.

For home games against Syracuse (Jan. 22), Virginia (Feb. 7) and Florida State (Feb. 19), tickets on the secondary market are already more than \$1,100.

The most expensive ticket of the season will no doubt be the final home game of Krzyzewski's Duke 42-year career when the Blue Devils play rival North Carolina in the regular-season finale March 5. A single ticket for that game is \$5,000 on the secondary market, which is actually cheaper than earlier this month when it was close to \$6,000.

In August, a Duke basketball experience package including four tickets to the UNC at Duke game plus hotel accommodations fetched \$1 million at a charity auction benefiting the Jimmy V Foundation for Cancer Research.

If you are still reading this, perhaps you aren't deterred just yet. In that case, here are the options to consider:

JOIN THE IRON DUKES

Membership in Duke's athletics booster club, the Iron Dukes, provides priority access to any tickets that become available in the 9,314-seat Cameron Indoor Stadium.

The smallest price point to join is \$100. But the more you give, the higher your priority is.

The deadline to join to get access to season tickets was July 22. Just to show what we're talking about here, the smallest membership level that would get you access to two season tickets is \$8,000 for newer members or \$7,000 for members who joined prior to the 2016-17 season.

For the right to buy four season tickets, the membership level starts at \$20,000.

ABSOLUTELY JOIN DUKE'S WAIT LIST

Even though the deadline is passed to join and buy season tickets, a new membership will still help get access to single-game tickets through Duke's new wait-list system.

The school announced the wait list plan on Sept. 29. Again, Iron Duke members get first priority to these tickets but if any get through that process, they will be available on a first-come, first-served basis for the general public.

Unlike secondary market websites, these tickets will be at face value, ranging from \$75 for the Winston-Salem State exhibition game to \$335 for the UNC game on March 6. Prices will vary depending upon the location of the seats, which range from standing room only to seats that season-ticket holders have made available.

Fans selected to purchase tickets will be notified anywhere from a month prior to the game to as late as game day.

CONDUCT THE PEP BAND. SERIOUSLY.

There is another (legal) way in without purchasing a ticket. Duke auctions off the opportunity to be a guest conductor for the Duke pep band during home games.

The winning bidder can bring up to three guests, meaning four people get to watch the game. The winning bid is selected three weeks prior to the game so you need to plan ahead for this one.

For example, the auction for the Nov. 12 home opener vs. Army West Point ended on Oct. 22. The next game currently available for bid is the Nov. 19 game with Lafayette. Bidding starts at \$1,500 and the auction runs through Friday, Oct. 29, at 7 p.m.

As a note, proceeds from the auctions go to support the band program, not the athletics department.

The bidding for most ACC games start at \$2,500 but there are two notable exceptions. The Virginia game on Feb. 7 starts at \$3,500.

The UNC game? It starts at \$25,000.

SLIGHT DROP ON SECONDARY MARKET

OK, so if going to Cameron with a ticket purchased in advance is what you need, the secondary market is where it's at.

VividSeats.com is Duke's official partner for ticket resales. But other sites, such as StubHub, also offer tickets.

Sticker shock is real, although prices have dropped somewhat over the last week.

As of Oct. 27, the least expensive ticket for the UNC game is \$5,000 on StubHub and on \$5,331 on VividSeats.com. That's actually a discount compared to Oct. 18, when the get-in price was \$5,990 on StubHub and \$6,329 on Vivid.

Nonconference games are, by comparison, remain far cheaper. Tickets to the Nov. 16 Gardner-Webb game start at \$204 (down from \$300 on Oct. 18) on Vivid and \$210 (down from \$325) on StubHub.

Duke's first home ACC game, Dec. 22 against Virginia Tech, starts at \$496 (down from \$591 on Oct. 18) on Vivid and \$550 (down from \$650) on StubHub.

Minutes projection 1.0: Without A.J. Griffin Duke will lean on short rotation

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (October 21, 2021)

Countdown to Craziness was, if anything, an appetizer. Something to whet our appetites, you know? But it also gave us some insight into what this year's Duke team actually looks like on the floor.

Spoiler alert: The Blue Devils are gonna be better than last season. Much, much better.

But even on a team as talented as this one, there are only so many minutes to go around. And given Mike Krzyzewski's longtime preference for shorter rotations – it would be shocking to see Duke go more than nine-deep this season – there are inevitably guys going to get squeezed. Here's Version 1.0 of how of how Coach K's final rotation may shake out, with projected starters in italics:

1. Jeremy Roach, Jaylen Blakes
2. Trevor Keels, Michael Savarino
3. Wendell Moore Jr., Joey Baker
4. Paolo Banchemo, Bates Jones
5. Mark Williams, Theo John

As you will note, there's a conspicuous absence on that list: five-star wing A.J. Griffin. Griffin, who missed most of the last 18 months with knee and ankle injuries, recently suffered a new knee injury during practice, sending him back to the sidelines. Luckily, testing revealed no structural damage to Griffin's knee, but he is still expected to be out about a month. And given his history, it would be surprising if Duke didn't treat his return with an abundance of caution. Griffin almost certainly will not play in the team's season-opener against Kentucky in Madison Square Garden, and therefore he is not included in these projections. I'll update them once he returns – hopefully before Duke's trip to Las Vegas to face Gonzaga the day after Thanksgiving.

Something else worth pointing out: That traditional positional breakdown doesn't accurately represent Duke's depth chart. Given the positional flexibility of so many different Blue Devils, we're better off instead slotting players into one of three responsibility-based buckets:

Ballhandlers/combo guards: Roach, Keels, Blakes

Guards/wings: Moore, Baker, Griffin*

Post players: Banchemo, Williams, John

You're reading that correctly: nine rotation players, and only eight until Griffin comes back. Probably worth diving a little deeper, no?

Ballhandler/combo guards

Maybe I shouldn't have been, but I was struck at Countdown to Craziness how much primary handling Keels did. In both games, meaning with mixed squads and when he ran with Duke's expected starters, more often than not Keels was the one initiating the offense, the one bringing the ball up the floor. I asked Roach about that after the game, how he and Keels will split point guard duties playing simultaneously: "Me and Trev have been playing with each other for I don't even know how long – at least six, seven years – so we know each other's game like that. If he's hot, he's bringing the ball up. If I'm hot, I'm bringing the ball up. We just find each other."

Fair enough. But realistically, Duke is going to need at least one of these guys on the floor all the time. While Griffin's out, I expect Roach and Keels to be two of the larger beneficiaries of his absence in terms of playing time; Roach averaged 27.4 minutes per game last season, but I could even see both of them approaching the 30-minute threshold without Griffin. Griffin coming back may drop that total down to 25 per person, but still, both former Paul VI guards are going to be staples of Coach K's final rotation. If Friday was any indication of what it'll look like when both are on the floor, Keels should handle more primary duties, with Roach looking like a secondary handler and more off-ball shooting threat.

There's also four-star guard Jaylen Blakes, who impressed me Friday with his defensive intensity and aggressive shot-hunting. The former, I expected. The latter, not so much. I still don't expect Blakes to play a ton of minutes – likely 8-10 a game with Griffin out, and maybe only five or so nightly once he's back – but he's not someone who's going to cost Duke games in his limited time. And if he ends up making a few shots in those backup minutes, then so be it.

Guards/wings

This is the unit that takes the largest hit without Griffin, clearly. When fully healthy, expect Griffin to compete to start – one of he, Roach, or Keels will have to come off the bench, though – and play about 25 minutes a contest. At 6-foot-6 and 222 pounds, with a wingspan longer than 7-feet, Griffin has the ideal size for a wing at both the college and pro level. Plus, between his combination of defense, rebounding and shooting, he's a guy who can do a little bit of everything. Duke will absolutely miss him in the interim. But injuries happen, and in the meantime, Duke's other two wings will both have to step up.

That starts with Moore, who I wouldn't be surprised to see play the most minutes on the team this year. That isn't because he's necessarily the best player, although he's one of them, but because of his versatility; reasonably, Duke can play him anywhere except center and get by. You'd like not to have him act as your primary ballhandler, but it's not out of the question. Moore even said earlier this preseason that the team has experimented some with him running the point. Rather, Moore is someone who can match up with opposing guards and wings, and even thinner power forwards in small-ball lineups. Offensively, the name of the game is versatility. He isn't the fastest or quickest or the best shooter, but he's a good enough passer, scorer and off-ball mover to fit wherever Krzyzewski needs him. Look for him to play around 30 minutes a night, if not more.

There's also Baker, who should see the biggest minutes bump of anyone in Griffin's absence. With Griffin, I struggle to see Baker expanding upon his 11.5 minutes a game last season. But without him? That number easily grows to the 18-20-minute mark. The thing with Baker is, he's almost entirely an off-ball offensive threat, someone capable of shooting off the catch or ripping inside following a shot fake. Defensively, he's got the length and willingness to sacrifice his body to slide around the perimeter. Much of Baker's on-court value is tied to his shot-making, though, so as his percentages ebb and flow, so too will his playing time.

Post players

In case you're sensing a pattern, yes, Duke's positional groups all sort of break down the same way: two starters (or starting-caliber players), plus one primary backup. But in the case of Duke's bigs, really, all three contributors – Banchemo, Williams, and John – are worthy of starting. That's part of the reason why coach-in-waiting Jon Scheyer told me this summer that Duke expects to have the best frontcourt in the nation. John is that good, and it was evident during Countdown to Craziness. Several times, he posted up the 7-foot Williams with complete comfort and control. John's savvy and strength – he set a new program record for bench press reps, breaking Sheldon Williams' longstanding mark – allows him to gain position inside, yet he still has the patience and touch to carefully execute his moves. And, again, he did all this against Williams, a projected first-round pick in next year's NBA Draft. I wasn't sure going into Friday how much John would play this season, just given the hype around Williams and Banchemo, but it'll be hard to keep the grad transfer off the floor. It's not difficult to imagine him playing 25 or so minutes a night, which matches up well with the 26.3 he played last season at Marquette.

If he were just about anywhere else in the country, John is a likely starter. Just not at Duke, which features two legitimate All-ACC talents in Banchemo and Williams. The expectations for Banchemo and the hype surrounding him are colossal, but they're warranted; he's basically a 6-foot-10, 250-pound guard. Considering how much secondary ballhandling he'll be doing – and possibly even some primary handling from the forward spot – Banchemo will challenge Moore for the most minutes played. Yes, even as a freshman. That probably comes out to somewhere in the 30-32 minute range, regardless of whether Griffin is playing. Plus, given his own skill versatility, he can even play alongside the other two bigs in super-sized lineups; Krzyzewski said Friday that he's only briefly toyed with that lineup, but that he wouldn't rule it out in the future.

Then there's Williams, who Krzyzewski mentioned Friday can get tired defending ball screens. That's why having John behind him, especially for their defense, is so critical. But Williams is going to be a featured starter and offensive piece of this team, even if almost all his damage comes around the rim. Simply, there's little opponents can do to stop Williams on lob threats and when he goes straight up to the basket from underneath. Williams will surely play more than the 15.2 minutes per game he averaged last season, and more likely in his end-of-season range. Over Duke's final 14 games, Williams averaged 21.3 minutes per night; I'd expect him to play even more this year, and more in the 24-26 range. It would be more if John wasn't a capable backup, but with the Marquette transfer in the fold, Duke doesn't have to feel forced to over-exert its standout center.

Duke hopeful that A.J. Griffin's knee injury is only a minor setback

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (October 12, 2021)

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Wendell Moore Jr. still remembers the feeling.

Not the literal pain – although surely there's a lot of that when you break your hand – but more so the way being injured made him feel. As in, where it took him mentally. Moore was a freshman at the time, midway through his first season as a part-time Duke starter when it occurred... and yet even now, two seasons later, that sentiment has stuck with him.

"Anytime you get injured," Moore said Tuesday at ACC Tip Off, "it's going to be a spot that you really go into where you think you're alone."

The reason Moore's two-year-old injury is (sort of) relevant today? Because it's now the same plight facing Duke's latest basketball prodigy, five-star freshman wing A.J. Griffin. During an Oct. 8 Blue Devils practice, Griffin suffered a sprained knee. There is no official timetable for his return, but Mike Krzyzewski said Tuesday – in his first media appearance since Griffin's injury occurred – that the freshman would be out about a month.

Which, all things considered, could be much worse. There was apprehension on Friday that Griffin may have torn or broken something, fears which were (thankfully) put to rest after further testing. And considering Griffin's prior injury history, that was doubly reassuring; he already missed a large chunk of his junior season in high school with a different knee injury, as well as most of his senior year with a bad ankle. So, yeah, talk about relief when Duke learned Griffin avoided needing surgery. Phew.

"It's just a matter of rehab, and hopefully it will be weeks," Krzyzewski said. "He's off crutches and doing well, but still has a lot of therapy to go."

"Crutches" sounds scary, but that Griffin is already off them, less than a week after the initial injury occurred, represents progress. Shoot, the fact that his recovery timeline is being measured in weeks – not months – is as massive for the player as it is for the program. This is a projected lottery pick we're talking about, you know? Six-foot-six, 220-pound wings who can shoot, defend and rebound don't exactly grow on trees. Griffin is that good, that important. To win a national championship in Krzyzewski's final season, the Blue Devils will almost certainly need Griffin's help.

Which they'll get... just not until he's healthy.

In the meantime, however, Duke has to adjust, and in more ways than one. It, of course, will need someone – more likely multiple someones – to step up and fill the void Griffin leaves behind. "I mean, it's on all of us. It's not on one person," senior Joey Baker said. "We all have to pick it up a little bit until we get A.J. back." A large bit of that burden will, coincidentally, fall to Moore and Baker, Duke's two captains and two capable wing options in their own right. Moore, who Krzyzewski said had a "sensational" summer, was already slated to start, but Baker almost assuredly will see more minutes in Griffin's absence. There will also be more playing time for combo guard Trevor Keels, who has impressed through the first few weeks of official practice. There's no saying exactly how those minutes sort out, but Duke has options. In the short-term, it'll be fine.

The other adjustment the Blue Devils have to make? Finding a way to keep Griffin involved even when he's not out on the floor. That, perhaps as much as Griffin's health, is something Krzyzewski and his team are focused on.

"It's tough when a kid sustains repetitive injuries, and they're not necessarily the same, because you don't have continuity of work. So you might get to a level, then you're knocked back," Krzyzewski said. "It's particularly tough for a freshman during this time, because you're learning a lot right now. And so if he's out – again, I don't know the time period, but say he's out a month – that's difficult."

This brings us back to Moore, whose own injury experience now becomes that much more memorable. While Griffin will surely keep studying, keep watching tape, keep doing mental reps as he learns Duke's system, he'll be doing it all from a distance. And physical distance often leads to mental and emotional distance, too. Speaking from personal experience, that's the thing Moore wants to help Griffin avoid.

"I really just want to keep his spirits up, because I've gone through a couple injuries myself in my college career, so I know how they can be," Moore said. "There's sometimes you may feel alone, but when you have teammates there with you, it's harder to feel like that."

Moore and Krzyzewski both noted Griffin's energy and positivity, even in the face of bad news, which bodes well for that sentiment. The other half of his recovery is getting back to the level of play Griffin had, according to his teammates, just begun reaching. "It was starting," Baker said, "to click for him."

What that looked like, according to Baker and Moore, was more consistent practice showings. Baker attested he didn't know Griffin could shoot as well as he could before this summer, something that had especially surprised him of late. Moore noted Griffin's intensity, the way he was finally picking up the pace of the college game. And while both those areas of Griffin's game can absolutely come back, expecting so immediately would be unrealistic and unfair.

So, yes, it sounds like Griffin will probably miss the season-opener against Kentucky at Madison Square Garden in the Champions Classic. Maybe even the home-opener against Army, too. And who knows beyond that?

But while Griffin getting healthy is paramount to Duke reaching its immense potential, so too is how the team handles him in the meantime. How it incorporates him. How it keeps him feeling included. All that, as much as the knee itself, will determine how effective Griffin is when he eventually returns.

"The main thing for him is, he hasn't had an opportunity to play in almost two and a half years, really specifically because of injuries. And when you're that talented of a player, that's a really hard thing to go through," Moore said. "For him moving forward, really it's just us all being there for him, trying to keep his spirits up, because I know he's going to do great things when he's back. He's very capable of it, and we can't wait to have him back."

Coach K at ACC Tipoff: On injuries, succession, and the one that got away

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (October 12, 2021)

CHARLOTTE - For the last time as an active coach, Mike Krzyzewski addressed reporters and took questions at the ACC Tipoff basketball event on Tuesday at the Charlotte Marriott City Center.

Krzyzewski, 74, announced last June he would retire following this season. Associate head coach Jon Scheyer will become Duke's head coach at that time.

Krzyzewski enters his final season with 1,170 wins, the all-time record for college basketball coaches, and is seeking his sixth NCAA championship at Duke.

Here are the highlights of his comments Tuesday:

AJ GRIFFIN INJURY UPDATE

Duke announced Saturday that freshman forward AJ Griffin suffered a sprained knee during practice last Friday and is sidelined indefinitely.

Krzyzewski offered an update on Tuesday, casting some doubt if Griffin would be ready for the Nov. 9 season-opening game with Kentucky at New York's Madison Square Garden.

"AJ sprained his knee," Krzyzewski said. "No surgical stuff. Nothing was torn or broken. Just a matter of rehab. Hopefully it will be weeks. I can't give you a timeline. He's off crutches and doing well but has work ahead of him."

HE'S GOT JOKES

The third question of Krzyzewski's press conference was about this being his last season, he interjected levity.

"You all don't need to keep reminding me," he cracked. "I'm 74 but I still have a memory."

SCHEYER'S UNIQUE ROLE THIS SEASON

Scheyer is in the position of still working for Krzyzewski while already knowing he'll be in the big chair next season.

Asked Scheyer's situation, Krzyzewski said, "He's not a coach in waiting. He's my associate head coach. He's been with me for eight years. He's basically going to do the same fantastic job he's done and then take over and do a fantastic job."

THE ONE RECRUIT HE FRETTE OVER NOT LANDING

Krzyzewski's won more than his share of recruiting battles over his 41 years at Duke. He said he no longer spends time thinking about players that got away.

But, early in his Duke career, he did shake his head about one star that got away.

"I did spend a little bit of time on what it would have been like to coach Chris Mullin," Krzyzewski said. "Because he chose St. John's over us and Holy Cross."

That recruitment occurred during Krzyzewski's first season at Duke, when he led the Blue Devils to a 17-13 record in 1980-81. Mullin signed with St. John's in 1981 and became an all-American player, leading his team to the 1985 Final Four when he was national player of the year as a senior.

Following a 16-year NBA career, Mullin was selected to the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 2011.

Meanwhile, Duke slumped, going 10-17 and 11-17 in Krzyzewski's second and third seasons. The Blue Devils turned it around in 1983-84 to make their first NCAA tournament under Krzyzewski and have since become one of the sport's most decorated programs.

But, if Krzyzewski could have landed Mullin, perhaps that would have occurred sooner.

Krzyzewski said he and Mullin have become "great friends." Krzyzewski finally got to coach Mullin on the 1992 Dream Team at the Barcelona Olympics, when he was an assistant coach.

A SPECIAL NIGHT IN NEW YORK

The first of many commemorative nights celebrating Krzyzewski's impact on the game occurred recently when NBA Commissioner Adam Silver, himself a Duke graduate, organized a dinner event in Krzyzewski's honor in New York.

The focus was on Krzyzewski's work as head coach of the U.S. National Team, which he led to gold medals in the 2008, 2012 and 2016 Olympics.

About 50 people, including Krzyzewski's family, former assistant coaches and other staff members from his time coaching the U.S. team attended, like New York Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau and Phoenix Suns coach Monty Williams.

Many of them are former Duke players and assistant coaches, such as Johnny Dawkins, Quinn Snyder, Jeff Capel, Chris Collins, Grant Hill and Steve Wojciechowski, so it became a reunion.

"It was a night where, wherever you were, at the cocktail party, you wanted to stay there all night," Krzyzewski said. "Then you move to a place and you wanted to stay there all night. And then when you looked around, everybody wanted to stay in the place. It was just, it was one of those beautiful nights."

Coach K's last season: Mike Krzyzewski reflects before he leads Duke one final time

By Mike DeCourcy, Sporting News (October 12, 2021)

DURHAM, N.C. – The man who taught us all long ago there is no such thing as a “defending champion,” that falling short the following season does not mean anyone’s coming to tear down your banner, now is attempting to eradicate the word “last” from his program.

The execution on this one will be trickier, because even Mike Krzyzewski trips on it occasionally. He dropped the word, using it in the forbidden context, at least once on a routine Monday afternoon. And, in the few weeks Duke has been practicing, he has caught himself at least a couple of times wandering past the emotional barrier he has constructed around the 2021-22 college season.

One more time. That’s the K-friendly way to discuss what will transpire for the coach and his program over the next five – or, if things follow the fairytale script allowing him to depart a champion, like John Wooden and John Elway and so few others – six months. He announced in June his decision to coach the current season and then leave the Blue Devils to a successor, which he preferred to be Jon Scheyer, who turned out to be the school’s choice, as well.

Their approach to this succession process is not unique, but it is uncommon. It has allowed Krzyzewski the opportunity to enter this season with a focus unlike any in his previous 46 seasons as a head coach. He need not travel for recruiting, not for scouting nor home visits. He is able to work on building relationships and building his team, and that is most welcome after the COVID season of 2020-21 he refused to let become the closing chapter of his Hall of Fame career.

Now he looks on the floor at the practice facility that bears his name and sees the ingredients of a promising team that could make this a joyous season, principally 6-10 freshman forward Paolo Banchemo, whose size and skill might be described as a combination of Danny Ferry and Grant Hill if that didn’t feel a bit too extravagant.

“I don’t want to go through memory lane here, or whatever. The reason I love coaching, and the reason we’ve had a continuity of excellence, is because we’ve focused on the moment, and I’ve done that with every team,” Krzyzewski told Sporting News. “And so I’m going to do it with this team. I’ve told them: Don’t talk about ‘sixth’, ‘last’, ‘doing it for Coach K.’ Let’s just do it together. Let’s see what the hell happens.”

Krzyzewski will reach his 75th birthday in February. He has won two FIBA World Championships, three Olympic gold medals, five NCAA championships, 12 NCAA regionals and 1,170 games as a Division I head coach. It may seem exhausting to carry around such a weighty resume, but Krzyzewski insists he feels “youthful” and “passionate.” He understands there only are so many years to a lifetime, though, and there are other ways to spend them beyond the passionate pursuit of youthful basketball prospects.

He considers himself beyond fortunate to have enjoyed this degree of professional success, to have had the opportunity to coach so many great players and teams over such a long period of time. “How lucky ... now, again, you’ve got to be good,” he said. Krzyzewski first dreamed of becoming a coach at 16, played for Bob Knight at Army and then entered the business and took over that program four years after Knight left. Here he is, nearly 60 years later, on the verge of completing a career no one could have imagined.

“To do something you love doesn’t mean you love everything you do to do what you love,” Krzyzewski told SN. “For me, the time – how much time do you have? There’s got to be something more that I’d like to do with my time. As much as I love going to Peach Jam and all the recruiting, the amount of recruiting and the intensity that you do to get the level of player that we get is enormous. And, again, it’s not like I hated it. But you’ve got to make some decisions.

“That’s part of it. The other thing is, Mickie, we’ve been married 52 years. We have 10 grandchildren; they’re all here. They’ve made a lot of sacrifices. And again, my daughters and my family would be all for me, whatever I would do. But Mickie and I have talked about it for a couple years.”

If the year 2020 had developed differently, we might have had this conversation a year ago. Krzyzewski’s Blue Devils owned a 25-6 record on March 11 and finished the ACC regular season a game out of first place. There’s no way to know what course he would have followed if that season had ended with a loss somewhere in the NCAA Tournament or maybe a slightly improbable Final Four appearance.

Once the pandemic became an issue, though, Krzyzewski knew he was not going to leave. Navigating COVID last winter while trying to run a Division I basketball program was no kind of fun, but leaving it for someone less experienced to manage might have set back Duke basketball – and the person left in charge – for years. That never was an option.

“As soon as COVID hit, I said there’s no way. We have to shepherd – I didn’t know where it would end or whatever – but I said we have to shepherd the program,” he said. “I didn’t know that shepherding would lead the sheep through the Valley of Death and up the Himalayas. For everybody, it was tough.”

Leaving after last season was over was not a possibility, and not just because the Devils finished 13-11, missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1995 and chose to end their season following a member of the program testing positive for COVID during the ACC Tournament.

Krzyzewski explained that three of the most important pillars of the program were undermined by COVID restrictions: preparation, relationships and communication.

“We have prepared really well, and I learned that from when I was a player under Coach Knight,” Krzyzewski said. “We could not prepare. We lost the summer. Forget about that we were a young team and not as talented.

“We have been great with relationships with our players, as a team and a coaching staff. No way did we come close to the level that you needed to be really good.

“And how do you teach communication at the level it needs to be when, really, for the first month of individual work in September, I wasn’t even on the court. Our weight room is right there, and I was behind the glass and would come out at different times. So the ability to touch, communicate, just be able to pat somebody on the back. Or, ‘Come over here son,’ give him a little hug or get on his ass. All that level of communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, was just ... to me, it showed just how important it’s been for us.

“It was such a bad year.”

Krzyzewski responded by bringing the Duke freshmen to campus a month earlier than in past years and having them take an academic class to become familiar with the campus, the program and their coach, who was around them daily. In July, when the rest of the players arrived for summer classes, they entered an unofficial, program-designed course called “the Brotherhood curriculum” – the Brotherhood being what Duke calls the unofficial fraternity of players who’ve competed for the Blue Devils.

They were instructed by Duke basketball’s academic coordinator, its creative director for advice on social media and branding, and by a financial adviser on personal finance. And then the coaches would help teach the program’s culture.

“As a result, we’ve learned from doing it. We saw what we missed. And we needed to right the ship,” Krzyzewski said. “You were in the gym. I don’t know how many games we’re going to win or lose – I think we’ll win more than we lose, maybe be real good – but that was fun in there. There’s energy. Last year, there was no energy.

“We got away a weekend ago, and Mickie said, ‘Do you have any regrets about continuing to coach?’ Not stopping coaching, because I’ve already let the recruiting go ... I’m not calling every night and texting. And I said, ‘No. I’m good. I think I’ll be better. I’m anxious to feel people in Cameron and on the road.

“My whole career is feeding off that energy. You have a passion for what you do, but the energy of the environment you do it in – your own, the players’, the crowd’s – there’s energy. And that was not there last year.”

On the evening of June 3, the day he held an afternoon press conference to discuss his decision to retire as head coach following the 2021-22 season, Krzyzewski was at home watching David Muir report “World News Tonight” to a large segment of the U.S. population.

And it turned out, to the coach’s surprise, he was World News that night.

“I was knocked back by the response,” Krzyzewski said. “I told Mickie, I said, ‘Holy crap.’ I literally was surprised.”

It only has grown more intense as the season approaches. Jon Jackson, Duke’s deputy director of athletics for men’s basketball, has had the responsibility of handling the coach’s media requests. There were calls from “60 Minutes” and HBO. Eventually, if that interest still is there when the season ends, “I owe that to people,” Krzyzewski said. “Then I’ll do whatever.”

Keeping the attention off himself during the fall has allowed more to be paid to the job Scheyer is doing recruiting the first Duke team of which he will be head coach. The Devils already have commitments from three top-10 prospects.

Mike Krzyzewski reflects before he leads Duke one final time (cont.)

By Mike DeCourcy, Sporting News (October 12, 2021)

Krzyzewski has not been uninvolved in that success, but he did not attend any summer tournaments or showcases to evaluate prospects or make them aware of his presence. Scheyer filled the role of Duke head coach at those events. The staff discussed with him what they learned on their various trips. And when players and their families visited campus, he met with them and explained his retirement does not equate to an evacuation.

"In June, we had a number of visits," Krzyzewski said. "So I had meetings with the families to reassure them: I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying in this office. I'm going to be an ambassador for the school. I'm not going to coach your son, but I'll be there for you. I'll be there for you if you go pro after a year. Jon and these guys are going to coach you. I'm not going to interfere, but you should know I'll be here if you need me for guidance and anything.

"So I know all of our recruits and their families, and will know them, but in a different way."

When prospects visited Duke in previous years, the trip usually included a breakfast at Krzyzewski's home. Now, that occurs at Scheyer's home.

To accommodate the visitors, Krzyzewski said, he along the way picked up some "really nice extra chairs" so everyone would have a place to sit. "They're not folding chairs. They're really good," he said. Scheyer, with a scout's eye, figured those would be very helpful when the prospects' families came to his house. So he asked to borrow them.

"We have two kids who are committed coming in in this weekend, and another kid and his family that we're recruiting," Krzyzewski said. "Today in our meeting, I said, 'So tell me what your plan is. Where do you want me?' And I said, 'By the way, when do I get my damn chairs back?'"

Adjacent to the Michael W. Krzyzewski Center for Athletic Excellence, where the Blue Devils practice each day, there is a rectangular courtyard fronted by a sign that reads "Krzyzewskiville." That is where, for decades, students have camped out to be first to enter Cameron Indoor Stadium and claim the best seats for Duke's home games.

To better manage this process, there are "line monitors" selected from among the student body. Recently, a line monitors "reunion" was arranged, and several dozen who handled that duty in the past came to campus to join the current group for an event that included a chance to visit last Friday's Devils practice and a cocktail party afterward. Krzyzewski spoke to the group then.

"Right toward the end, in talking, I said something. I don't even remember the exact words. I started, like, crying," Krzyzewski said. "So I said: All right, we'll see you all and keep up the good work."

The following day, there was an "open practice" used as a fundraiser for the Duke Children's Hospital, a favorite charity project for the Krzyzewskis for decades. Those willing to pay \$100 were granted a seat in Cameron to watch Banchemo and muscular freshman guard Trevor Keels and vets Wendell Moore, Jeremy Roach and Mark Williams continue their preparation for the opening game Nov. 9 in the Champions Classic at Madison Square Garden.

"I was doing different things and finally 10 minutes before – our guys were out there already – I came on the court and it's a standing ovation," Krzyzewski said, and he started to explain how that felt, then stopped, because it wasn't necessary and might have provoked the same reaction, again.

"I've got to be careful it doesn't hit me like that," he said. "I wasn't expecting either one. On the road, when they boo me, that'll balance the scales.

"We'll see what the hell happens. But I just wanted to coach for this ... like, I'll go home tonight and watch the tape. I love watching tape. I love practicing planning. I love developing relationships with the players, and all that. And building a team.

"I hope it never hits me until it's over that I won't be able to do that again. But right now, that hasn't hit me. If it does, then I won't be as good, I don't think."

When he was close to reaching the ultimate decision to coach the Devils once more, and only once, Krzyzewski and his wife spoke with a close family friend, with his three daughters and then gathered assistant coaches Scheyer, Chris Carrawell and Nolan Smith and discussed it with them. All this took place over about a week in the spring.

"By the time I talked with the coaching staff, I was pretty sure that this is what we were going to do," he said. "I brought up, 'Look, in order to do this, I'm in an ethical dilemma. I can't recruit a kid if I'm not going to coach him.' And so it creates a situation if I still want to coach, it's Duke's decision then, will they allow me to do that? I didn't think they'd ask me to retire, but again, you still have to show courtesy to everybody.

"And so we need to find the answer of who – it needs to be somebody from the Brotherhood. And Chris Carrawell said, 'Coach, the answer is right here: Jon.' And I already knew that. And Nolan said, 'That's right.' And I said, you know what: 'That's a hell of a thing.' I get chills just thinking about it. I said, 'Jon, you're ready.'"

Krzyzewski explained he would not have said that of Scheyer a year earlier, but it's now been nearly a decade since he joined the staff. Scheyer was an All-American point guard for Duke's 2010 NCAA Championship team, even though he wasn't truly a point guard. He adapted to the position because that's what the team needed. He had to do that with only a short time to prepare in practice.

Now Scheyer gets nearly a year to adjust to the demands not just of coaching in the ACC, or coaching a program that three different coaches have led to the Final Four, but to follow the man who is the greatest men's basketball coach in NCAA history.

It'll help to have the greatest coach around to guide him. Even now, with a team to prepare to chase an ACC title and perhaps another Final Four and possibly more beyond that, Krzyzewski is discovering another approach to coaching that can continue into his retirement. He even, as he is teaching, learning some new ideas about how to coach this one more season.

"Jon and I, as good a relationship as we've had, doing this it is off the charts," he said. "I've loved it. After we have a staff meeting, I'll say, 'Let's the two of us spend a few minutes.' This was like weeks ago, I had something to tell him, and I got in at 8 o'clock in the morning. And I was going to get – we have a Starbucks machine on the floor – and I open the door and Jon was right there, at the door. And we started laughing. He said, 'I have a couple things.' And I said, 'I have couple things, too.' And after we got through those couple things, we spent another 45 minutes.

"And I said: I haven't talked to you about time. You're going to be amazed that you don't have enough time. And so before you commit to anything, make sure you know that's time. With you, with a young family, you've got to be careful. It was really a good talk about time."

Krzyzewski understands that clock is ticking. There will be a final buzzer, because that is how the game ends, no matter how one might endeavor to manipulate the language. It may be followed by confetti descending from the ceiling of the Superdome or tears dropping from the corner of some Devilish eyes, possibly even both. It is coming, though.

Duke names its captains. Here's who will lead the way in Coach K's final season

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (October 11, 2021)

Back on June 3, Joey Baker and Wendell Moore sat side-by-side in Cameron Indoor Stadium when Mike Krzyzewski announced this would be his last season as the Blue Devils' coach.

This season, they'll work together to lead the team through the historic ride that they hope ends with a championship to cap off Krzyzewski's storied career.

Duke's players voted Baker and Moore as team captains, something that only makes sense given all the experience they have with the Blue Devils as compared to their teammates.

Baker and Moore are among four returning scholarship players from last season as Duke brought in two transfers and four freshmen to this season's roster. The other two returning players who were on scholarship at Duke last season are sophomores Mark Williams and Jeremy Roach.

"This is such a tremendous and well-deserved honor for Joey and Wendell," Krzyzewski said in a statement Monday night. "Our team could not have selected two more worthy captains, who are each great leaders in their own way. Wendell and Joey are hardworking, selfless, and humble and set a daily example with how beautifully they represent our program. Our team is in great hands as we prepare for this season."

A 6-6 forward from Fayetteville, Baker is the lone player on Duke's roster who has appeared in an NCAA tournament game with the Blue Devils. That came during his freshman season in 2018-19, when he was a deep reserve on Duke's ACC championship team led by his classmates Zion Williamson, RJ Barrett and Cam Reddish.

Baker has played in 54 games for Duke with four starts over the last three seasons, averaging 3.9 points per game.

Moore, a 6-5 forward from Charlotte, arrived for the 2019-20 season. He has appeared in 49 games, with 29 starts, over the last two seasons. He's averaged 8.6 points per game.

Both Baker and Moore will be Duke's player representatives at Tuesday's ACC Basketball Tipoff media event in Charlotte.

Last month, Krzyzewski tipped his hand, to a degree, when discussing Moore's personal growth in the offseason.

"He has become that older leader that we've had over the years," Krzyzewski said. "By going through the things that you go through as a freshman and a sophomore, learning how to be a player, learning how to be a Duke student, learning how to lead."

But, overall, Krzyzewski already has good feeling about this team's cohesiveness. "We have a real close group," Krzyzewski said.

"They have been fun to coach. And they have fun. They work hard. They work really, really hard."

The first public event of this season is Countdown to Craziiness Friday night at 7 p.m. It includes a Blue-White scrimmage. The Blue Devils play Winston-Salem State in an exhibition game Oct. 30 at 1:30 p.m. and open the regular season Nov. 9 against Kentucky in the Champions Classic doubleheader at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Why Coach K says you won't see him watching Duke games in Cameron next season

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (October 11, 2021)

Even with the transition to Jon Scheyer already in place – with no drop-off on the recruiting trail so far – there are still so many unanswered questions about what Duke is going to look like after Mike Krzyzewski is no longer on the bench.

Krzyzewski will face many of those questions Tuesday at ACC Tipoff in Charlotte, the league's annual media extravaganza, but he already knows at least part of the answer to one of the least important and most compelling, if not the rest.

Where will he watch Duke play when he's not the coach?

"Not in Cameron," Krzyzewski told the News & Observer. "I know I'm not going to be in Cameron."

It is, to use a phrase of some disrepute, a known unknown.

Since Krzyzewski is keeping his office that overlooks Cameron Indoor Stadium – and most of the Duke campus – he could potentially watch games there, on the rarely used television hidden inside an armoire facing his desk. Or perhaps in a conference room closer to the court, where he could be available to Scheyer and his staff as needed. That has yet to be settled.

But Krzyzewski has ruled out more visible options. His wife and daughters have sat in seats in Cameron's upper ring for many years, above the scorer's table and across the court from Duke's president. Krzyzewski won't join them there, among the fans. Security would be a nightmare, among other issues.

Nor does Cameron have any luxury suites where Krzyzewski could potentially watch the games live but be secluded and somewhat hidden from view. Duke discussed building some sort of box in the corner of the arena behind the visiting bench, but ruled it out.

Krzyzewski also declined a facetious invitation to join Duke's managers and germophobe writers tired of the Cameron press-row experience in the auxiliary media area that now sits high among the girders in the corner above the Duke bench.

"I'm OK," Krzyzewski said.

There's a lot to joke about here, but in some ways it's an apt allegory for the new era Duke is entering.

Krzyzewski will still be around, watching, overseeing, advising. But he also understands the imperative that Scheyer be able to chart his own course, how delicate the balance truly will be between mentor and mentee, legend and successor.

Where Krzyzewski is physically located when Duke plays on without him probably has the least tangible impact of any of the factors involved, but as much symbolic significance as any, just as Krzyzewski keeping the head coach's office after he is no longer the head coach sends a clear message that his job may be changing but his influence will not.

"It's interesting. You want to be able to help but you don't want to be a distraction," Krzyzewski said. "Jon and I and the guys, we have an amazing relationship so it's not like they're worried about me getting in their space or whatever. ..."

"But I will watch every game. I don't think I would go to a game on the road. Definitely not in conference. But maybe if they're like in (Madison Square) Garden, where you could go someplace, something like that. I'll be there to help, I'll be there to support, but not to interfere. And going to a game would be interference."

Even if there's no demand for a decision right now, it is still one of many variables in a transition that is in some ways unprecedented, something that demands thought and consideration. If not remodeling.

How Wendell Moore changed his mind and body to lead Duke basketball

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (October 4, 2021)

Wendell Moore etched his name in Duke basketball lore with his game-winning basket at North Carolina during his freshman year.

An overtime buzz beater in the sport's biggest rivalry? On the road to silence the Smith Center?

For many, that's a badge of honor to carry for a lifetime.

For Moore, though, it represents but a start.

Because after he scored 17 points with that basket to beat UNC 98-96 in overtime on Feb. 8, 2020, Moore combined for only 13 points over his next four games.

When he scored 25 points in Duke's 83-82 win over Boston College last Jan. 6, Moore followed that up with back-to-back four-point outings.

Consistency lacked; confidence waned from game to game.

MOORE CHANGES HIS APPROACH

Moore, though, worked this offseason to change that, and his Duke teammates and coaches are confident he's achieved that goal.

"He's come back and he's been a different guy," Duke assistant coach Nolan Smith said. "He's been really special. We're excited to see it all come together now."

A 6-5, 213-pound forward, Moore's versatility allows him to handle the ball at the point when needed, or fill the shooting guard or small forward slots or even go down low and battle big guys for rebounds.

Now a junior, he's the most experienced Blue Devils player in terms of games played with Duke.

But, mostly, it's that his mental and physical approaches are in tune now, something that wasn't always the case as he learned how to handle the ups and downs of a season.

"He's benefited from not just the successes he's had, but the times he's been knocked on his butt," Duke head coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

For everyone who patted him on the back for that overtime basket to beat UNC, Moore had to hear about his 4-of-19 3-point shooting as a freshman.

For all the bouquets thrown his way for scoring 20 or more points three times in ACC play last season, there's criticism for his four points in a loss to Michigan State or failing to score when Illinois beat the Blue Devils.

"All those things that are said and all the sudden the guy is good," Krzyzewski explained. "(People say) 'Well, I'm surprised.' Well, you're surprised because you don't know it's a process. I mean, you don't get an app to be good. You have to earn being good. And he spent the spring changing his body and how he runs. He's taller now. He's a much better athlete."

MENTALLY CONSISTENT

One of his teammates who knows Moore best, roommate and fellow junior, Michael Savarino, said Moore sharpened his mental approach as well.

"I feel like he's wavered multiple storms and this is his time," said Savarino, who is Krzyzewski's grandson. "He's in a great mental spot."

Moore, from Charlotte and Concord's Cox Mill High School, averaged 9.7 points and 4.8 rebounds as a freshman and 7.4 points and 4.2 rebounds last season as a sophomore.

Those are decent numbers. But the inconsistency of his play is what he sought to fix this offseason.

"It's always been mentality with me," Moore said. "The biggest thing was changing my mentality, making it stronger every time I get out there on the court. I really just need to play where I never feel weak on the court. I know my teammates always believe in me and I think now I'm really starting to believe in myself the way everybody else does."

Smith said he and Moore have had "many, many conversations about that." Playing with confidence, being strong to protect the ball and finish plays, being a force on defense are all things Moore strives to show this season.

A video clip of a Moore dunk in practice making its way around the Internet last week showed perhaps that work paid off. Even Krzyzewski noted it had gone viral.

Moore worked with senior Joey Baker and Savarino on their games last spring and during the summer on campus. He traveled to Los Angeles to work with Matthew Hurt, his former Duke teammate who was preparing for the NBA Draft last summer, and spent a few weeks in Miami working on his game.

He's turned in some memorable performances in his Duke career, but they were too few and far between for his liking.

"I started showing flashes of it," Moore said. "For me it was about putting those flashes together into a consistent run over the season. I'm starting to really figure that out."

MOVING FORWARD WITH PERSEVERANCE

Smith sees his own career in Moore's. During Smith's first two seasons with the Blue Devils, he averaged 5.9 and 8.4 points per game. As a junior, he's scoring jumped to 17.4 points and he helped Duke win the 2010 NCAA championship.

As a senior, Smith averaged 20.6 points and was the ACC player of the year in 2011 when the Blue Devils won the league championship.

Moore's perseverance impresses Smith.

"The one thing I'm most proud of him when it comes to that is, he didn't run," Smith said. "We are in the climate of transfers, when a lot of guys transfer and run when it's not going their way. Obviously it worked out for me. I'm a firm believer in if you stick it out, it's going to work out, especially if you are talented enough and you have the tools to make it work."

Krzyzewski looks to Moore as a team leader. He's clearly in line to be named a team captain this season. With Krzyzewski set to retire following this season, Moore is one of the players he's counting on to produce one more great season.

"I love my relationship with him," Krzyzewski said. "He's our leader. He's vocal. He's in a great, great place. I love where he's at. I'm really anxious to see how it will turn out for him this year. He's one of the keys to our team because he's going to be that leader."

Coach K isn't savoring the moment. He's trying to live in it.

By Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer (September 28, 2021)

It was one of many beginnings of what will be one very final end. Mike Krzyzewski took a seat, wearing a blue Emily K Center track jacket, and began his final preseason briefing, a relatively routine event suddenly imbued with unexpected substance.

Each of these is the last for Krzyzewski, these things he's done so many times before they become almost rote. It's going to be a long season of them, one after another.

The last first practice. The last Countdown to Crazyness. The last trip to Madison Square Garden. The last game at nine ACC arenas, all but two of which didn't even exist when Krzyzewski first came to Duke. The last game at Cameron. The last ACC tournament ... in Brooklyn, of all places. The last NCAA tournament, presumably.

Mixed in there, at some indefinite point, the milestones that matter to a coach and a grandfather: The last practice plan of thousands committed to paper, the last practice with his grandson.

The weight of history, personal and otherwise, already sits heavy and will only get heavier. Heavy enough that it's something Krzyzewski is actively fighting against, parrying away any attempts at nostalgia or sentiment, giving himself the same command he gives his players: live in the moment.

"I've told my staff and everyone around me not to use 'the last,' " Krzyzewski said. "This is my 47th year, my 42nd year at Duke, and I'm going after it the way I've gone after every year. As soon as you start saying 'savor,' 'let's remember this thing,' whatever, you open up the door for rationalization of not putting it all out there, that it might be OK not to do it to this level. I know that can take place. We're not having any of it. I'll savor in May or whatever, after that."

For more than four decades – with one interruption – his basketball calendar has proceeded apace, the persistent rhythm of a life spent in coaching from event to event, milestone to milestone, with no end in sight. But the end is most certainly in sight now, getting closer every day.

Tuesday, it was only a few feet away. To Krzyzewski's right, a table sat ready for Jon Scheyer, the anointed successor. There were already four television microphones propped up there while Krzyzewski was talking, waiting for the coach in waiting.

So it's a challenge that has to be acknowledged and confronted. It would be easy for the entire season to be played under a sepia-toned haze, a farewell tour for the sake of a farewell tour. This team has too much talent for that; whether it was intentional or not, Krzyzewski chose to make his exit with a roster capable of just about anything. A team, as he said, capable of making a mark "before we leave, in this decade."

By the same token, while it seems like a long season stretching out ahead, with high expectations colliding with what could be a near-endless string of new distractions, it's going to pass quickly, more quickly than seems possible at the end of September. It always does.

"As we go through this year, I'm trying to enjoy every single practice, every little moment with coach," newly promoted assistant coach Nolan Smith said. "I'm going to enjoy this year. But we're not going to make this year all about that."

Krzyzewski has already made his final recruiting trip, handing the keys over to Scheyer and his staff, a 74-year-old man who decided he'd rather not put in the thousands upon thousands of miles anymore. Krzyzewski joked that his wife Mickie asked him why he didn't get off the road 10 years ago.

So Tuesday was not even the first of the lasts, and they will proceed unrelentingly now over the next seven months and change. And just as unrelentingly, Krzyzewski will insist they neither exist nor matter, no matter how many times he is asked. And he will be asked many, many times.

"Just – I'm not doing to do that," Krzyzewski said. "I'm 74, I'm going to live every moment I have. I don't have a bad wish for myself or anything. But that's how we've been successful, doing it that way."

But even Krzyzewski can't avoid it entirely in his rage against the dying of the light. He auctioned off four tickets to the final game at Cameron against North Carolina to raise money for the V Foundation. They brought in a cool million.

"I do think that will be a tough ticket," he quipped, knowing the last of the lasts is out there somewhere, the moment when there will be no basketball moment left to live in.

One-and-not-quite-done: Why Mark Williams returned to Duke basketball

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (September 26, 2021)

A strong finish to his freshman season could have been enough for Mark Williams.

Standing 7 feet tall, with a 7-7 wingspan and weighing a solid 243 pounds, the Duke center looked like one of the ACC's top players in the ACC tournament.

A 23-point, 19-rebound effort when Duke beat Louisville to reach the quarterfinals at Greensboro Coliseum last March 10 showed Williams could dominate.

But could he do that in professional basketball?

That's the question he faced after Duke's season was abruptly ended by COVID-19 with positive cases on the team leading to its withdrawal from the ACC tournament with a 13-11 record.

One of his classmates, Jalen Johnson, declared for the NBA Draft and left the team in February. Another, D.J. Steward, turned pro after the season ended.

Every year since 2014, at least one Duke freshman has been taken in the NBA Draft's first round, usually in the lottery.

Williams explored the idea of becoming the latest one-and-done Blue Devil.

"I did," Williams told the News & Observer this month.

But it went no further.

"I felt like coming back, I could really show what I can do over the course of a whole year," Williams said. "My body of work last year, I don't think, would have been enough. I mean, it could have been, obviously, if I'd have tested the waters. But I didn't want it to be a question. So I wanted to come back, show what I could do, dominate for a whole year and see what happens from there."

MARK WILLIAMS LOOKS AT THE BIG PICTURE

His decision made him a rarity among Duke players of recent vintage. Sophomores become grizzled veterans as guys from Jabari Parker and Jahliil Okafor to Jayson Tatum and Zion Williamson boarded the one-and-done train.

Williams looked at the big picture. He'd struggled to adjust to college basketball early, only playing more than eight minutes in one game prior to late January.

Even on Feb. 20, tasked with guarding Virginia 7-1 center Jay Huff, Williams played just seven minutes that day.

"Jay is such a good basketball player," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said that day, after the Blue Devils won 66-65. "His footwork, his touch and his ball handling. Mark hasn't guarded anyone like that."

In a game 11 days later at Georgia Tech, which had 6-9, 230-pound, ACC player of the year Moses Wright in the middle, Williams scored 20 points but fouled out.

So, while his size and skill would have been enough for some NBA to either draft him or sign him as a free agent, Williams knew what he'd done wasn't enough for him.

He was good at times, great in the ACC tournament. He's seeking a higher, more consistent level.

"He should be the best rebounder and be the best defender in the country or try to be," Duke associate head coach Chris Carrawell told The News & Observer.

To get there, Williams hit the road this summer, working out and finding gym time and games to play in Philadelphia, Miami and Washington, D.C., against fellow college and some professional players.

"Continuing to work on my game, expanding my game," Williams said. "Just being decisive with all my moves."

INTERNAL COMPETITION, AND DEPTH

Back at Duke with his new teammates by late June, Williams found one particularly intriguing addition to the roster who should help him in practice and games.

Theo John transferred to Duke to play his final year of NCAA basketball. Listed at 6-9 and 242 pounds, the veteran center joined the Blue Devils after starting 25 games for Marquette last season. He's played in 123 college games.

Suddenly, Williams has a comparable athlete to battle in practice every day. He has a teammate who's played in the Big East and has NCAA tournament experience.

"He's really strong," Williams said. "He's been around the game for a while and can teach me some tricks. He's really strong. That forces me to make better moves. If I can do it against him, that's going to make life easier against somebody smaller than that, because he's 6-10, 250. He's legit."

Former Duke and NBA center Shelden Williams (no relation), the two-time national defensive player of the year during his days with the Blue Devils, said a physical teammate like John will make Williams even better, especially on defense.

"What I'm actually excited about is, now they actually have a guy who can bang against Mark every day in practice," Shelden Williams said on his podcast. "He can actually get used to Theo bumping his chest and still trying to stay strong and stay straight up where he's not putting his arms down and giving up cheap fouls."

Carrawell made it clear that is where the foundation of Williams' game needs to be for him to be considered one of the nation's top centers and someone worthy of being a first-round draft pick.

"You build it from defense," Carrawell said. "They want to know if he can defend. That's the first thing they look at from bigs now. Can you defend around the rim? Can you go out on pick and rolls? Can you protect the paint? Can you rebound the ball? That's the foundation and everything else comes from that."

BIGGER THAN BASKETBALL

Mark Williams' belief in improving his play to a higher level before jumping to a higher level of competition isn't the only way he's different from recent one-and-done Duke players.

NCAA rule changes in July allowing players to profit financially from their name, image and likeness removed some of the monetary impetus for leaving school. Williams is active on Cameo, receiving \$50 for custom, personalized video greetings, with more opportunities still out there.

His family also values education. His father, Dr. Alex Williams, is a practicing gastroenterologist in Chesapeake, Virginia.

Mark Williams made the all-ACC Academic Honor Roll for posting a 3.0 GPA or better last school year.

His older sister, Elizabeth, was a four-time, all-American center for Duke's women's basketball team from 2011-15. She twice made the ACC Honor Roll, in addition to the school's Dean's List, while receiving her psychology degree before entering the WNBA, where she now plays with the Atlanta Dream.

Mark Williams, though, said that aspect of his life alone wouldn't keep him from entering the NBA early if he's ready after this season.

"Even if I leave, I would plan on coming back to finish school," he said.

Back in 2010, when Elizabeth Williams committed to Duke, it was an 8-year-old Mark who helped reveal the news by removing his jacket to display a Blue Devils shirt at her signing day event.

In December 2016, 15-year-old Mark was at Cameron Indoor Stadium with his parents when Elizabeth's No. 1 jersey was retired to the rafters.

His family's legacy literally hangs over his head while he plays for the Blue Devils.

Now here he is, honing and strengthening his game with a chance to become a national defensive player of the year, just like his sister was in 2015.

"I honestly got familiar with Cameron when I was younger with her playing in the same gym," Mark Williams said. "It's crazy. Full circle."

All of that was too much to pull Mark Williams away from Duke and to the NBA following his freshman season.

The Blue Devils figure to benefit from having their standout center on the court as they work to deliver one last national championship in Krzyzewski's final season before his retirement next spring.

Coach K's final ride at Duke could end with a sixth championship parade

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (September 22, 2021)

From his sprawling sixth-floor office in the Schwartz-Butters Athletic Center, Mike Krzyzewski can see it all:

Cameron Indoor Stadium, the site of his 41 seasons worth of home games as Duke's head coach. Krzyzewskiville, the area around the arena that his name (and success) inspired. Even the University Chapel, its tall spires the only thing – save Krzyzewski's perch, of course – that pierces the skyline above these Gothic-style grounds.

The only thing he can't see? Well, something that hasn't appeared yet: the carnival big top tent that will envelop Duke's campus and his men's basketball program sometime in the next six-ish weeks. It will cast shadows. It will change the view. How, exactly, it's hard to say. But the circus is certainly coming, just as everyone imagined it would for the greatest attraction of this college season: Coach K's farewell tour. (And yes, it still feels surreal seeing that phrase written out.)

Of course, Krzyzewski doesn't see things that way. He can't. Not with this team, this type of talent. Anything that distracts from their tremendously-high-but-attainable goals, frankly, isn't worth the time.

"I'm not looking at this as my final season; I'm looking at it as my 42nd season at Duke, and 47th as a head coach, where there is no end line except the end of the season," he tells The Athletic. "If you put a different end line there, you probably would finish before the end line you should be going after – and that's trying to win a national championship."

Which can't happen. So just like that, the standard for handling *gestures wildly* all this has been set. The sentiment has seeped down to every member of the staff and squad, too. "Not a distraction," coach-in-waiting/assistant Jon Scheyer says twice of the national narrative surrounding the Blue Devils. Adds Wendell Moore, the rare third-year starter in Durham these days: "It's not pressure at all. It's more just ... excitement."

That, even an impartial outsider can say, is palpable. There are fewer than 50 days until Duke's season-opener, and locally, there's already been chatter about when students will start tenting for the regular-season finale against rival North Carolina. (Duke rules dictate it can't begin before January, but ... we'll see.) Local restaurants just taped up Duke calendars, circling key conference matchups. It is all already building, with the circus-like crescendo nearer every day. Of this, surely Krzyzewski is aware. And after four decades at the helm of this program, and with five national titles to show for those years, he's well-accustomed to massive media attention. Just three seasons ago, after all, his Zion Williamson-led team drew a similarly fervent following, and a constantly-full press row inside Cameron.

In that vein, at least, Coach K is willing to acknowledge what's coming.

"We know we're going to have to deal with more publicity, more attention – although we usually get a lot of publicity and attention – but there'll probably be a lot more this season," he jokes. "But no, I want to be in this moment, and no other moment. And so far, that's what we've been able to do."

The big question

How does this team handle not just Krzyzewski's final season, but also rebounding after missing the NCAA Tournament last season for the first time in over two decades?

"That's the main focus really," says Moore. "Because we know last year just wasn't a Duke season for us. I think this year, we're coming in with the mentality that we all have to lock in, and we have to prove to everybody that we are who we are."

Of course, reinforcements arrive in the form of another star-studded freshman class, one which features two potential lottery picks and a legitimate candidate to go No. 1 overall. That's without mentioning a third five-star freshman, another four-star, plus a three-year starter from the Big East. Point being, for all the baskets and big moments that departed the program this spring, just as much – if not more – came back into it.

Last year, Duke's players arrived on campus later than every other ACC program, and even then, had limited interactions due to ongoing COVID-19 protocols. Players essentially spent all their time in one of two buildings: the Washington Duke Inn, where they lived, or the basketball building. That's it. Now, conditional pandemic procedures weren't something the Blue Devils alone dealt with, but not having a full-fledged summer certainly didn't ease the transition for last year's six freshmen.

This summer, though? Things are back to normal, and everyone involved couldn't be happier about it. "With COVID, we knew how bad it was when you don't have a summer, and even a fall, where you can not just prepare physically, but you prepare relationship-wise," Krzyzewski says. "We've had a terrific summer. Not a good one, a terrific summer." That's meant regular workouts on the court, getting to assess players' relative strengths and weaknesses, but also mingling away from the floor. Hanging out again. Having meals together. For the Fourth of July, Coach K had the whole team over to his house for a cookout, replete with cornhole and his pool and even a bounce house. (Imagine a certain 7-footer trying to fit into that thing.) For the NBA Finals, it was assistant Chris Carrawell's turn to host. And recently, for the first Sunday of NFL action, it was Scheyer's, with all the guys coming over to watch football.

"I think as a coach, they see us enough on the court," Scheyer says. "But being able to let down and just spend some time together, talk about life? It's really helpful for everyone."

Roster analysis

Guards: For all the versatility on this roster, all the positional flexibility, the one thing every elite team needs is a floor general – and in sophomore Jeremy Roach, the Blue Devils have theirs. Roach, who started 18 games as a freshman last season, was up-and-down in his first campaign, but the staff has high hopes for him in his second year. "He's been on a mission," Scheyer says. "He's serious about his work, and he's learned a lot from year one." Roach averaged 8.7 points per game last season, but also just 2.8 assists countered by two turnovers per contest. Scheyer says one of Roach's offseason focuses has been on his 3-point shot, after Roach made just 31.3 percent of his 3s last year, and that's already evident from the team's preseason scrimmage videos. More good news? Moore, who spent a week in D.C. this summer working out with Roach and freshman Trevor Keels, says he can tell the game is slowing down for Roach. "That just allows him to be a lot more confident in what he can do," Moore says. "He's really coming into himself."

Roach also won't have to handle point guard duties alone, now that Keels is in the fold. A 6-foot-4, 221-pound combo guard, Keels was the lone five-star guard the staff added this summer, meaning he'll play a vital role from the jump. Specifically, he'll be asked to step in – whether as a starter or off the bench – as one of the team's primary 3-point shooters. "His shooting is a big-time weapon," Scheyer says. "I mean, big-time." As a bigger guard, Keels is capable of defending both backcourt spots, and his chemistry with Roach – they played together at Paul VI Catholic in high school – is already paying dividends. "A lot of times, having so many new players, this is sometimes when a lot of mistakes are happening and we're feeling it out," Scheyer explains. "With these two guys, they know each other so well, so it's been a good bond that they've had."

Behind those two, four-star freshman Jaylen Blakes arrives as a backup option and someone who can be developed over the years to come. That trio should make up the majority of the backcourt minutes, although Duke also has several wings who can slide down in a bigger lineup.

Wings: Wendell Moore has had one of the stranger careers in Duke history – the NCAA Tournament was canceled his freshman season due to the pandemic, and Duke shockingly missed it when he was a sophomore – but now entering his third season, he's prepared to be an invaluable leader on this young team. Just as important, the 6-foot-5, 213-pound junior is the ideal do-everything piece for a roster that will ask him to play everywhere. "We want him to be aggressive," Scheyer says. "When he's done that throughout his career, he's been one of our best players, and he has the potential to be one of the best players in the country." Moore figures to slot in as the team's starting shooting guard, but he can play anywhere from point guard to small-ball power forward. Defensively, he's already been asked to do that at various points in his career; his steal rate last season was No. 23 in the conference, per KenPom, and that was even with him shifting up and down the lineup.

Joining Moore both on the wing and as a team leader is senior Joey Baker, the lone fourth-year player on this year's roster. The 6-foot-6 swingman emerged as a sharpshooter as a sophomore, draining 39.4 percent of his 3s, only for that percentage – and most of his notable statistics – to drop off last season. That may be more a product of the team's overall struggles, though, as Duke's offense hardly found a real rhythm last year. If Baker can get back to his sophomore-year levels, not to mention the experience he provides on such a young roster, then the Blue Devils would have another valuable floor-stretcher on their hands. "Obviously he makes a lot of shots, but he makes everything easier on me being a leader," Moore says. "Because I know I have somebody right next to me who is just as locked in and just as focused, and he's also a guy who all the guys respect."

The last big player on the wing is ... well, quite literally a big player: five-star freshman A.J. Griffin, who arrives at 6-foot-6 and 222 pounds. Griffin didn't play his final season of high school at Archbishop Stepinac last season due to injuries, but Scheyer says he's fully healthy now and without any setbacks. "The talent is clear, right? The talent is obvious. His body, the physical tools that he has. And then his skill level – shooting, passing, handling – he has all of it," Scheyer says. "He's going to be a guy I don't think anyone else has in the country like him." That's high praise, but Griffin – whose father, Adrian, is an assistant for the Toronto Raptors – is well-deserving of it. And like Scheyer said, he'll do a bit of everything this season. That means normally, Griffin is likely to start at small forward, but he absolutely has the wingspan and defensive acumen to slide up to power forward in smaller lineups. But with his combination of shooting, rebounding and sheer athleticism, Griffin should be one of Duke's most impactful players this season across the board.

Lastly, there's Davidson graduate transfer Bates Jones, the younger brother of former Duke and current New York Giants quarterback Daniel Jones. Jones was a rotation player with the Wildcats, and while he won't see a ton of minutes this season, Moore says that Bates shoots the ball "extremely well," which has already helped him in practice.

Bigs: Let's not mince words here. If Duke is going to win the national championship this season and send Coach K out on a high note, it'll be because of its bigs. "We feel like we have a frontcourt," Scheyer says, "that can be the best in the country."

That starts with incoming freshman phenom Paolo Banchero (more on him later) and sophomore 7-footer Mark Williams. It was really the story of two seasons for Williams last year. In Duke's first 10 games, he scored a combined 19 points and never played more than 15 minutes a game. The last 13 games of the season? Williams averaged 11.2 points, 6 rebounds, and 2.2 blocks per night, playing almost 22 minutes per contest. His last game of the season was also his best – 23 points,

Coach K's final ride at Duke could end with a sixth championship (cont.)

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (September 22, 2021)

19 rebounds, one steal, and one block – when he broke Ralph Sampson's ACC tournament freshman record for rebounds in a game. “The way he ended the season with great momentum, he knows what it takes,” Scheyer says. “We don't think there's a better big guy in the country; it's just making that jump to doing it every single day.” Williams already flashed tremendous defensive instincts last season, and once again should anchor the Blue Devils' interior defense. The next step for him is continuing to build offensively, both with his post moves and counters around the basket, as well as potentially stretching his range outside of five feet. His KenPom comparison from last season – freshman-year Willie Cauley-Stein – should be a hint for what's to come in his second (and potentially last) season in Durham.

And as if Williams wasn't enough of a defensive presence alone, Duke dipped into the transfer portal this summer for super senior Theo John, a three-year starter at Marquette. The staff was already familiar with John – Carrawell recruited him out of high school and former Duke star Steve Wojciechowski coached him in college – but felt his blend of experience and production was exactly what this roster needed. “He battled some injuries this past year at Marquette, but if you look at his three prior seasons, he was just a stable force for them inside,” Scheyer says. “If you look at the winning teams, being able to defend pick-and-roll, rebound and have a physical presence is incredibly important. Theo provides all that.” Per KenPom, as a sophomore and junior, John had the No. 1 and No. 3 block rates in the entire Big East, respectively. No shocker, then, that he's second all-time in Marquette history in that category. He'll be this year's backup big, as well as a constant big brother to both Banchemo and Williams. “I can't say enough,” Scheyer says, “about the impact that Theo has made on our team.”

Spotlight on: Paolo Banchemo

Duke is no stranger to landing the best recruit in the country – just comb through recent recruiting rankings at your leisure, and pick your favorites – but the hype surrounding Banchemo is at a whole 'nother level. At 6-foot-10 and 250 pounds, Banchemo is not just one of Duke's biggest players, but by season's end, he very well may be its best. There's a reason he's being touted as the potential No. 1 overall pick in next year's NBA Draft. Just take it from Scheyer:

“It's rare when you get the trio: the combination of size, skill and feel. He has all three at, I would say, as high of a level as you can get.” Scheyer says. “Then you add on top of that, all he cares about is winning. He's a great teammate, coachable, listens well. So he's been really fun to work with on a daily basis. And as good as he is now, I think he's going to grow tremendously during the entire season. He's going to be a guy that can play every position. You'll see him bringing the ball up the floor. He can score inside. He can really pass. And he's going to defend every position.”

“So besides that,” Scheyer says, dripping with sarcasm, “he stinks.”

Obviously, Banchemo does not. But what you hear there is that this is more than just your average talented big man. Banchemo's best gift is his versatility – that he, realistically, can handle the ball like a point guard at his size. That he has the skill to drive into traffic, the basketball IQ to read the defense as he does, and the physical tools to either finish or whip a pass to the corner in a second's time. That is ... not normal. Frankly, it sounds a bit like how Duke used Williamson's lone college season. That wouldn't be a surprise, although Banchemo is probably more skilled now than Williamson was (although not quite as athletic). So while, yes, Roach is this team's starting point guard, Banchemo absolutely at times is going to function as a point forward. And defensively, the staff feels comfortable with him defending anyone else on the floor – anyone.

“I mean, obviously he's a unique talent,” Moore says. “He's a once-in-a-generation kind of guy.”

Recruiting

With Krzyzewski's impending retirement, Scheyer ran the show out recruiting this summer, criss-crossing the country and building relationships with the players who will form his first teams. And, if the early results are any indication, there won't be any drop-off from Coach K.

In his first few months, Scheyer has already landed commitments from five total prospects, four of them being five-star talents. In 2022, that looks like:

- No. 2 overall, 7-foot-1 center Dereck Lively II
- No. 5 player, 6-foot-6 wing Dariq Whitehead
- No. 8 overall, 6-foot-11 forward Kyle ‘Flip’ Filipowski
- No. 56 overall, 6-foot-5 shooting guard Jaden Schutt

And there's also five-star 2023 point guard Caleb Foster, rated the No. 12 player in his class, per the 247Sports Composite. So ... yeah, it's been a busy first summer for Scheyer, who still has more work to do before he takes over for good in April. “We need a big class to come in right away,” he says. “We've loved the start that we've built here, and we're a long way from a finished product, both for this year and for next.”

Duke is still in a strong position to land five-star wing Mark Mitchell and four-star combo guard J.J. Starling in the 2022 class, which almost definitely would give the Blue Devils the top group in the country. Regardless of what happens with those two, it's clear Scheyer intends to continue stacking elite high schoolers as he transitions the program into a new era. That doesn't mean Duke won't take transfers – see John and Jones this year – but unlike other high major schools who are completely shifting their philosophies, the program still sees itself as a primary developer of high school talent.

“That's never going to be our main focus,” Scheyer says of the portal, “but it's a resource and a tool that we're going to be open-minded about.”

Schedule analysis

Talk about a start to Coach K's farewell tour:

Nov. 9, in Madison Square Garden, all eyes trained on the Champions Classic, against powerhouse Kentucky.

“We wouldn't want it any other way,” Moore says with a grin. “You come to Duke because you want to play with that target on your back. And I think for all of us, we came here to really make a statement: that we're one of the best teams in the country.”

But Duke's interesting nonconference slate doesn't end there. On Nov. 12, Duke hosts Krzyzewski's alma mater Army, which – despite not being a ranked opponent – will be quite the emotional foe. On Nov. 26, Duke travels to Las Vegas to face likely preseason No. 1 Gonzaga, in what might very well be a Final Four preview. There's also a trip to Ohio State for Krzyzewski's final ACC-Big Ten Challenge before conference play begins. Duke travels to Notre Dame, Syracuse, Florida State and Virginia this season, not to mention the two biggest games of the year: Krzyzewski's final matchups against North Carolina. The first is Feb. 5 at UNC, with the season finale – Coach K's final home game in Cameron Indoor – on March 5. The get-in price for those tickets should be as outrageous as you can imagine. A hint: Four such tickets were recently auctioned off for charity (along with lodging at the Washington Duke Inn) and they went for... a cool \$1 million. Yes, really.

The ceiling

The trio of five-star freshmen – Banchemo, Griffin and Keels – are as good as expected, providing Duke the 3-point shooting it lacked last season. Roach takes a step up and becomes an undisputed floor general. Moore finally figures it all out and becomes the do-everything wing this team needs defensively. Williams emerges as one of the nation's best rim protectors and anchors a top-10 defensive unit. The Blue Devils, with the ideal blend of youth and experience, grow as the season goes along, ultimately culminating in a sixth national title for Krzyzewski before he retires.

The floor

Roach struggles with decision-making and shooting like last season, and the team never finds a consistent distributor. Baker's shooting woes continue, and none of the freshmen emerge as consistent marksmen, either. Williams still has flashes of greatness, but struggles with consistency on a nightly basis. Moore struggles to find his role, and ultimately comes up empty when Duke needs him most. This team is far too talented to miss the NCAA Tournament altogether, but those struggles result in an early-round exit and a stream of what-ifs.

Final report

Krzyzewski may not be focused on this being his final season, but when you're talking about the retirement of arguably the best men's college basketball coach of all time, it's impossible to avoid that narrative. Still, Coach K has bunkered down with his team, focusing on film and teaching and spending as much time as possible doing the thing he loves most: coaching. Not being out on the road has allowed him to lean into that role even more robustly.

And yet, for the people close to him, there's a desire for one final bow on top. The storybook ending. To give K the same treatment other legends of their sports – David Robinson, Peyton Manning, Ray Lewis, to name a few – had in their farewell seasons. And with the combination of veterans and young studs that Krzyzewski has assembled, that's absolutely within the realm of possibility this year. Just listen to one of his players, and how he's seen his head coach this preseason compared to years past:

“Coach is gonna always be the same, but since I've known him for some while, I can tell he wants this one a little more,” Moore says. “I mean, everybody wants that last one to go out with.”

Now, time to get it.

How Dereck Lively became the player every school wanted – and Duke got

By Dana O'Neil, The Athletic (September 20, 2021)

WEST CHESTER, Pa. – With the sunlight fading into the early fall evening, Dereck Lively stepped outside of the athletic center at Westtown School and announced his decision to play at Duke. His mother, Kathy Drysdale, stood by his side.

Broadcast on ESPN, these decisions are the very public dog and pony show of recruiting, igniting message boards and inspiring analysts both in full throat. By choosing the Blue Devils, Lively, the No. 2 player in the Class of 2022 according to the 247Sports Composite, now serves as the official stamp of approval on Jon Scheyer as successor to Mike Krzyzewski.

Behind the scenes, though, there is something much more intimate and real going on. Two hours before he made his announcement, Lively and his mother sat down in the small team room to discuss how they got here, to the moment of a high school senior choosing his college and his mother's steadying hand in guiding him there.

The two sound more like an old married couple than mother and son, not so much finishing each other's sentences as interrupting them with corrections, eye rolls and friendly goading. Asked about the lessons his mother taught him in basketball, Lively starts to answer when Drysdale pipes up. "Go ahead, tell her. Tell her." Lively leans back into the locker and shakes his head. "Pssh. She threw me out of practice. Or so she says. I don't remember it." This is how it goes, back and forth, for an hour, Drysdale nodding at Lively and puffing out her chest with a grin when he's asked to describe her, and he leaning back and looking at her when it's her turn, "OK, your turn."

This could be a very sad story. Parts of it are devastatingly sad, unfair even. Dereck Lively Sr. died unexpectedly in January 2012, leaving behind a confused 7-year-old who couldn't understand why the man he said was like a "superhero," wasn't around anymore.

Except Drysdale doesn't do sad. She is a practical woman, forthright and no-nonsense. "I'm not a why person," she says. "I'm a how do we handle it person."

She is also just one month removed from surgery to remove two lobes from her lungs, the latest in a now seven-year battle with Hodgkin's lymphoma. She already has gone through chemo, radiation and stem cell transplant, and is currently undergoing immunotherapy. She rattles off her battles as if she's reading a grocery list, dry-eyed and concise, her son nodding along as she explains. "He's already a statistic, as the child of a single mother," she says. "There is no way in hell he's going to be an orphan."

This is their reality, how a boy became not only a great basketball player but one mature enough to navigate all that must be handled in today's world of college basketball. "I always wanted him to be a kid," Drysdale says. "Because he already had to grow up so fast."

Lively has the gift of great genetics. Drysdale grew up in Michigan, the daughter of a basketball coach and former player at Xavier. The family had a halfcourt on the property and Drysdale naturally gravitated to the sport. She wound up at Penn State, a 1,000-point scorer under Rene Portland's first No. 1 ranked team, before parlaying that into a coaching career. His dad was a chef, but stood 6-foot-9.

Drysdale remembers telling her son that his father was gone, not so much the words but the gut in her stomach that the moment left. She worried about filling the void, of being both father and mother, but there's no real handbook for such a thing. She just made do, relying on a village of friends to fill the voids that she couldn't. Lively didn't give her much grief, which made it easier, but there were days where she didn't so much as breathe as she just made it through.

When she was coaching grassroots ball, she'd pack up her son's snacks, coloring books and favorite dinosaurs hoping it would keep him occupied, or leaning on the players' parents to serve as de facto babysitters. In 2012, mother and son relocated to Bellefonte, just outside of State College, after Drysdale took a job at her alma mater as a director of marketing in the athletics department. She wanted her son to make friends, so she insisted Lively try a different sport in each season. He swam, played football, and grudgingly played basketball. "I didn't really like it at first," he says. "I didn't want to play it at all." But he assimilated well, and they found their rhythm.

Two years later, Drysdale received her diagnosis. "That's when I had my, 'Why God? Why me?' moment," Lively says. "That's when it felt like my world fell apart." Except his mother wouldn't let it. Her stoic and sensible approach holding firm, she called on her support system to help make sure Lively's life didn't, in fact, fall apart. Schedules were made to make sure he got where he needed to get when he needed to get there, and friends shuttled her to and from chemo.

While Drysdale fought, Lively soared. By the sixth grade, he realized he was pretty good at this basketball thing and in the eighth grade, Drysdale sat him down, suggesting he attend high school outside of the area.

Lively was not a fan. "I didn't want to move away from my friends, go to boarding school," he says. "And my mother was sick. I wanted to stay home." Drysdale didn't offer a democracy, insisting she knew what was right, and promising that when it came time to pick a college, the decision would be all his. Lively enrolled at Westtown, about three hours from their home, playing for a team that has steadily attracted more and more talent under coach Seth Berger. It was not easy for either party. Drysdale bawled when she left, and Lively had to master the art of doing laundry, cleaning his room and making his own decisions.

It was the right call, though. Lively's time at Westtown coupled with his experience on Philly's Team Final elevated his game, and ultimately his stature among the recruiting experts. From "underappreciated and underestimated," as Berger termed Lively's early career, he blossomed into the second-best player in his class, recruited by a who's who list of college programs.

Mother and son navigated the decision-making process together, Drysdale reminding her son it was his choice, and that he needed to make it for the right reasons. "This is a business," she says. "But at the end of the day, it comes down to who are the guys you can play with for four years, and the coach you can play for? All of this other stuff, that doesn't matter." He could have lingered, milked it for all it was worth, but like his mother, he is far too practical for that. "All of these coaches calling at first, blowing smoke, it was great," he says. "And then it got old. Like, why are they all saying this stuff about me anyway? I just wanted to be done with it."

As he talks, Drysdale nods along. She appreciates his thoughtfulness, the way he's handled such a monumental and very public decision with such intelligence and care.

Two hours later, Drysdale walks out of the gym to the small gathering for Lively's announcement. Students gather in folding chairs, some chatting about Lively's future. "Dude, he's gonna make so much money now with the new NCAA stuff," one says to another.

As they sit down at the table set up just outside of a flower bed, Drysdale says to her semi-famous, soon to be a big deal son, "Don't fall. I could just see you doing that." She is not at the moment cancer-free, or even in remission. The latest surgery required more aggressive procedures than the doctors anticipated. Radiation essentially burned the lobes on her lungs, but they also found a cancerous cavity. They'll need another scan in October, after she heals, to see where she stands.

In Durham, on the Duke message boards and Twitter and no doubt in the Duke basketball offices, there is no doubt much celebration. Scheyer now has three players in the top eight, a decided sign that the Blue Devils are not exactly about to drop off the Earth.

Behind the scenes, after the show ends, Kathy Drysdale and Dereck Lively spend a good 20 minutes posing for pictures and meeting with friends. Lively wears his Duke shirt and hat proudly. "I have good days and bad days," she says of her health. "This is a good day."

Is Duke ready to bounce-back for its final season under Coach K?

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (July 22, 2021)

Last summer? No on-the-road recruiting, no on-campus visits, and no real on-court action with current players.

This summer? It's all back... not to mention the introduction of name, image, and likeness (NIL) to college athletics, and a still-overflowing transfer portal to sift through. At Duke specifically, there's even more to juggle: the impending retirement of the sport's winningest head coach; his assistant balancing his current and future roles; and the arrival of another fantastic, five-star-laden class. As the kids say, it is a lot.

And naturally, as the college basketball world spins back into action, you all have questions. I have (some) answers. Let's do it:

There has been so much change in such a short amount of time: legendary coaches retiring, the transfer portal, NIL rights, etc. My question is, what do you think college basketball will look like in say, 3 years? Mostly unchanged from the last 2 decades? Completely different? Or to narrow the focus to Duke specifically, does Duke continue the one-and-done model after Coach K leaves? Does that model even exist in 3 years? – Chris P.

You're right about a lot of that, Chris, and frankly, there might be more change to come. I'd be fairly surprised if the NBA didn't eventually – as in, within the next several years – drop its age requirement for draft-eligible players down to 18, once again opening the preps-to-pros pipeline that ended in 2005. That, of course, is going to dramatically change the talent pool that college hoops has to work with. So too will the ongoing development of other professional leagues, like the G League and Overtime Elite. Basically, even if the NBA doesn't make that change for a few more seasons, you're going to continue to see elite high schoolers opt for non-college options. That doesn't mean every elite high school kid will skip college for some pro option; there will always be value in an education, the branding bonus a school provides and the exposure advantage the sport has. But certainly a handful or two will now choose alternatives, where previously they might have been at places like Duke.

The impact that has? Well, we've already started to see it. The more experienced, more cohesive teams are going to be the best. Look at what Baylor and Gonzaga did this season, compared to the struggles of freshman-heavy units at Duke and Kentucky. Now, did the pandemic exacerbate many of the issues that come with young rosters? Of course, and that won't be the case again this season. But no, I don't believe teams will be bringing in five or six five-star prospects in a class anymore. You're going to see much more mining of the transfer portal instead. For example, as one coach told me at Adidas' recruiting event in early July, why take and develop a high school freshman who might not produce that season, when instead you can land him as a semi-developed sophomore the following year? So Duke will still be Duke, and it'll land its fair share of five-star talents, but roster construction is changing on the fly. College basketball will still be good, and entertaining, but yeah, it's also going to look a bit different.

Do you think Duke will have a bounce-back year? How will it being Coach K's last year affect any of these guys or the organization? – Sandy P.

The bounceback is definitely coming. And I don't just say that because last season was a struggle; looking at this roster, if everything breaks the right way, Duke pretty clearly has the pieces to win a national championship. The frontcourt, anchored by Mark Williams and freshman Paolo Bancho, will be among the best in the nation. In Wendell Moore Jr. and A.J. Griffin, you have two versatile wings, and the former has lots of experience. And in the backcourt, sophomore Jeremy Roach and freshman Trevor Keels – who played together in high school – offer interesting dynamics individually and combined. Depth is the biggest concern I have, really. Beside the aforementioned six, there's essentially one backup at each position group: freshman Jaylen Blakes in the backcourt, senior Joey Baker on the wing and transfer Theo John in the frontcourt. Coach K doesn't mind a smaller rotation, which will be the case again this season, but expecting all five newbies to produce immediately is a big ask.

As for Coach K's final season affecting guys, I'm sure it will, but how exactly is hard to say. There's going to be a spotlight on this team all season, regardless of its success, and every win and loss will be scrutinized through the prism of Krzyzewski's final act. I'm sure he and his staff have spoken with the team at length about it, but each guy will also handle it differently. K cares about winning above all else, so he'll try to keep his team insulated from as much as he can, but there's only so much you can shield with something this monumental.

How much do you think recruiting will be affected by K leaving? Do you think it will require Duke to recruit differently than they have the past 6-7 years? – George G.

It'll be different, obviously, but Jon Scheyer has already been a force on the recruiting trail the last few years. Now he's just the closer, rather than having Krzyzewski roll out his box of rings. Duke will still chase and land five-stars – Dariq Whitehead, a top-10 player in the 2023 class, should soon become the first such talent Scheyer lands in his new role – like it always has. It's funny, though; you'd think a massive part of the appeal of playing at Duke is playing for someone like Coach K. And while that is the case, so many recruits speak about the program's other advantages – the facilities, the track record for sending guys to the league, the rest of the coaching staff, the academics, Durham as a city – when they ultimately commit. My point is, Duke isn't going to fall off a cliff just because Krzyzewski is retiring. He'll still be around in some capacity, Scheyer is more than capable and Duke has plenty of other selling points that are attractive to promising high schoolers.

Obviously there are previous commitments and the ACC regular season, but what effect, if any, has Coach K's retirement had on scheduling for this upcoming season? – Bruce L.

Duke's nonconference schedule hasn't been released in full yet, but we do know a good bit. The Blue Devils open the season Nov. 9 against Kentucky in Madison Square Garden, as part of the Champions Classic. Then on Nov. 26, the team will play another premiere neutral-court game, this time against likely preseason-No. 1 Gonzaga. On Nov. 30, Duke travels to Ohio State for the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. And as I reported on Twitter this week, Duke will not be playing at Michigan State this year, although that makeup game – for MSU playing last year's Champions Classic matchup in Durham instead of a neutral site – will happen at some point TBD in the future. That's three marquee nonconference games before the month of December; we'll have a good idea of what this team looks like early on.

Beyond those highlights, Duke is hosting an MTE that features Army, Campbell and Hartford; as well as The Citadel, in a makeup from last season's canceled contest. Aside from the ACC schedule, that doesn't leave a lot of room for more nonconference games. Still, it's a great schedule for fans and for the sport – and for my travel rewards accounts.

We haven't seen much of Mark Williams in videos released by the social media team. Is it the student-athlete's choice whether they are on campus over the summer? – Eoin R.

Williams is on campus, along with the rest of the team. I'm not sure which posts you saw, but he's been in a number of videos and pictures I've seen across various socials. He's also in the most-recent scrimmage video the team posted, which is less than two weeks old.

Last offseason we heard comment after comment about Wendell Moore's improvement and ascent to leader. He then started the season with one of the worst shooting stretches in recent memory, plus a myriad of unforced turnovers. Looking back, is there any sense of what went wrong? It seemed when he shifted to a point forward role he became more comfortable later in the year. Any idea of steps taken to get him in the right spots and comfortable this time around? – Colin P.

Admittedly, I was one of the people hyping up Moore's sophomore season; I saw him play in high school, loved him, was impressed by his non-injured time as a freshman, and wrote this lengthy feature on him last November. To be honest, I think most of those early-season struggles were mental for Moore. The dude has the ability to knock down shots, guard multiple positions, get to the lane, be a creative passer – he's done it all in spurts – but the consistency just hasn't been there. I fully believe there was added pressure on him, both externally and internally, to step up for a team that, as we all saw by season's end, needed contributors to emerge. Basically, I think he got in his own head, to the point where he was thinking so much he wasn't just allowing himself to play instinctively and freely.

As Matthew Hurt and Williams emerged later on in the season, I thought Moore flipped a page. That's what I'm expecting of him again this season: to be a do-everything piece Krzyzewski can slide up and down the rotation depending on matchup. Not having the pressure to be "the guy" should help Moore pick up where he left off the last five or so weeks of last season.

Duke and Coach K have always focused on strong point guard play. I did not think Duke had strong point guard play last year. The Devils functioned best when Jordan Goldwire took over the point. Will one of the frosh be able to strengthen the point guard position, or even wrest it away from Jeremy Roach? – Renny D.

I might push back on that idea, Renny, that Duke functioned best with Goldwire at the point. Certainly Goldwire's experience and defense made him a strong fit for an otherwise youthful team, but his offensive limitations also seriously inhibited Duke's ability to score at times. Roach was inconsistent – both because he was a freshman and because he was still returning from a knee injury – but when he was good, he was good.

As of today, though, I'd say point guard is probably the position I'm most worried about for Duke. The frontcourt is set. Griffin is a star in the making on the wing, and either Moore or Keels (or Joey Baker) can play shooting guard. But at point guard, Roach has to take a major step up, both in terms of his individual offense and his ability to run a team. He averaged 8.7 points and 2.8 assists per game last season in 27.4 minutes per game, but all of those totals took a hit as the season progressed. Roach has looked good in all the videos the team has released this summer, especially shooting the ball, but considering the limited depth behind him – it's basically just Keels, who is more of a combo guard, and Blakes, who reclassified to enroll early – there's a lot of pressure on Roach to produce.

Thoughts on what Coach K will do in retirement? TV? Pickleball? – Peter B.

Maybe some TV, if we're lucky. Otherwise? Attend Duke games, spend time with his family. Garden. Drink wine. Live the life, basically. He's earned it, no?

Amile Jefferson's Duke 'story' has a new chapter

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (July 21, 2021)

It's been nearly a decade since Duke became part of Amile Jefferson's life and he's glad that bond remains as strong as ever.

A three-time captain under coach Mike Krzyzewski during his playing days from 2012-2017, Jefferson is returning to campus as the program's director of player development, the school announced Wednesday.

Krzyzewski announced late last month that he planned to add Jefferson to the staff.

"This is an honor to be back at Duke and I'm so grateful to Coach Krzyzewski for considering me for this opportunity," Jefferson said in a statement released by Duke. "I'd also like to thank Coach (Jon) Scheyer for his help through the process and look forward to his leadership in the future. Duke has been a part of my story and my life and it's a privilege to give back to the program and the university that has meant so much. I can't wait to work with these guys -- helping them develop, grow and learn -- and be a small part of something bigger than myself."

Jefferson played on Duke's 2015 NCAA championship team and was a senior captain on the 2017 team that won the ACC championship.

"It is a thrill to have Amile back in our program," Krzyzewski said in a statement on Wednesday. "Amile is truly one of the best representatives of Duke Basketball as a fierce competitor who never took a day off -- whether it was in a game, on the practice court, and more importantly in the classroom. This position serves such an important role in helping our players develop personally, socially and athletically. I'm so proud of the man he has become, and know there are few better to take on this opportunity."

NCAA rules only allow a head coach and three assistant coaches to work with players on the court and recruit. Those roles are currently filled by Krzyzewski, associate head coaches Jon Scheyer and Chris Carrawell and assistant coach Nolan Smith.

Of course, Krzyzewski will retire from his head coaching duties when the upcoming season ends with Scheyer taking over as head coach. That will open up an assistant coaching role and this puts Jefferson in line for a promotion at that time.

How Jon Scheyer's Glenbrook North childhood explains his rise to Duke head coach

By Brian Hamilton, The Athletic (July 20, 2021)

NORTHBROOK, Ill. – The new Glenbrook North High School scoreboard is pretty nice, as luxuries in suburban multipurpose gyms go. It's also bigger than its predecessor and compelled administrators to do some redecoration upon installation. This is how a large and thoughtful and well-crafted jersey-retirement signboard comes to rest on a carpeted floor, in a corner of an assistant athletic director's office, like a semi-ancient relic you need a guide and a tattered map to find.

Here lies Jon Scheyer, Class of 2006. But only figuratively and only for the moment. A redesigned board to fit the space is on order, for one. And the former state champ and Illinois Mr. Basketball and McDonald's All-American – yes, that's all spelled out on the gym wall adornments – is never out of mind within these town limits. For that matter, he's not even really out of sight, right here and right now.

In a display case, across the hall from the gym's main entrance, is Scheyer's Mr. Basketball plaque. And two for Parade All-American honors. And another for Gatorade Player of the Year. And a limited edition basketball honoring his achievements. And a picture of Scheyer with Morgan Wooten at the McDonald's All-American game, which sits one shelf below the official McDonald's All-American certificate. And Scheyer's college jersey. Plus other memorabilia from postseason runs and that state title, just one of 10 in any sport in school history. It is a meticulously curated altar to one kid's greatness and its echoes. It is, if you will, the Scheyer Shrine.

Before Jon Scheyer was a big deal because he's the next men's basketball coach at Duke, he was an insanely big deal because he was one of the best basketball players this state has ever seen and, as such, something like a small-town hoops demigod. He had ad hoc bodyguards. He had a sandwich named after him. He bore the full weight of the hopes of a place he loved dearly. And he somehow navigated all of it with uncommon grace.

To understand how a 33-year-old will handle maybe the hardest job in college basketball history, you have to understand he's kind of already lived the life he's about to live. "It certainly is crazy, but I also feel like he's prepared," says Justin Weiner, who has known Scheyer since preschool and is now a baseball and football coach at Glenbrook North. "They're not going to put someone in this job who isn't prepared to be successful. And I've never seen Jon in a position where he's not been prepared to be successful."

Revisiting the Jon Scheyer origin story is now, inevitably, a search for clues as to how he'll keep post-Krzyzewski Duke humming, beginning with the 2022-23 season. Those 3,034 points scored during his high school career – still good for fourth in state of Illinois history – are in a way only a symptom. The absurd competitiveness? The precocious on-court feel and real-time grasp of basketball nuance? The uncanny knack for getting everyone to follow his lead, without resorting to I'm better than you to make his case? Generally being a normal person in circumstances that are cartoonishly abnormal?

Northbrook, a suburb of 33,000 residents about 25 miles north of downtown Chicago proper, was the incubator for all of it. Here, Scheyer developed into the kind of person, in every sense, who even can fathom taking on a job of Duke's magnitude. This place is not Durham, and those years are not the same as the ones to come. Obviously. But it's the same life, writ small. A dress rehearsal on a bigger stage than you think, for a life spent on the biggest stage conceivable.

"The same for me happened for him: We have such supportive family and friends back in Northbrook, any struggles in our careers, we've been able to rely on them and use them to help us out of a rut or pick us up a little bit," says Jason Kipnis, a Northbrook native and Scheyer friend and, most notably, a two-time All-Star second baseman for the Cleveland Indians. "The same thing I found in Cleveland, I think he found at Duke. You're there for long enough, you develop friends into family. He's built up the pillars of support to where he knows he's not alone in this journey at all."

So you start to ask around, and unsurprisingly, tall tales of an insatiable need to win roll off everyone's tongues. The Scheyer house had a pool in the backyard, making it a natural epicenter for warm-weather adolescent shenanigans. One of the most memorable activities was pool basketball. Friends broken into teams, attempting to score on a mini-hoop at water's edge. Over time, one strategy for winning at pool basketball beat all the others: be on Jon Scheyer's side.

Because his team strategized. His team huddled up and discussed the angles and where the ball needed to go – or, more accurately, his teammates listened to Jon tell them what the angles were and where the ball needed to go. And, well, if things didn't quite go as planned, rules strangely seemed to shift in favor of Scheyer's squads at key moments, or calls reliably favored the "home" team more often than not, and so on.

It might have been frustrating if his pals expected anything less. "This is a true story," says Sean Wallis, a longtime friend and a teammate on that Glenbrook North championship squad of 2005, not to mention a Division III All-American himself. "He'd go into the settings to change how the defense would pick up in a video game, and change who the matchups are, and double-team people. I'm like, dude, just play the game. What are you doing?"

Long nights of best-of-5 one-on-one sessions against Wallis grew longer on the fairly rare occasions Wallis actually won; Scheyer would insist they stay in the gym until he came out on top. It wasn't pique reserved for a close buddy delivering the L. "If he lost a pickup game," former Glenbrook North coach Dave Weber says with a laugh, "I would not want to be his teammate." No, being competitive isn't determinative. Anyone who plays college basketball and/or coaches college basketball must be pathologically competitive, or they ought not bother at all. But Scheyer's confidants aren't resting their case simply because their friend made sure his basketball schedule permitted him to show up and pitch his Shelby's Too little league baseball team to a World Series win over Town Car Wash in eighth grade.

Their point, generally, revolves around Scheyer's circumstances: Any misgivings about his move one seat over from associate head coach will strike the perfect antagonistic chord, to where they can't imagine him allowing himself to fail. "The competitive nature inside of him is not competing with everything Coach K did but all the people who have said, 'This is an impossible act to follow,'" Wallis says. "Man, I'll tell you, I will never doubt Jon. Those types of comments only fire him up more for the opportunity."

Emotion won't win 30-odd games each winter, of course, but neither did it at Glenbrook North in the mid-aughts. Having a very talented player helped. Having a very talented player who might've been smarter than everyone else on the floor, who possessed a self-awareness beyond his years, helped even more.

In 2003, Glenbrook North met Hoffman Estates High School in a state tournament sectional final. By Weber's estimation, Hoffman Estates had the better team. So he deployed a triangle-and-two defense to unsettle the opposition and hopefully mitigate any talent disadvantage. The problem? Hoffman Estates wasn't unsettled, not entirely. It simply started screening the two Glenbrook North defenders chasing individual assignments. Weber effectively had to conjure up another layer of answers on the fly – the adjustment to the adjustment to the adjustment – when a freshman on the floor caught his eye.

Coach, Scheyer said, why don't we just switch that?

"I was like, 'You're right,'" Weber says now. "And it worked to perfection."

Glenbrook North won by seven and ultimately finished third in the state that spring. It was a sign of what was to come on multiple levels. Scheyer's innate feel and Xs and Os acumen would be as surpassing as his scoring prowess over his prep career. "He taught me a lot," Weber says. Go back and rewatch the file footage of Glenbrook North games, and Weiner, then a student broadcaster, promises you'll see countless examples of Scheyer directing traffic during the flow of a game or mapping out the next possessions in timeout huddles. Wallis recalls car rides to grassroots tournaments during which Scheyer busied himself by watching game film, and not because anyone made him do it, and not necessarily because he wanted to be a coach someday.

Scheyer understood, in a way few high school players would, that studying film not only made him better but also empowered him to raise the floor for the rest of the roster. During his retirement news conference, Krzyzewski lauded his successor's basketball intelligence, as if it were the best-kept secret in the game; moments such as these at Glenbrook North seeded an appraisal like that years later. "He made everyone better," Weiner says, "because he knew the next move."

The trick, then, is to get unequivocal buy-in. It's not easy being the most talented and the most demanding. Even good friends have egos. Trip the wrong wire, the whole thing blows up.

Scheyer never did. How?

"Probably because he was the best player and wasn't a dick," Kipnis says. "It's funny how simple it is sometimes. When you're a really good player and not an asshole about it, guys tend to gravitate towards that."

How Jon Scheyer's childhood explains his rise to Duke head coach (cont.)

By Brian Hamilton, The Athletic (July 20, 2021)

He put in the time to earn his voice, which was part of it; after finishing dinner and homework, Scheyer returned to the Glenbrook North gym with his father for a shooting workout pretty much every night. (Weber can't say Scheyer for sure acquired a key to the place ... but he pretty much assumes Scheyer acquired a key to the place.) As critically, Scheyer worked on relationships as diligently as he worked on his jumper. He befriended Jordan Gaffen, a 20-something volunteer team manager who had dealt with a lifetime of struggles due to speech and language processing disorders; Scheyer engaged Gaffen on activities big and small, called him a teammate and treated him as an equal. The night before one sectional final, Scheyer called the entire varsity team back to the gym at 9 and gathered everyone in a circle at midcourt. He then asked the group to explain what the next day meant to them, player by player. When someone relayed the story to Weber the next day, he had one thought: There's no way we're going to lose.

By the end of Scheyer's junior season, with multiple future college hoops players on the roster, a state championship was in sight. So before the playoffs began, Glenbrook North's All-American sat down with a stack of paper and a pen. He wrote a personal note to every one of his teammates, spelling out what they needed to do as individuals and as a team. He wrote that he knew the Spartans could win, but they needed to do it together, because they'd been playing together for too long not to make it happen.

"It wasn't just for a couple players that were key and who were starting," Wallis says. "He did that for everyone."

Turn off Shermer Road, head west past the freshly paved parking lots and the Center for the Performing Arts, pull into a space in the lot adjacent to the football field and you can't miss it: a white rectangle held up by green posts, with GLENBROOK NORTH STATE CHAMPIONS emblazoned at the top. Ten in all, dating back to 1966. The lone boys' basketball championship of 2005 is on the top of the right column. A vision turned reality for Jon Scheyer, and very much a moment in time for his town.

Still, relative to the years of ScheyerMania, it's a rather large log tossed on an absolute wildfire. It didn't start or end anything. Before and after that, students arrived for the sophomore boys' basketball games to have any chance at a seat for the varsity tilts. The line for regular spectators sometimes stretched as far as the eye could see from inside the doors. Wallis' coach at Washington University would later tell him he's never parked farther away for a high school game than he did for Glenbrook North's sectional in the 2005 playoff run. Scheyer, for years, had two assistant athletic directors serve as his ad hoc bodyguards, helping him move through the throngs waiting outside doors or at the bottom of stairwells for autographs – at home or on the road. By the end of his career, during the first 30 minutes of Glenbrook North practice, the Spartans stretched and warmed up while Scheyer used that window for media requests.

The zeal hasn't waned. Following Duke's national title, Scheyer returned to his high school alma mater for an assembly; a standing-room-only crowd filled the space. Weiner once had Scheyer drop by one of his physical education classes and, as he puts it, "lost the class completely." The old gym floor is basically hallowed ground: When Glenbrook North put down new hardwood a few years back, it saved the planks with the tip-off circle, and they now hang in the mezzanine.

"Someone said to me, 'My daughter is friends on Facebook with Jon!'" Weber says. "I was like, oh my God. What does that really mean?"

"It comes up so often: 'Oh, were you Scheyer's year? Or the year before Scheyer?' 'You played with Jon Scheyer?'" Wallis says. "That conversation happens for me on a monthly if not weekly basis."

"Around the area, everyone knew who Jon was," Weiner says. "In school, of course, it's Jon Scheyer. You wanted to sit next to him in the blocks, you wanted to go to lunch with him. He's had those experiences where most people might let it get to their head, and he never did."

As Duke's next head coach, there will be pressure to win, to coach every game better than the other guy, to run a program with more harmony and belief than anyone else's, to live as the center of a roiling universe with patience and humanity, to make even the smallest people feel giant-sized, and to flinch not once during the whole ordeal, year after year after year. It's a hell of a responsibility.

Good thing Jon Scheyer has had some practice.

"There's just a special little part of him that, I don't know why he has it, but he does have it," says Weber, who knows a bit about college basketball coaches, considering his older brother Bruce has been one for 40-plus years. "And he's worked under Coach K for all these years and played for him and that's taught him a lot. He just has that little intangible. You never know, but I really think it's going to work."

Little Louie's, established in 1967, occupies a spot near the beating heart of Northbrook, steps away from the intersection of downtown's main streets, across from the park that is literally called The Village Green. It's a redoubtable two-room joint serving up damn near anything preparable on a flat top grill or in a fryer, with a heaping side of nostalgia. The walls are lathered in memories: small plaques for little league softball and baseball teams, infinite shots of locals, signed AC/DC and Cheap Trick album covers, autographed pictures of Keifer Sutherland and Kid Rock among countless others. ("Your hot dog is an 'American Bad Ass!'" was the inscription left by Mssr. Rock.)

Arguably nobody has a larger presence than a skinny local basketball player. In the dining room hangs the front page of the sports section after Glenbrook North won its state title, Jon Scheyer tugging his jersey and smiling wide. Above that is the Sports Illustrated cover following Duke's 2010 national championship, autographed by Scheyer. ("To Little Louie's: Thanks for never doubting me!" has nothing on Kid Rock, honestly.) And then there's the grid of printouts describing specialty sandwiches on the Louie's menu, next to the order counter.

The Munson. The Bad Mother Clucker. The Von Dripsy.

And, of course, The Scheyer.

Skirt steak, romaine lettuce, tomato, avocado, grilled onion on fresh bread with a side of teriyaki dressing. (It is, The Athletic has learned, really tasty and insanely messy, so double order the napkins.)

"That was what he would eat every time," says Pete Weiss, the owner of Louie's. "Jon would come in all the time, and he came up with this sandwich and I just called it The Scheyer. It was just his thing. That's what he wanted. And I would never say no to him, obviously."

Weiss, like a lot of people around here, has his Jon Scheyer stories. He remembers a 9-year-old playing ball across the street with vision beyond anything someone can expect from a grade schooler ... and that same kid hung out with Weiss in Durham a few hours before they and everyone else at Cameron Indoor Stadium watched Zion Williamson's shoe explode. Also like a lot of people around here, Weiss misses his guy Jon, all while his excitement and pride about what's next renders him more or less speechless. "I have never seen anybody doubted more in my life than Jon," the 45-year-old Weiss says, "and he's the biggest winner I know."

And that's the thing.

It is crazy to everyone that the kid they played video games with or coached or fed is the next coach at Duke. Absolutely. But it's also not crazy. At all. Nor is it crazy for them to believe Scheyer will handle an awesome burden with aplomb. They've seen him do it. This next part isn't a new chapter. It's a sequel. Bigger, brasher, the stakes raised astronomically. And they think they kind of know how it's going to end.

Sean Wallis, in fact, was included in Jon Scheyer's first round of calls once one of the most talked-about transitions in the history of the sport had been settled. This was only fitting. Beyond their longstanding friendship, Wallis and Scheyer had played in the same backcourt forever growing up, sharing what everyone describes as an almost psychic connection on the floor. Neither could move without the other knowing where he'd be. So, naturally, Scheyer and his wife, Marcelle, reached out over FaceTime to connect with Wallis and his wife when this next momentous step was official.

We got the job, Scheyer announced.

There was joy and smiling and congratulations and all that, but also a weird, intangible sensation lingering over the connection. After a moment or two, one of the call's participants addressed the vibe.

I feel like you're not that surprised, Scheyer told his old friend.

"It's a combination, right?" Wallis says about a week after the world changed, but in a way that's totally familiar to everyone living in it. "You are surprised, because you weren't sure it was going to happen. But you also aren't surprised because you know he's going to do an amazing job. And it should be him. That's the guy."

‘Our next coach is in this room’: Inside Duke’s secret search to replace Coach K

By Seth Davis and Brendan Marks, The Athletic (June 21, 2021)

It started as an ordinary staff meeting. On April 12, Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski summoned his three assistants – Jon Scheyer, Chris Carrawell and Nolan Smith – to the conference room adjacent his office on the sixth floor of the Schwartz-Butters Athletic Center. Krzyzewski had just returned with his wife, Mickie, from a brief vacation in Las Vegas. (“That’s Coach’s spot,” Smith says.) The respite helped the Krzyzewskis recover from a difficult season and clear their minds for the path ahead.

With his assistants seated around the table, Krzyzewski revealed that he had reached a decision: He wanted to coach one more season and then retire. “Being in that moment, it was like, ‘Wow, this is arguably the greatest coach of all time stepping away from the game, and here I am witnessing it behind the scenes,’” Smith says. Krzyzewski, who turns 75 in February, had long maintained he wouldn’t announce his retirement in advance, but he told the guys he wanted to be transparent with recruits about his intentions. He also liked the idea of having a clear succession plan in place. That meant asking the university to choose the next coach before the season started.

Upon hearing that idea, Carrawell spoke up: “I believe our next coach is in this room.”

All eyes turned to Scheyer. At 33, he was the age Krzyzewski was when Duke hired him in 1980. Unlike Scheyer, Krzyzewski had previous head coaching experience for five years at Army, but Krzyzewski strongly believed Scheyer was far more equipped to become the head coach at Duke than he was in 1980. Scheyer was a senior co-captain on Duke’s 2010 NCAA championship team, and he has been on Krzyzewski’s staff for eight years, the last three as associate head coach. They are fellow Chicago natives and kindred spirits, and they have talked many times over the years about basketball, life and the future. Yet until that moment, they had never discussed the possibility that Scheyer would be Coach K’s heir apparent.

Krzyzewski did not expect Carrawell to make that observation, but he seemed pleased that he had. “Well, I was going to talk to you privately,” he said, turning to Scheyer, “but it makes a lot of sense. I think you’d be terrific. You’re here, you know the program, you understand the culture. You’re ready to do this.”

It was a lot for Scheyer to take in. He figured he would be in the mix whenever Krzyzewski decided to retire, but he also knew there were plenty of former Duke players and assistants – including ones with head coaching experience – who would be viable candidates as well. Moreover, Scheyer had interviewed in March for the head coaching vacancies at UNLV and DePaul, only to be passed over both times. He was particularly disappointed he didn’t get the DePaul job, considering both he and his wife are from Chicago and still have family there. As his mind spun, Scheyer felt grateful that Carrawell and Krzyzewski had endorsed him so strongly. “That was pretty powerful,” he says. “When the people who are closest to you believe in you like that, it means a lot.”

As the next few weeks passed, Krzyzewski would reference the situation during staff meetings, but Scheyer heard little about what was going on behind the scenes. He wondered at times if Coach K had changed his mind. Finally, on the afternoon of Sunday, May 23, Scheyer got the call he’d been waiting for while he was cooking burgers in his backyard on the family’s Weber gas grill. (“He’s a lot better on the grill than in the kitchen,” his wife, Marcelle, jokes.) The caller was Todd Turner, founder and president of Collegiate Sports Associates, a North Carolina-based executive search firm the school retained to assist with the hire. Scheyer handed Marcelle the spatula and answered his phone. “We’d like to interview you,” Turner said. “Are you interested?”

Scheyer smiled. “Absolutely, 100 percent, yes.”

He hung up and told Marcelle the news. She felt a wave of excitement, tinged with a current of dread; her husband had, after all, just emerged from two other job searches empty-handed. “I got my hopes up, and then I got disappointed,” she says. “I didn’t want that to happen again.”

At that moment, Scheyer didn’t have a firm idea of what his chances were. He guessed they were around 50/50. The only thing he could do was rely on his instincts, just as he had as a player. Whatever happened, he was ready to take his best shot. “I don’t go into anything thinking I’m going to lose,” he says. “I understood this is a high-level job and it’s going to be incredibly competitive. But ultimately, I’m going to bet on myself.”

Krzyzewski and his wife, Mickie, had discussed the prospect of his retirement often over the last few years. She, too, will turn 75 soon, and all 10 of their grandchildren live in the area. Mickie had felt increasingly strongly of late that it was time for her husband to step away. That was especially true in the wake of the pandemic-induced difficulties of last season, when the Blue Devils missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time in more than two decades.

Advancing age was a big factor, but the rapidly evolving environment inside the sport also played a part in their decision. The transfer market in college basketball has exploded over the last decade, and given the passage of the NCAA’s one-time transfer rule, player movement this offseason has reached record highs. Rules are also on the way that, for the first time, will enable college players to profit off of their name, image and likeness (NIL) away from the court. Krzyzewski has adapted to many such changes during his four decades as a head coach, and he was a strong advocate for the new NIL rules. But managing all this tumult requires a long haul, not a quick fix, and he wasn’t prepared for that kind of journey. “He’s not scared of NIL, he’s not scared of the transfers, he’s not scared of what’s coming,” says ESPN broadcaster Chris Spatola, who is married to Krzyzewski’s youngest daughter, Jamie. “I just don’t think he had the energy to say, OK, how do we attack the next five years?”

After Krzyzewski and his wife returned from their postseason trip to Vegas, they held a Zoom call with their three daughters on April 10 to share their decision. He told his staff two days later. The search for his replacement was further complicated by the impending retirement of Duke’s athletic director, Kevin White. His deputy, Nina King, has been named his replacement and will take over in August. The two of them worked with Duke president Vincent Price to put Krzyzewski’s plan into action. The first task was to form a search committee, and then go through the painstaking process of identifying candidates, interviewing them, and selecting a coach – all of which had to be done out of the public eye.

It would not be easy to keep such a big secret. After a smattering of cryptic rumors made their way onto Twitter the night of May 11, Spatola was bombarded by text messages and phone calls from media colleagues wanting to know what was up. Jon Jackson, Duke’s deputy athletic director for men’s basketball and external affairs, also got an email overnight from The Athletic asking about a tip from an anonymous source indicating that Krzyzewski had decided this would be his last season. Since nothing had been officially activated yet, Jackson was able to be cagey yet truthful in the statement he provided. Jackson acknowledged that discussions about Krzyzewski’s future were ongoing but nothing new, and anything beyond that was “speculative.” He added, “We look forward to many more games with him as our leader.” Jackson hoped that would be the end of that, but he sent an email to the basketball staff warning that the story could soon break at any moment.

The next day, Jackson was called into White’s office for a group meeting, where he learned he would serve as chairman of the search committee. Turner formally reached out to Scheyer the following Sunday and scheduled his interviews for Tuesday, May 25.

Having just been through multiple interviews two months before, Scheyer had a good idea of what to expect. When he asked Krzyzewski for advice, the coach replied simply, “Be yourself.” On Tuesday afternoon, Scheyer told Smith and Carrawell he needed to be in his office alone for a while. Then he shut the door and spoke to the search committee for over an hour via Zoom, followed by another hour-long call with White, King and Price.

Scheyer thought he scored some levity points when he quipped, “I just want to make clear I realize I’m not Coach K.” When the lengthy sessions were done, he felt good about how it all went. “I’m normally pretty critical of myself, but I walked out of there feeling I did everything I could do,” he says. “I told my wife, I have zero regrets. I felt I was authentic to who I am.” With the first round of interviews completed, Jon and Marcelle decided it was time to let their parents know what was going on.

So what happened next? “I’ll tell you what happened next – I heard nothing,” Scheyer says. “I didn’t hear one single thing for the next six days.” The wait was not only excruciating but ominous. It reminded Jon and Marcelle of the radio silence that settled in during the days before they got the bad news from UNLV and DePaul. The Scheyers did their best to stay in the moment. Between her work as a nurse practitioner at a local wellness center and her duties raising the couple’s 3-year-old daughter, Noa, and 22-month-old son, Jett, Marcelle had no trouble staying busy. If she had some spare time, she took out her stress on her Peloton treadmill. Jon, meanwhile, managed to maintain an even keel during the daytime, but he did a lot of tossing and turning at night. Friday was especially fitful. He woke up at 3 a.m., came down to the kitchen for snacks, and waited for the sun to rise. “I was actually calm most of the time, but I’m human,” he says. “The unknown was incredibly hard. You’re lying awake at night thinking, what if I get this? What if I don’t? My mind was just racing.”

Scheyer never tried to find out who else was up for the job during those interminable six days. Multiple sources confirmed to The Athletic that the other candidate most seriously considered was Harvard coach Tommy Amaker, who played for Krzyzewski from 1983-87 and was his assistant for nine seasons. Amaker, 56, is as well-respected as any member of the Duke basketball family, and his 24 years experience as a head coach, including previous stops at Seton Hall and Michigan, was an asset Scheyer couldn’t match. On at least one occasion, Amaker spoke directly with Krzyzewski about the job. The biggest hurdle for Amaker’s candidacy was the fact that taking the job would require him to leave Harvard and return as an assistant at Duke for the coming season. There is precedent for this – Matt Painter left his post as head coach at Southern Illinois in 2004 to spend a season as Purdue’s head coach

Inside Duke's secret search to replace Coach K (cont.)

By Seth Davis and Brendan Marks, The Athletic (June 21, 2021)

in-waiting under Gene Keady – but in this case, Amaker would be joining a staff that included the other primary candidate in Scheyer. In addition, Krzyzewski recently promoted Smith to full-time assistant as a replacement for Nate James, who left in April to become head coach at Austin Peay. If Amaker joined the staff, Smith would have to be demoted or even out of a job.

On Saturday, Scheyer squeezed in nine holes of golf with a couple of buddies. He played lousy, although he adds, “That’s how I normally play, so I don’t think they thought anything was wrong with me.” Sunday came and went with nary a peep. The radio silence finally broke on Monday, May 31, when Scheyer spent part of Memorial Day on another Zoom call with White and King.

The next evening, Scheyer was again in his backyard and talking to a recruit when he saw King’s cell number pop up. “I’m gonna need to call you back,” he told the recruit. Then, he picked up King’s call.

“Hey, Jon,” she began. “We’d like to set up another Zoom interview.” Pause. “Just kidding. Actually, I’m calling to let you know that I’ve spoken with President Price and Dr. White, and we’ve selected you to be the next men’s basketball coach at Duke.”

What goes through a man’s mind at the very instant his life changes forever? “I can’t even explain the feeling,” Scheyer says. “It was months of uncertainty but also years in the making, beginning with my decision as a kid to go to school here. It was just overwhelming.” To that point, the school had not had any substantive conversations about Scheyer’s contract with his agents at CAA, Jimmy Sexton and Evan Daniels, but Scheyer had no desire to delve into such matters. He accepted the job on the spot.

Scheyer maintained his calm while speaking with King, but as soon as he hung up, he dashed upstairs to where Marcelle was waking Noa from her nap. “We got it! We got it!” he said through tears. They were still hugging and crying a few minutes later when Price called. Scheyer put the president on speaker so Marcelle could listen in. “It was so important for me to hear that excitement from him and Nina,” Scheyer says. “I’m connected with them now. Their belief meant the world to me.”

The rest of the night is a blur of celebratory phone calls. There were a few technical difficulties getting Jon’s parents, siblings and their spouses on one FaceTime call, but they managed to make it happen so he could let them know. They did the same with Marcelle’s family. Scheyer reached Smith on his cell phone as he was picking up his children at daycare. “Are you around anybody?” Jon asked. Smith was alone, save for his kids, so Jon delivered the news to his 2010 championship backcourt mate. Carrawell’s house is in the same neighborhood as the Scheyers’, so Jon and Marcelle drove over to deliver the news in person. Carrawell was on his way home from the dentist. When he pulled into the driveway, Jon and Marcelle faked disappointment, but Carrawell didn’t fall for the ruse. “They’re horrible actors,” he says. Jon then broke the news, whereupon Carrawell sprinted in circles around his front yard in delight.

By the time Scheyer reached Krzyzewski, his soon-to-be-former boss had already heard the good news. They reveled in the moment, and then Coach K threw a good-natured jab. “Just remember you’re still my assistant for one more year,” he said. Scheyer laughed. “He was excited for me, but I think he also felt some relief to get closure,” Scheyer says. “It allowed us to move on and focus on the future.”

On Tuesday night, Jackson got word it was “go” time. He rang up the athletic department’s facilities manager and asked him to prepare Cameron Indoor Stadium for a news conference. The decision would not be final until the Board of Trustees approved it at a 3 p.m. meeting on Wednesday. The plan was to allow that vote to happen, after which Krzyzewski would inform the players during a Zoom call. Then the school could blast the news.

That plan was upended shortly after 1 p.m., when Stadium’s Jeff Goodman reported on Twitter that Krzyzewski had decided to retire following the 2021-22 season, and that Scheyer was the leading candidate to replace him. Several media outlets confirmed Goodman’s scoop, and in a flash the news was everywhere. Marcelle, who isn’t on social media, was unaware of what was going on until a TV reporter knocked on her front door and tried getting her to divulge what she knew. The break gave Jackson and his team some breathing room to take their time preparing a press release. At 7 p.m. Wednesday evening, Duke issued its official announcement.

As soon as the news dropped, Smith was flooded with texts and calls from other members of the 2010 championship squad. They wanted to know when Scheyer’s introductory news conference would be held, so they could be there in person to support their captain. Krzyzewski’s news conference took place in Cameron on Thursday, Scheyer’s the next day. When he walked onto the floor, resplendent in a snug-fitting royal blue suit, a hundred spectators rose to give him an ovation. Among the faces were not only his wife, kids and parents, but also Gerald Henderson, Lance Thomas and Brian Zoubek, the other members of Scheyer’s 2006 recruiting class. “That’s when it hit me,” Scheyer said. “The magnitude of what was happening.”

A considerable amount of talent and hard work went into creating that moment, but luck and fate played major roles as well – arriving, as they often do, under the guise of adversity. For example, had Scheyer not suffered a serious eye injury during his first summer camp with the Miami Heat in 2010, his playing career might have lasted longer – in turn delaying the launch of his coaching career, and perhaps leading him to begin somewhere other than Duke. And had Scheyer gotten either the UNLV or DePaul jobs in March, he probably wouldn’t have been in a position to take over at Duke. “It’s crazy how life works,” Scheyer says. “I know it’s a cliché, but I truly felt like those jobs didn’t work out for a reason. But for me to be named the Duke coach a couple of months later? That was not the reason I was thinking about.”

It took a few days for things to settle down, but a sense of normalcy has returned to the program over the last two-and-a-half weeks. Coaches are preparing for the fall and recruiting the 2022 class – the first official group of the Scheyer era. The team’s four incoming freshmen have arrived on campus, and players have enrolled in summer school and begun their workouts. On some days, if you didn’t know better, you’d think they were getting ready for just another season.

Except it won’t be. Krzyzewski has already been flooded with multiple requests for longform TV interviews, insider books and documentaries to chronicle his final season. Aside from a brief spot on CNN’s “The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,” he has turned down all of them. Krzyzewski dismissed the notion that this will be a farewell tour, but that’s exactly what it will feel like, especially when the team goes on the road and the end draws nigh. If the Blue Devils can stay healthy, bolstered by one of the nation’s best recruiting classes, they should be right back in the national championship chase. But the outside noise will be as loud as ever, and it won’t be easy shutting it all out. “My goal is for him to have a year where he can just love every second of coaching,” Jackson says. “Just keep it as pure as we can. We’ll figure out the outside stuff along the way.”

Then there’s Scheyer’s challenge: to continue staying in the moment, while simultaneously keeping an eye on the future. No one has to tell Scheyer how high the bar has been set – he helped set it, after all – but his instincts have worked pretty well for him so far. He figures he might as well keep shooting. “I’m not going to move ahead comparing myself to Coach every single day. That’s a recipe for disaster,” he says. “But I’m also not hiding from the fact that this program is built on the expectation to compete for a championship every year. I’m not running from that at all. I believe in myself, and I’m excited to show what we can do.”

Duke mailbag: What's next for Jon Scheyer, Duke after transition announcement?

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (June 9, 2021)

Some week, huh?

I'll spare y'all the full recap – because, you know, you are reading a Duke article, so I assume you're at least sort of up to date – but long story short, Mike Krzyzewski, unbelievably, announced he'll be retiring after this season. His replacement? Associate head Jon Scheyer, just 33 years young ... and now tasked with replacing one of sport's legendary figures. No pressure or anything.

Obviously with news of that magnitude, there are plenty of questions. And that is why I wanted to do a mailbag this week: to hopefully answer some of them, or at least more than my colleagues and I already have. I'll get to those shortly.

I did want to quickly touch on something else, though, before I get into all your K-Scheyer-Duke queries. On Wednesday, we learned that Rick Bonnell of The Charlotte Observer had unexpectedly passed away. He was 63. He was also one of my closest friends, one of the best NBA reporters in the business, and the person who taught me much of what I know in this industry. I cannot begin to describe what a loss this is. Rick was kind, compassionate, and did everything in his power to support young writers. Professionally, he was insatiably curious, and he loved when readers challenged him with smart questions. I've tried to pick that up from him – and it's another reason I wanted to do this mailbag. So to all of you who asked questions this week, thank you, sincerely; it means a lot. And Rick, friend, I miss you so much already. I know you'll be watching this whole succession saga from up above, with the same curious wonder as always. Rest easy.

Now, on to your questions:

What do you think Scheyer's coaching staff will look like? – Ryan N.

We're still a year out from Scheyer officially taking over, but never too early to look ahead. (An aside: How Scheyer balances his current assistant duties, while simultaneously prepping to take over next April, is one of the things I'm most excited to chart this season.)

Based on this being a continuity hire, and the fact that they're good at their jobs, I would be shocked if both Nolan Smith and Chris Carrawell aren't on Scheyer's first staff. Both are high-level recruiters, former standout Blue Devils, and they complement Scheyer's personality well. Smith is one of the nicest people in the sport, period, and Carrawell has an energy about him that enables him to connect well with players. Aside from those two, though, Scheyer is obviously going to have to hire someone to replace himself. A few of you chimed in asking if Jay Williams or Steve Wojciechowski would join the staff, but I don't think either is a terrific fit for what Scheyer will need.

So what does he need, then? Someone older, with previous head coaching experience who can help him navigate all the non-basketball aspects of the job. That means knowing when to say yes and no to everyone, what things he must do and what he can get away with delegating to others. Plus, not that Scheyer is a micromanager by any means, but you want that experienced voice on staff who can help a first-time head coach avoid burnout. Look at Michigan hiring Phil Martelli to help Juwan Howard, or North Carolina hiring Jeff Lebo to help Hubert Davis. The trick is identifying candidates like that who come from the Duke family. If his contract didn't run through 2025, I'd say Mike Brey would be an ideal fit – but someone in that mold, you know? There are also a few former Krzyzewski players currently serving as NBA assistants, such as Chip Engelland (San Antonio) and Antonio Lang (Cleveland). Or would Scheyer, with a nudge from the Duke family, convince someone like Shane Battier to come back instead? The pool isn't as deep as it might seem, but in my eyes, Scheyer ideally adds someone with prior head coaching experience to help ease his transition.

We've heard a lot about how great a recruiter Scheyer is, which is encouraging. But he had Coach K as the closer and ultimately his message to recruits was, come play for the GOAT. Now that he's selling himself and his own program, what will he do differently and do you think he can be as effective? – Todd D.

It's true that Scheyer is a great recruiter, and he's been the lead on a number of Duke's biggest stars of late. Think Jayson Tatum, Zion Williamson – that stratosphere of players. But yes, it's also true that he had Krzyzewski as his closer, which obviously is a tremendous draw.

A few things here: first, it's not like Coach K is walking off campus and never coming back. He'll still be around, and I think having him as a resource – even if not as a true closer – will be a big bonus for Scheyer. Recruits will still like that. But the reason Scheyer has been such a good recruiter is that he's diligent, and he maintains relationships with all these guys as well as anyone in the country. That won't change, and so he's still well-positioned for the future. I do think he'll try and sell kids on the “new” Duke, though. Just because Coach K isn't there doesn't mean the school itself doesn't have tremendous positives. Think of the facilities, the resources, the national exposure on TV and the media in general, the top-tier academics, the vast alumni network. I mean, that's a lot to sell. I don't think it's fair to expect Scheyer

to keep reeling in as many of those elite prospects as Duke has with Krzyzewski in the fold, but he's going to absolutely ensure Duke maintains its national profile. Plus, as name, image, and likeness (NIL) legislation comes to pass, Duke intends to be at the front of the line for implementing that. You don't need me to tell you that'll be attractive to high schoolers.

I know you're going to get a lot of questions about the future for Duke basketball, but regarding the present and this year's team, how much added pressure are they now under to make Coach K's last year a successful one? I know going to Duke has its own kind of pressures but is there a concern that knowing this is Coach K's final season will wear on them mentally in trying too hard to have him go out on top? – Chris P.

Excellent question, Chris, and something I've been debating with other reporters since this news came out.

I'm a little surprised it happened how it did – for this very reason. The rumblings that this was going to be Krzyzewski's last year have been LOUD for a few weeks now, but I always just sort of assumed he would announce after a season that he was walking away. That is what he told our Seth Davis prior to the 2019 season, after all.

But now that everything's out in the open, absolutely there is going to be enormous pressure on this team. Duke was already projected as a preseason top 15 team, and for good reason, but this is going to crank up expectations another notch. Something I've been a little worried about is that the college basketball universe, in general, has been putting too much pressure on Duke's incoming class to produce at an elite level immediately. Paolo Banchemo, A.J. Griffin, Trevor Keels and Jaylen Blakes are going to be good, but for Duke to hit its ceiling, they have to be great. That pressure was already substantial, but now? Just ramp it up. I know Coach K will tell his team not to think about the pressure, but getting a bunch of college kids to actually tune out the noise/attention is easier said than done.

Just curious – how long do you think Scheyer has known that he would be chosen to succeed K? Do you think Nate James was told that he wouldn't be the guy before he took the Austin Peay job? And do you think Duke reached out to anyone else (Quin Snyder? Brad Stevens?) before choosing Scheyer? – Marc K.

Not long, Marc. Truthfully, I'd always been told the “plan” was for someone like Tommy Amaker to return as a bridge guy, before someone younger like Scheyer took over. But Amaker has a job now, and a solid one, so here we are. From what athletic director Kevin White said, the process of finalizing both the Krzyzewski and Scheyer decisions took about 10 days, although Krzyzewski has been contemplating this since after the season ended.

On the Nate James front: I don't know for certain that he knew beforehand, but I'm guessing he was aware at least of the possibility. I also know James wanted to be a head coach, so he's still accomplishing that goal. As for Quin Snyder, he's one of the NBA's best coaches and isn't coming back to college. Full stop. Stevens doesn't seem like he wants to coach any team right now.

Do you know if Coach Amaker, Dawkins or Hurley were considered or approached for the position? What are the opinions of former players on Scheyer's hiring who played before Scheyer's time at Duke? – Jay S.

This is all so fresh that we're still reporting some of the behind-the-scenes of this transition, but it is my understanding that both Amaker and Johnny Dawkins were considered for the job. To what extent, I admittedly am not certain. But ultimately, from the sounds of things, it worked in Scheyer's favor that he was already in the building and could help with a true transition year – which the other two obviously couldn't, given they already have head coaching jobs.

Opinions on Scheyer have been nothing but positive. Jay Williams said on TV that he looked at Scheyer as a young Brad Stevens, a basketball savant of sorts. That's not dissimilar to what other alums have expressed publicly and privately. People outside of the program have speculated that this is more of a “right place, right time” sort of hire – and that might be true to a tiny, tiny extent – but Scheyer is also an ascending star in the industry who has turned down other offers before. Also, I think it's important for fans to remember: Duke isn't just hiring Scheyer for who he is now, but who he will grow into in five, 10, or hopefully more years.

What are you hearing about the transfer portal? Any notable names who've been inspired by the opportunity to play for Coach K's last team? – Zach A.

As far as I am aware, Duke's roster is basically set for this season. Patrick Baldwin Jr. was the last major domino to fall, and it didn't fall in Duke's favor. Of course, there's still time for that to change, and Duke is carefully monitoring the portal (like every school in the country), but I believe the program has shifted its attention to the future. Aka, high schoolers in the 2022 class.

Duke mailbag: What's next for Scheyer, Duke after transition? (cont.)

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (June 9, 2021)

Which players from last year's team most likely left because they knew the coaching change was probably coming, and why did it cause them to leave? – Dave M.

I put something out on social media about this when the news was announced, so I appreciate you asking this, Dave, and giving me a chance to clear the air. Obviously, Duke had four players leave via the transfer portal this spring: Jordan Goldwire, Jaemyn Brakefield, Henry Coleman and Patrick Tapé. Without airing too much of the personal laundry of those guys, it's clear each decision was different.

Tapé, for instance, didn't get – and wouldn't have gotten – much of a chance to play next season. Goldwire would've needed to enroll in one of Duke's graduate programs in time to stay for his super-senior season, but ended up finding a better fit and timeline (and a starting job) at Oklahoma. Brakefield's talent exceeds what his role would have been next season, too, given the presence of Banchemo, Griffin and Mark Williams in the frontcourt. And Coleman was in a similar spot, especially after Duke signed Theo John to fill that "backup big" role. My point is, while "being on Coach K's final team" is obviously a very cool thing to experience, these guys also have larger dreams and aspirations that ran counter to what their roles would have been coming back. If you're Coleman, for example, do you wait until your junior season at Duke to see serious minutes, when Coach K is already gone ... or do you seek out a bigger role now, where you can develop without waiting? Again, every situation was different – and every player loved their time at Duke – but you can't fault these guys chasing their grander dreams if they were more easily achieved elsewhere.

Given all of the upheaval in college basketball, with the transfer portal becoming wide open and the chance for more top players to turn professional earlier, is there any chance Duke changes its recruiting tactics? This year's NCAA tournament top teams showed the value of players who stick around. – John S.

Scheyer basically said at his introductory news conference he'd like a blend: some longer-term, developmental guys, some potential one-and-done guys. And, wouldn't you know? That's this year's team to a tee. Guys such as Banchemo and Griffin have NBA lottery written all over them, but guys such as Wendell Moore are going to be just as important for their experience and leadership. I'd expect that trend to continue under Scheyer, but I also would've expected it to continue had Krzyzewski decided to keep going. That's the way the best college programs are going to win nowadays. Look at the two finalists from this year's NCAA championship game – both Baylor and Gonzaga have added five-star prospects to the established depth they already had.

This is a bit of a change-up – Cameron Indoor is glorious. I've heard that Coach K turned down offers from the administration to build a new, big arena because he didn't want to lose the atmosphere. Any chance that changes with the coaching change? (I sure hope not). – Glen B.

I've heard about plans to build another building on campus in Krzyzewski's honor (and who knows if his retirement changes those), but Cameron?

Like hell anyone is knocking down Cameron anytime soon. It's got all the best aspects of intimate, college venues, while importantly still driving tremendous revenue. Updates, perhaps, but Cameron Indoor ain't going anywhere anytime soon.

How Jon Scheyer rose from ‘special assistant’ to Coach K’s successor in eight years

David Cobb, CBSSports.com (June 2, 2021)

Just 11 years removed from leading Duke to the 2010 national championship on the court, Jon Scheyer will soon be put in position to lead the Blue Devils to national prominence. This time, it won't be as a team captain but rather as head coach.

Scheyer on Wednesday was formally approved by athletic director Kevin White to be Mike Krzyzewski's successor at Duke, according to CBS Sports' Matt Norlander. Coach K will retire following the 2021-22 season. Scheyer does not yet have a coach-in-waiting contract with Duke, Norlander reports.

At just 33, Scheyer is a decade younger than the ACC's current youngest head coach, Georgia Tech's Josh Pastner, and he will become one of the youngest Division I head coaches in the country. However, a look at back at the last 15 years of Scheyer's playing and coaching career illustrate why Krzyzewski might be comfortable handing the reins of an illustrious program to someone so young.

Scheyer isn't just Krzyzewski's current associate head coach; he is a storied former player for the legendary coach and a blossoming recruiter who, in theory, could seamlessly transition to the head role and lead the program in a time of transition for college basketball.

The player

Ranked as a four-star prospect in the Class of 2006 by the 247Sports Composite, Scheyer signed with Duke out of Glenbrook North High School near Chicago and quickly took on a key role by starting and averaging 12.2 points per game as a freshman. He ultimately appeared in 144 games during his college career, which culminated with Duke's national title run in 2010.

Scheyer was the leading scorer as a senior for that team, which finished 35-5 and secured Krzyzewski's fourth title with a 61-59 win over Butler in the national championship game. He finished his career with 2,077 career points, which ranks 10th on the program's all-time scoring list.

As a 6-foot-5 guard, Scheyer was known for his 3-point shooting and still ranks fourth all-time in program history for both 3-point attempts and makes, but he also flashed his distributing skills as a senior by handing out 4.9 assists per game.

The path back to Duke

After going undrafted in 2010, Scheyer suffered a serious injury to his right eye while playing with the Miami Heat in an NBA Summer League game. The incident left him legally blind but did not derail his playing ambitions. Scheyer played in the G League and overseas from 2011-13 until joining the Duke staff as a special assistant for the 2013-14 season. He assisted in developing game plans, breaking down film and in planning practices, according to program archives.

"I am extremely fortunate to be able to come back to Duke," Scheyer said at the time. "It is a tremendous honor to be on Coach K's staff and it is something I will cherish. I want to continue to learn from the entire staff and bring whatever I can to help the program."

The coaching rise

When Duke associate coach Steve Wojciechowski left to become Marquette's coach after the 2013-14 season, Krzyzewski promoted Jeff Capel to the role and Scheyer to fill Capel's vacated assistant spot.

"We are ecstatic about Jon joining the staff," Krzyzewski said at the time. "He was one of the great players to play at Duke: a national champion and a captain not that far removed so he adds a youthful exuberance to our staff. His knowledge of the game is incredible. I think he will be a terrific teach and an outstanding recruiter."

When Capel left to take the head coaching job at Pittsburgh after the 2017-18 season, Scheyer and Nate James were promoted to associate coaches, continuing Krzyzewski's preference of relying on his former players in key staff roles.

"Nate and Jon are former captains who clearly understand Duke and our culture," Krzyzewski said at the time. "They're both national champions who've played an integral role in our success over the past two decades. As good as they were as players, and they were both excellent, they have been remarkable, distinguished and instinctive coaches who have earned this opportunity. With Nate and Jon assuming additional responsibilities in their associate head coach roles, I am excited about the makeup of our staff moving forward."

James was named the coach at Austin Peay in April, clearing the runway for Scheyer as the natural successor to Krzyzewski if the program opted to hire from within upon Krzyzewski's retirement.

If not at Duke, it was clear that Scheyer was destined to become a head coach elsewhere at some point, if he wanted. Though just now approaching his mid-30s, Scheyer was rumored to be among Pittsburgh's candidates in 2018 when Capel ultimately got the job. His name also came up in the rumor mill during this year's coaching carousel in connection with the DePaul job.

Considering Scheyer's growing reputation as a top recruiter, it's no surprise that he's drawn interest from other programs. Among the prospects he's helped bring to Duke as a primary recruiter are Jayson Tatum, Cam Reddish, Vernon Carey and 2021 five-star forward Paolo Banchero, according to 247Sports. He was also the secondary recruiter for Zion Williamson.

Scheyer is also credited with helping develop recent Duke stars such as Tyus Jones, Luke Kennard, Frank Jackson and Grayson Allen into NBA Draft picks.

Get ready for Coach K's farewell tour -- and a realistic run to a national title

Ryan McGee, ESPN.com (June 2, 2021)

The first time I saw Mike Krzyzewski was on a fall Saturday in 1983. It wasn't at Cameron Indoor Stadium, but rather across the street at Wallace Wade Stadium, the long-miserable home of Blue Devils football. In those days, there was plenty of misery to be found in the basketball gym too. They'd made the Final Four in 1978 and the Elite Eight in 1980, but lost their head coach, hired a guy whom no one could spell his last name, and hadn't been back to the NCAA tournament in the three years since.

My father was officiating a football game, and I had managed to get into the press box to score a boxed lunch. It was halftime, and I was eating a barbecue sandwich at a table full of crusty old Tobacco Road writers and photographers when the Duke hoops coach walked up. Krzyzewski said hello to the group and said that he hoped to see them all over at the little gymnasium across the street when his fourth season at the helm began just a few days later. No sooner than he had walked away, the old ACC scribes rolled their collective eyes.

"That sumb---h..." one of them blurted out, cutting his eyes to me to apologize for his language, but continuing anyway. "His ass is about to get fired."

He, of course, was not fired. Instead, his team won 24 games that winter and made their first NCAA tournament appearance on his watch. They have missed the tourney only twice during the nearly four decades since.

That day when I first saw Coach K, I was in elementary school. Ronald Reagan was in his first term. The No. 1 movie at the box office was Return of the Jedi. That same fall my family bought our first VCR at a Kmart. Ms. Pac-Man was still new. His first coaching rivals were UNC's Dean Smith and NC State's Jim Valvano. The NCAA tournament was a 32-team bracket. Jay Bilas had hair.

That's how long it's been since Mike Krzyzewski first moved to Durham, North Carolina. It's a marathon by any measuring stick, be it the 42 years, the five national titles, the 12 Final Fours, 15 ACC Tourney titles, 12 ACC regular season championships, the 1,170 wins or the wall of Olympic gold medal-winning team photos.

So, when he hangs up his whistle at the end of the 2021-22 basketball season, none of us have any idea what Duke University, the ACC, or, for that matter, the world is going to look like without K stalking the sideline and barking out orders to try and beat Carolina, State, Wake and everyone else on the ACC calendar one more time.

It's like trying to picture the Duke campus without the chapel.

That's probably why the shocking news of the 74-year-old's retirement was also quickly followed by a sigh of relief when it was revealed that he would be coaching until he was 75, logging one more season before being replaced by longtime protégé Jon Scheyer. It was just two months ago when we all watched his frenemy Roy Williams tearfully walk away from the Tar Heels after being bounced from the first round of the NAAs for the first time in his Hall of Fame career. Williams cried and talked about the game beginning to pass him by and said, "I no longer think I am the right man for the job."

It's a safe bet that Krzyzewski still believes deep down that he is the right man for Duke, but it's no secret that he's been frustrated by the drastic changes in the college game over recent years. See: His visible and audible irritation at trying to navigate the choppy, ever-changing seas of 2020-21 pandemic season, a year his team finished 13-11 and ended with the second of those two missed NCAA tourneys since '83 and the first since his back injury-asterisked 1995 season. Duke's year ended unceremoniously, with a positive COVID-19 test and a quiet exit from the ACC postseason.

Did you really think he would let that be his finish line? Of course not.

Call this upcoming campaign a retirement tour, call it a victory lap, call it whatever you want. But if we have learned anything about Krzyzewski over the last half-century it's that he will never pass up a chance to win basketball games. Duke has a chance to win a lot of them between now and April.

He just inked a top five recruiting class. Seven-footer Mark Williams chose to return to a team that will have more high-flying wings than the RDU airport, as inconsistent vet Wendell Moore Jr., will be joined by top-3 prospect Paolo Banchemo, internet highlight sensation A.J. Griffin and late signee/buzz-generator Trevor Keels.

This team will likely find itself in an early locker room tug-of-war between a large group of upperclassmen and the wave of incoming freshmen, but what else is new? 'Tis the way of the modern college basketball world (if you want to kill an hour, ask K for his views on that). But though it seems easy to forget now, in the five seasons that preceded the pandemic, Duke won a national title and reached the Sweet 16 four times, including consecutive Elite Eight appearances in 2018-19.

Oh, and the Devils will also be catching UNC transitioning into its first post-Roy season, NC State and Wake Forest scuffling (what else is new?) and really, a spaghetti pile of an ACC that feels very scalable. It all begins with an uber-hyped matchup with Kentucky on Nov. 9. In the midst of it all, rivals will recruit against Duke with a strategy of "Coach K is leaving, do you really want to play for What's-his-name Scheyer?" But it's also Scheyer who has done much of the heavy lifting to bring in Zion, etc. since the former Duke player returned as an assistant coach in 2013.

Will Mike Krzyzewski enjoy the inevitable procession of pregame ceremonies, rocking chair gifts and lifetime achievement plaques? He will tell us that he does not. In reality he will relish the spotlight one more time. He'll even dig the boos. Despite always trying to convince us otherwise, he has always liked to be reminded of how great he is at what he does, whether that praise comes in the form of a Duke Blue thumbs up or Carolina Blue middle finger. He smiles at both.

But this winter, those smiles will come only if his last Duke Blue Devils team is winning games. If instead, for the third consecutive year they do not, then heaven help those rocking chairs, let alone those freshmen.

Then again, it wouldn't be a true Mike Krzyzewski season if there weren't plenty of snarls to go around. Even now, the last time around.

Duke basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski plans to retire after season, sources say

ESPN.com (June 2, 2021)

Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, who is the winningest coach in Division I men's basketball history and has led the Blue Devils to five national championships in his 41 seasons, plans to retire after the 2021-22 season, sources confirmed to ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski on Wednesday.

"The only thing wrong with Mike Krzyzewski is that he doesn't play golf," Williams told reporters Wednesday. "Michael doesn't need Roy Williams giving him advice. He's a great family man. He's going to enjoy his family a great deal. He'll still be important in college athletics. He'll still be important to college basketball."

Associate head coach Jon Scheyer has agreed to become the next head coach at Duke, sources told ESPN. He will spend the 2021-22 season as coach-in-waiting and will take over after that.

Duke talked to outside candidates about replacing 74-year-old Krzyzewski, including Harvard coach Tommy Amaker, sources told ESPN. Scheyer, however, was the lead recruiter on such stars as Jayson Tatum and Zion Williamson and is Duke's choice to replace Coach K, sources said.

Stadium first reported that Krzyzewski is planning to retire after next season.

Krzyzewski, a Naismith Hall of Fame coach who has 1,097 career wins at Duke, has taken the Blue Devils to the Final Four on 12 occasions. He has won 12 regular-season ACC championships and 15 conference tournament titles while producing 28 NBA lottery picks -- and 41 first-round selections -- over the years.

Having five national titles puts him second only to former UCLA coach John Wooden, who won 10.

"Mike's been fantastic for the game of basketball," retired North Carolina coach Roy Williams told reporters Wednesday after the Pro-Am for the Korn Ferry Tour stop in Raleigh, North Carolina. "... He's been a good friend. He's been a guy I've respected a great deal. He made everybody bring their A-game for years and years and years. ... He's just been phenomenal in everything he's done."

Hired at Duke in May 1980, "Coach K" won national championships in 1991, 1992, 2001, 2010 and 2015, while setting the men's career coaching victories record in November 2011.

He has tailored his approach to adapt with the times and his personnel. He won the 2010 title with a senior-laden roster, then claimed the 2015 one after pivoting to more "one-and-done" talent that headed to the NBA after a lone college season playing in Duke's famously hostile Cameron Indoor Stadium.

His tally of 97 NCAA tournament wins ranks No. 1 among all coaches, as does his 126 weeks atop the Associated Press Top 25 poll.

Overall, including his five seasons as head coach at Army at the beginning of his career, Krzyzewski has a 1,170-361 record.

Along the way, he also took over the U.S. men's national team -- with NBA All-Star rosters featuring names such as the late Kobe Bryant and LeBron James -- and led it to Olympic gold in Beijing in 2008, London in 2012 and Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

Duke missed the NCAA tournament this past season for the first time since 1995, but the Blue Devils welcome one of the nation's top recruiting classes for the coming season.

Scheyer played for Krzyzewski from 2006-10, with his last season resulting in his mentor's fourth NCAA title. Scheyer joined the Duke staff for the 2013-14 season and rose to his current role after the 2017-18 season.

He served as interim coach last year for Duke when Krzyzewski was sidelined for a January win against Boston College due to COVID-19 protocols. Scheyer has never been a college head coach.

The news about Krzyzewski comes almost two months to the day that Williams, another Hall of Famer in the state, announced his retirement after 33 seasons with Kansas and the Tar Heels.

Coach K plans to retire after season

By Brendan Marks, Shams Charania and Seth Davis, The Athletic (June 2, 2021)

On the eve of the 2019-20 college basketball season, Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski was asked during a telephone interview how long he would continue to coach. At the time, Coach K was 72 years old, so the topic of his impending retirement was a familiar one. Krzyzewski gave his usual answer, indicating he still felt fresh enough to keep coaching and had no idea when his great ride would come to a halt. He did, however, reveal at least one decision he had made: He would not announce his retirement ahead of time. He would simply decide one day that he had enough, and that would be that.

"I've never looked ahead, so that's why I don't look ahead now," Krzyzewski said. "I think it's important for you to be you all the time. You have to have the same passion and same work ethic. So I'll keep coaching as long as I can be that person. If I cannot be that person then I'll get out, but I don't want to set a date certain. As soon as you set a date, you've already become a different person. That's why I'll never do that."

That plan, however, has changed. The Athletic has confirmed, according to a source with knowledge of the situation, that Krzyzewski has decided that he will retire following the 2021-22 season. Stadium was first to report. Krzyzewski has informed his family and close confidants of his decision, and an announcement from the school is expected to be forthcoming. Krzyzewski will turn 75 in February and has been a head coach since 1975 so it's hardly a shock that he has decided that he is finally ready to call it quits. His willingness to set that advanced date despite years of insisting he wouldn't was a nod to the accelerated pace of change in college basketball and the need to get rid of uncertainty that could hamper the program's recruiting efforts. Also, according to a source with knowledge of Krzyzewski's thinking, he was feeling increasing discomfort at the notion he might not be able to be totally straightforward with recruits regarding his future plans. Having assembled one of the nation's top freshman classes for next season, Krzyzewski and his staff have been contacting players in the high school class of 2022, who are all asking whether the Hall of Famer would still be around to coach them. Since the end of the 2020-21 season, Krzyzewski has been discussing with family members and confidants his growing realization that he wanted this coming season to be his last.

The decision comes on the heels of Duke introducing Nina King as its next athletics director, replacing the retiring Kevin White. King has spent the last decade-plus in Durham, most recently as senior deputy director of athletics/administration, legal affairs and chief of staff. The program's current associate head coach, Jon Scheyer, will be heavily considered to replace Krzyzewski.

The pivot to make this advanced decision serves as a fitting coda to Krzyzewski's storied career, which has been a towering monument to the importance of adaptability. Krzyzewski went 38-47 in his first three seasons at Duke, prompting widespread calls among the program's boosters for his ouster. He hung on to take the Blue Devils to four Final Fours from 1985-90, but he was unable to capture a title. That changed in 1991, when Duke won the first of back-to-back championships. Duke was one of the last programs to lose underclassmen to the pros, and when that trend accelerated Krzyzewski adapted his recruiting strategy to build his roster around one-and-done freshmen. That yielded his fifth NCAA championship in 2015, when the Blue Devils started three freshmen. That team played a good deal of zone defense, the ultimate adjustment for a coach who to that point had played almost exclusively man-to-man.

Though Krzyzewski has not returned to the Final Four since, he has continued to win with rosters dominated by freshmen and sophomores. That could not have happened if Krzyzewski had not been able to continue relating to 18- and 19-year-olds. He oversaw the development of one of the top social media operations in college sports, learned how to follow his teenage athletes on Twitter and Instagram, and even made a point to listen to their music so he could quote the lyrics in the locker room.

Last season the Blue Devils were hampered by not having a preseason to develop a young team because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They struggled throughout the season, which ended with them having to withdraw from the ACC tournament in Greensboro because of a positive COVID-19 test in the program. That marked just the second time since 1983 that Duke had failed to qualify for the NCAA Tournament. Krzyzewski will enter his 42nd and final season at Duke with another talented roster, but times are changing in the sport at warp speed. The NCAA recently passed a rule allowing basketball players to transfer once without having to sit out a season. Duke has lost four players to the transfer portal since season's end: Jordan Goldwire, Patrick Tapé, Jaemyn Brakefield, and Henry Coleman. There are currently more than 1,500 men's Division I players listed in the portal. Krzyzewski indicated during a Zoom call with friends last month that he is disheartened by the transfer craze that has overtaken the sport. He said he saw it as detrimental to the players, who are not being forced to push through adversity, as well to the coaching profession, which has been strained by the impression that coaches are tampering with other rosters.

The impending Name, Image and Likeness legislation is another seismic change that is fast approaching. All of these trends require long-term foresight and a great deal of energy. Coaches around the country report being on the phone and on Zoom calls morning, noon and night for weeks at a time in their efforts to recruit players out of the transfer portal.

Wednesday's news was the beginning of the final lap for one of the most legendary careers in all of sports. In his 46 years as a head coach – the five first at his alma mater, Army, and the last 41 at Duke – Krzyzewski has attained unprecedented success. He's won more games than any coach in men's college basketball history, 1,170, to go along with five national championships. His teams have reached 12 Final Fours, including at least one in four different decades.

Krzyzewski's rise and career arc is without parallel. In his early years, he was just a little-known graduate assistant at Army under Bob Knight, who first recruited him to the school as a point guard. But after moderate success replacing Knight, Krzyzewski was hired by Duke to continue building up its program. Admittedly, his first three seasons were difficult. But a breakthrough in his fourth season earned Krzyzewski some leeway, and the program's rocket ascent began thereafter. All told, 67 of his former players have been selected in the NBA Draft, with 41 of those coming in the first round.

Both Duke's most recent championship team and most recent Final Four contender, in fact, were fueled by one-and-done stars. And as he's moved into the latter phases of his career, that 2018-19 group – led by Zion Williamson and R.J. Barrett – stands out especially. Sources tell The Athletic that that group rejuvenated Krzyzewski and gave him a much-needed jolt of energy. Now, the hope is that the 2021-22 team – which features potential one-and-done lottery picks Paolo Banchero and A.J. Griffin, and fellow five-star guard Trevor Keels – can have a similar impact during Krzyzewski's final season.

The who-will-replace-Coach-K grapevine has been humming for several years, but it will reach a frenzy in the wake of Wednesday's announcement. Over 20 of his former players are now coaches or front-office executives at both the college and NBA level, including Quin Snyder (Utah Jazz), Mike Brey (Notre Dame), Bobby Hurley (Arizona State), Grant Hill (part-owner of the Atlanta Hawks) and Elton Brand (Philadelphia 76ers general manager). Scheyer won a national championship as a Duke player in 2010, and has served on staff since 2013-14. After Nate James' offseason departure to become head coach at Austin Peay, Scheyer became the longest-tenured assistant on Krzyzewski's bench and the lone associate head coach. This season, when Krzyzewski missed a game due to COVID-19 protocols, Scheyer filled in as his replacement, leading Duke to an 83-82 win over Boston College.

All that said, Krzyzewski's career hasn't been without its hiccups. During the 1994-95 season, Krzyzewski took a leave of absence 12 games into the season to recover from lingering back pain and general fatigue. That 1994-95 team, prior to this year's squad, was the last at Duke to miss the NCAA Tournament. The coach has said several times in the years since that had he not stepped away that season, he wouldn't still be coaching today.

But health ailments, while less common, have continued to pop up in the years since, most notably missing nearly a month during the 2016-17 season with another back surgery.

Additionally, days after a shocking November 2019 loss to Stephen F. Austin, Krzyzewski mentioned he "had a little health issue" and "was not myself" during the game. Then this season, Krzyzewski was placed in COVID-19 quarantine after being a close contact to an infected individual – although neither he nor his wife tested positive.

Krzyzewski's grandson, Michael Savarino, is currently a junior on the team. Sources close to the program say Krzyzewski had previously told players he intended to remain the coach at Duke as long as Savarino was on the team.

Duke basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski to retire at the end of upcoming season

By Steve Wiseman and CL Brown, Raleigh News & Observer (June 2, 2021)

Duke's legendary men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski will retire at the conclusion of the 2021-22 season and associate head coach Jon Scheyer will be named the coach-in-waiting, according to a source close to the process.

Krzyzewski, who turned 74 in February, is the second-longest tenured coach in NCAA Division I. He has amassed 1,170 wins and counting since first becoming a head coach at Army in 1975. He became Duke's head coach in 1980, winning 1,097 games with the Blue Devils. Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim is the longest-tenured, having just completed his 45th season with the Orange.

Krzyzewski will end his career as the winningest men's basketball coach in Division I history. He has led Duke to 12 Final Fours and national titles in 1991, 1992, 2001, 2010 and 2015. With North Carolina's Roy Williams stepping down in April, Krzyzewski's retirement plan signals a new era for ACC basketball.

As with Hubert Davis replacing Williams at UNC, Krzyzewski will be replaced by a first-time head coach who was a former player. Scheyer was a starting guard on Duke's 2010 national championship team. He's been an assistant coach on staff since 2014 and was promoted to associate head coach in 2018.

In addition to his success at Duke, Krzyzewski led the U.S. to three Olympic gold medals as head coach from 2005-2016, restoring glory to a program that had failed to win gold at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece.

Krzyzewski made his retirement decision with Duke coming off a 13-11 season where the Blue Devils missed the NCAA tournament for the first time since 1995. That was the season Krzyzewski missed the final 19 games as he recovered from back surgery.

The Blue Devils played in the next 24 NCAA tournaments before struggling during the pandemic-altered season.

FROM ARMY TO DURHAM, COACH K'S CAREER

A Chicago native, Krzyzewski played college basketball at Army for head coach Bob Knight. It was Knight who held the record for most career coaching wins in college basketball, at 902, before Krzyzewski recorded win No. 903 on Nov. 16, 2011. He's been the all-time record holder ever since. He became the first men's Division I college coach to record 1,000 wins on Jan. 25, 2015.

Krzyzewski took over the Blue Devils after Bill Foster had coached them to a final eight appearance in the 1980 NCAA tournament. Foster left to become South Carolina's head coach and Duke went 38-47 with no NCAA tournament appearances in Krzyzewski's first three seasons.

When the Blue Devils were humiliated 109-66 by Virginia in the ACC tournament to end the 1982-83 season, Duke boosters wanted Krzyzewski fired.

But athletic director Tom Butters, who had hired Krzyzewski three years earlier, decided to retain him as coach. Duke made its first NCAA tournament appearance under Krzyzewski the following season and, by 1986, played in the Final Four where the Blue Devils lost to Louisville in the NCAA championship game.

That season started a stretch where Duke played in seven Final Fours in nine years, with five appearances in the national championship game.

Krzyzewski led Duke to its first men's basketball championship in 1991 and followed that up with another NCAA title in 1992.

Over the years, as numerous NBA teams sought to lure him away from Duke, Krzyzewski stayed in Durham. The closest he came to leaving was in 2004 when the Los Angeles Lakers offered him a five-year, \$40 million contract.

Instead, Krzyzewski stayed with the Blue Devils, proclaiming that his "whole heart" was at Duke.

Duke turned into one of college basketball's all-time great programs under Krzyzewski. He's led the school to 12 of its 16 Final Four appearances.

After back-to-back losing seasons in his second and third years with Duke, the only losing record the Blue Devils suffered since the 1982-83 season was in 1994-95 when Krzyzewski only coached the first 12 games due to his health.

JON SCHEYER, A BLUE DEVILS ALL-AMERICAN GUARD

Duke is entrusting another Chicago-area native to keep the program at this level of success.

Born in suburban Northbrook, Illinois, Scheyer was an all-American guard with the Blue Devils. A team captain as a junior and senior, he averaged 18.2 points per game during the 2009-10 season that culminated with Duke winning the NCAA championship.

An eye injury suffered in an NBA summer-league game cut short his professional career and Scheyer returned to Duke as a special assistant coach on Krzyzewski's staff in 2013-14. Promoted to assistant coach the following season, Scheyer helped coach the 2015 NCAA championship team.

He became an associate head coach under Krzyzewski in 2018 and has become renowned for his recruiting prowess.

Ten thoughts on Duke's 10 scholarship players – a team with the pieces to win it all

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (May 14, 2021)

Under Mike Krzyzewski, Duke doesn't have subpar seasons – or at least, it hadn't had one in more than two decades.

Which means the 2020-21 campaign, during which the Blue Devils went 13-11 and missed the NCAA Tournament, is one fans will be fast to forget. The good news? With the talent Duke has coming in, plus its few but gifted holdovers, Krzyzewski has basically built a national title contender in one swift offseason. Oh, the perks of being a blue blood.

Now, that's not to say Duke didn't suffer losses. Replacing the shooting of Matthew Hurt and DJ Steward will be tough, and the depth took a hit as four players entered the transfer portal: Jaemyn Brakefield, Henry Coleman, Jordan Goldwire and Patrick Tapé. Losing Brakefield and Coleman especially hurts, given the promise both showed as freshmen. But on the whole, the Blue Devils should be substantially improved.

So let's look not just at where the roster stands, but forecast roles and expectations for this newest collection of championship hopefuls.

Wendell Moore Jr.

2020-21: Sophomore – 9.7 ppg, 4.8 rpg, 2.7 apg

The jump Moore made as a sophomore shouldn't have been a surprise, given his athleticism and the insane offseason he put himself through. Excluding the first five games of the season – when he scored 19 points and twice went scoreless – Moore averaged 11.3 points, 5.3 rebounds, 3.1 assists, and 1.4 steals per game. All that, while also hitting 85 percent of his free throws and 32.8 percent of his 3s? That ain't bad.

The larger issue with Moore was consistency. Yes, you'd prefer he hit a few more of his 3s, maybe dish out a few more assists here and there. But the biggest thing still holding him back – and the biggest thing NBA teams will want to see from him next season – is the ability to flex his skill set on any given night. Moore won't be asked to carry the same scoring burden he did this season, given the elite freshman class that is coming in, but he also can't disappear. He was more consistent as a sophomore than as a freshman, but there's still room for growth.

Now going into his third season, Moore should be this team's undisputed leader. Joey Baker has a year on Moore, but the latter showed maturity this year – he often spoke after the team's more difficult losses, regardless of his performance – that will command respect. On a team that sways young, there's no understating the value of Moore's experience.

As for his on-court role, Moore should put his versatility to the test. Jeremy Roach and Trevor Keels should handle the bulk of point guard responsibilities, with Jaylen Blakes filling in behind them. But Moore once again is going to be asked to operate as a secondary ball-handler. He's better slashing to the rim than camping in the corners for kick-out 3s, but he has to be able to do both effectively. And given who's on the roster, it's not out of the question that Moore plays everything from the one to the four on both ends of the floor. Simply, Moore has to avoid pushing himself to be a leading scorer. That's why he struggled out of the gate this season, before settling into a role as the do-everything dude. He still has NBA upside, but with other more-proven scoring options around him, it'll be his entire skill set – not just his bucket-getting ability – that earns him professional looks.

Jeremy Roach

2020-21: Freshman – 8.7 ppg, 2.2 rpg, 2.8 apg

At one point this season, rumors circulated about Roach considering a transfer, but I never really understood why. That's because Roach has a ready-made role – and an important one at that – in Durham. It's the role he was being groomed for as a freshman.

But Roach, like Moore, struggled with inconsistency this season. Through the first nine games, Roach averaged 11.1 points and 3.2 assists per game. From then on, though, his numbers – and his effectiveness – dipped dramatically; the rest of the way, he averaged just 7.3 points per game while playing about five fewer minutes. Part of that was due to the midseason departure of Jalen Johnson, which shifted the way Duke played, but Roach also hit a wall of sorts. As the bona fide starting point guard on a team with justified title aspirations, that can't happen again.

That, though, is theoretically what this season was for: for Roach to work out the kinks and get prepared for next season. Krzyzewski's best teams have always featured a standout point guard the coach connects with, and Roach is next in line. As I see it, he doesn't have to do everything. For example, there are other shooters. There are other solid perimeter defenders. There are others capable of handling the ball and running the offense. But Roach is able to do all those things, and he must contribute in each area for this team to maintain its balance.

To me, Roach is the guy this roster hinges on. That's not to say "best," but arguably the most important. With Mark Williams and Paolo Banchero in the frontcourt, Duke will be able to hang in the paint. There is no shortage of players, from Trevor Keels to Joey Baker (and even Banchero to a lesser extent), who can knock down shots. But to get the most out of this roster, Krzyzewski needs a guy who can set everything up and put others in position to succeed. Roach's ability to play connector will determine how high this team's ceiling is.

Mark Williams

2020-21: Freshman – 7.1 ppg, 4.5 rpg

I have to say: Williams' cryptic tweets this spring, which sent a few fans into a tizzy, were quite enjoyable from a distance. There was always skepticism Williams would declare for the NBA Draft after one month of real production, and after speaking with two NBA teams, I always felt the same way: Yes, he had a terrific final month of his freshman year. Now he needs to do that over a longer period to generate the pro interest he almost definitely will this season.

But that last month of his was good. Like, really good. Watching Williams drop the stats he did against Louisville in the ACC quarterfinals – 23 points and 19 rebounds – was as impressive a performance as I saw in person all season. Like Moore and Roach, this is another example of a guy who almost had two mini-seasons in one. Over Duke's first nine games, Williams averaged 1.4 points and 2.0 rebounds, while playing only five minutes a game. From then on, he averaged 10.8 points, 6.0 rebounds and 2.0 blocks. Of course, Johnson opting out of the season in February certainly afforded Williams more opportunity, but his increased comfort on the court was obvious.

I can't wait to see what Williams does this season. He's a shot-blocking machine, using every inch of his 7-foot frame to affect shots and protect the rim. He could stand to add a little more muscle, but his in-season improvement in terms of post moves and footwork was impressive. He has a little range outside the paint, although that's not his most efficient area by any means, and he's savvy enough to be able to clean up missed shots near the rim. All the skills you could want from your starting center are there.

The thing I'm most interested to see this season is how Williams meshes with Banchero, who figures to start at the four. This year, Williams' frontcourt mate (Hurt) drifted in and out of the paint, allowing him more space inside. Banchero can be a similar inside-outside threat, but he's going to get his chances in the post. Those two should complement each other well, but there will be a feeling-out process. The frontcourt will be the strength of this team, and Williams is a large reason why; he has All-ACC upside, and even alongside Banchero, should show enough to warrant first-round draft buzz this time next year.

Joey Baker

2020-21: Junior – 2.9 ppg, 11.5 mpg

I feel for Baker. The guy loves Duke, but through three seasons, he hasn't been able to find a consistent role. That's because he hasn't seized on the skill he's best at: shooting.

This is not to say Baker misses most of his 3-point attempts; he's a career 36.3 percent shooter from deep, with 45 career makes. But when his shots aren't falling, it's hard to justify more than a few minutes for him per game. He's an OK defender – and he is arguably the best charge-taker on the roster – who can guard multiple positions on the perimeter, but he plays because of the floor-spacing aspect of his game. That he took a significant step back in that regard this season, dropping from 39.4 percent to 31.4 percent, isn't an awesome sign.

Baker isn't going to be a heavy usage guy next season, but Duke needs him to play at least a rotational role on the wing. Realistically, this is going to be a nine-man rotation, with Baker ideally playing 10 or so minutes at the two and three. He was scoreless in nine of 23 games this season, though, and only made multiple field goals in four games. One or two 3s a night off the bench would be terrific, but given the other talent on the roster, Baker won't have an especially long leash.

Paolo Banchero

2020-21: Senior, O'Dea High School, Seattle

When Banchero committed in August, it sent shockwaves through the recruiting world. As for the folks in Durham, it has been a countdown ever since, as Blue Devils fans have eagerly awaited the arrival of the potential No. 1 pick in next year's draft. Banchero is that good. He recently went toe-to-toe with other elite members of his class at the Iverson Classic, and he's doing stuff at his size that just shouldn't be possible.

Ten thoughts on Duke's 10 scholarship players (cont.)

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (May 14, 2021)

Physically, Banchemo is already ready to compete at the highest level of college basketball, with a 6-foot-11, 250-pound frame. That represents a growth spurt from his previously reported 6-foot-9, 235-pound size, and he didn't lose any of his skills with this latest bump. Banchemo won't be asked to be a primary ball-handler, but he's comfortable initiating offense from the perimeter. He's at his best attacking the basket and using his size and speed to create mismatches, hit midrange jumpers and 3-pointers. The dude can do it all.

Banchemo most likely ends up as the leading scorer and rebounder, and there's a reason he's already being projected as a top-three pick. I expect Duke will use him all over the place to get the most out of his talent – in a Zion Williamson-like role – but there aren't enough positive things I can say about Banchemo. Duke fans should enjoy the one season he's in town, where he'll team up with Williams in arguably the country's best frontcourt.

A.J. Griffin

2020-21: Senior, Archbishop Stepinac High School, White Plains, N.Y.

Injuries have kept Griffin out of the spotlight (and off the court) most of the last year, but he reminded everyone at the Iverson Classic why he was a sought-after recruit. He looks like an NBA wing already – he turns 18 in late August – and has skills on top of that body. One look and it's easy to see why Griffin is another projected one-and-done lottery pick.

Griffin is listed at 6-foot-7 and 200 pounds, but he has grown since then, probably an inch or two and by maybe 10 or so pounds. That may not seem consequential, but he has the size to play either forward spot, although I'd expect him to slot in at small forward given the roster construction. Griffin's frame and athleticism – some of his highlight reels are ridiculous – should make him an advanced and versatile defender immediately. He can defend smaller bigs in the post, and also keep up with quicker ones outside the arc. Offensively, he's not a terrific ball-handler, but he can do just about everything else. He should help Duke with his 3-point range, not to mention his slashing ability and passing. And again, we're talking about a potential lockdown defender as a true freshman.

Because of Banchemo and Williams, I wouldn't expect Griffin to be Duke's every-night leading scorer. He will at times, given he's basically a 2K create-a-player in human form, but he can do a little bit of everything. He'll get rebounds, block a few shots, have some steals, all in addition to the 3-pointers and the acrobatic dunks. Griffin is similar in size to Jalen Johnson, but he's a better shooter, athlete, and defender. That dog will hunt.

Trevor Keels

2020-21: Senior, St. Paul VI High School, Chantilly, Va.

The last of Duke's three five-star freshmen, Keels makes for two Paul VI alums on the same roster. (Roach is the other.) Keels is a true combo guard, someone who can slot in at the point or as a catch-and-shoot off-ball option. His shooting should especially be music to fans' ears. Keels' high school coach told me recently that their staff has been around Keels so long, they don't even think of him as this sharpshooter anymore; they've almost come to take that aspect of his game for granted.

Duke fans won't, however. Keels has the potential to be the best shooter on the roster next season. His form is so smooth, and he's going to have opportunities, especially off-ball playing alongside his former backcourt mate. But saying Keels is just a shooter is a disservice to his game. He's a strong, strocky guard, and the staff will continue working on his body with him, but that size makes him a nightmare defensively. Listed at 6-foot-5 and 210 pounds, Keels could get some looks at the three in smaller lineups.

Overall, though, I wonder how many offensive opportunities Keels is going to have. With the offense funneling through the frontcourt, he'll be a strong kick-out option, but a guy this talented needs some shots of his own. I wonder if he'll spend more time alongside Roach at the two, or more backing him up as a point guard/primary offensive option with the second unit. I'd assume he comes off the bench as the sixth man, but given how much Krzyzewski likes tinkering with his lineups, he'll probably get a few starts too. Keels' talent may exceed his usage next season, but he's still filling an invaluable role.

Jaylen Blakes

2020-21: Senior, Blair Academy, Blairstown, N.J.

For those pleading that Duke needs to sign another guard in the transfer portal, meet Blakes. A four-star prospect from the same high school as walk-on Keenan Worthington, Blakes is the ideal reserve guard for this team. He'll primarily be a ball-handler and a defensive guy behind Roach and Keels, and that wouldn't be a bad role on a roster this talented.

Blakes is a guy who ideally stays multiple seasons and develops into a starting-caliber guard. But for now, pencil him in for about 10 minutes a game, where he can distribute the ball and use his longer wingspan (in the 6-foot-8 range) to disrupt defensively.

Theo John

2020-21: Senior (Marquette) – 8.0 ppg, 5.0 rpg, 1.2 apg

Duke fans can thank assistant coach Chris Carrawell and former Marquette coach Steve Wojciechowski for the newest backup big man, John. Wojo, of course, was a longtime Duke assistant, and Carrawell was on the Marquette staff that recruited John out of high school. The Blue Devils needed a big man. It all adds up.

John is going to be the backup big man, given the multiple frontcourt defections in the offseason. He is an ideal fit for this roster, as a veteran presence who adds interior defense, shot-blocking, and inside scoring. John struggled with a knee injury this season, which limited his ability to practice, but the hope is that the knee is good to go by fall. Banchemo and Williams are going to see the lion's share of frontcourt minutes – when Williams is off, Banchemo or John can serve as a small-ball center – but they need someone reliable behind them. John provides that without a substantial drop-off.

Bates Jones

2020-21: Senior (Davidson) – 2.6 ppg, 2.6 rpg

Jones, the brother of former Duke quarterback and current New York Giants starter Daniel Jones, was mostly a backup in his four seasons at Davidson. He'll be the same at Duke, working on the scout team and providing a practice partner for Williams and Banchemo. Jones will be most valuable behind the scenes, where he can work with the team's young bigs and provide more veteran experience. And the dude will be in line to get a Duke graduate degree out of it all, which is a pretty good deal.

A look at Duke's roster. Who's gone? Who's back? What about Mark Williams?

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (April 23, 2021)

It really should be easy for next season's Duke basketball team to put last season's uncharacteristic struggles in the past.

The majority of the players who participated in the 13-11 campaign to become the first Duke team since 1995 to miss the NCAA tournament won't be around when the new season begins.

With all of the departures to the NBA and the transfer portal since the Blue Devils' season ended when COVID-19 cases caused their abrupt departure from the ACC tournament, seven of the top 11 players in minutes played won't play for Duke next season.

This is a roster tear down and rebuild, for sure.

While some of the churn was expected, other players leaving were not anticipated when the coaching staff looked ahead to getting Duke back to its usual place among college basketball's elite teams.

But that's the state of college basketball in 2021, thanks mostly to immediate eligibility for transfers now in place.

So what will Duke look like next season? The roster will be tall and athletic with depth in the backcourt, thanks to a four-man freshman class rated No. 3 in the country and two incoming graduate transfers.

Here's a look at the comings and goings with thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of what will be coach Mike Krzyzewski's 42nd Duke team.

WHO'S GONE

All-ACC forward Matthew Hurt and freshman guard DJ Steward declared for the NBA, following freshman forward Jalen Johnson's withdrawal from the team and school in February.

Johnson was expected to be a one-and-done. Hurt played so well as a sophomore the time arrived for him to go. Steward was a surprise as he's likely to not be drafted.

Seniors Jordan Goldwire and Patrick Tape used the NCAA's pandemic-era rule that allows for a fifth season of eligibility to transfer. Goldwire, a guard, will play at Oklahoma with the 6-9 Tape landing at San Francisco.

Jaemyn Brakefield, a 6-8 freshman forward, will transfer back to his home state to play for Mississippi. Another freshman forward, the 6-7 Henry Coleman, entered his name in the transfer portal on Monday and has yet to select a new school.

Duke could have used any of those four players next season, though all would have projected to be reserves.

WHO'S BACK

That leaves 6-7 rising senior small forward Joey Baker, 6-5 rising junior small forward Wendell Moore, 6-3 rising sophomore guard Jeremy Roach and 7-0 rising sophomore center Mark Williams as the only players who have played a game for Duke set to be in uniform when the new season starts in November.

Moore, Roach and Williams all started Duke's final game of the season, a 70-56 ACC tournament win over Louisville.

All three will be important players on next year's Blue Devils. In addition, Moore and Baker look like candidates for team captain roles due to their experience.

WHO'S ARRIVING

Two of the four freshmen arrive with high expectations, having been ranked among the top 12 players in the class.

First up is Paolo (pronounced paul-oh) Banchemo, already projected by ESPN as the No. 1 pick in the 2022 NBA Draft. An athletic big man, Banchemo has reportedly grown from the 6-9 he's previously been listed at to 6-11 this school year.

At around 235-240 pounds, he's strong enough to hold his own inside while still being agile and skilled enough to put the ball on the floor and drive or hit a 3-pointer.

He projects as the classic Duke stretch-4 forward who would thrive in an offense with at least four players out away from the basket to create driving lanes.

Another forward, 6-7 AJ Griffin, arrives as the No. 9 player in the class. While not as big as Banchemo, Griffin should give Duke another perimeter scoring threat who can help with rebounding.

On the perimeter, 6-2 guard Trevor Keels is another five-star recruit, rated No. 20 in the class. A former high school teammate of Roach in Virginia, Keels should take over the minutes that Steward had for Duke last season as the top scoring guard.

The latest addition to the class is 6-2 point guard Jaylen Blakes, a four-star player from Blairstown (NJ) Academy who projects as Roach's backup.

Together the class is the best for Duke since the 2018 group that included NBA lottery picks Zion Williamson, RJ Barrett and Cam Reddish.

In addition, Duke mined the transfer portal to rebuild after its own players transferred.

Theo John, a 6-9, 255-pound center, played four seasons at Marquette with former Duke assistant Steve Wojciechowski as his head coach. Current Duke assistant coach Chris Carrawell was on the Marquette staff for one of those seasons. John is a solid defender and rebounder who should have little trouble adjusting to playing for Krzyzewski.

"We are thrilled to welcome Theo into our program," Krzyzewski said in a statement. "He is versatile, tough and physical; a great defender and passer with the ability to both face up and play with his back to the basket."

Duke also added 6-8, 225-pound forward Bates Jones from Davidson. Like John, Jones is using his super senior season to find a new school. Davidson, where he played in a reserve role, doesn't offer graduate level classes.

Jones is the younger brother of former Duke and current New York Giants quarterback Daniel Jones and the older sister of Ruthie Jones, a sophomore goalkeeper for Duke's women's soccer team.

"He obviously comes from an incredible family and was a terrific four-year player at Davidson, playing for one of the best coaches in our game in Bob McKillop," Krzyzewski said in a statement. "Bates will instantly add experience and a veteran voice in our locker room and provide size and a physical presence in the frontcourt. We're excited to have him in our program."

WHO PROJECTS AS DUKE'S TOP PLAYERS

As usual, it starts with the freshmen, particularly Banchemo. His skills put him in line with Duke's past one-and-done stars like Jabari Parker, Jahlil Okafor, Brandon Ingram, Jayson Tatum, Marvin Bagley, Wendell Carter, Williamson and Barrett. The same was expected from Jalen Johnson last season and, due to injury and indifference, that didn't work out and Duke missed the NCAA tournament.

Putting it bluntly, Duke needs Banchemo to be as good as advertised to be a national championship contender.

He would pair well with the 7-foot Williams inside giving Duke a powerful front court with John a steady, capable reserve or starter when needed.

A look at Duke's roster. Who's gone? Who's back? (cont.)

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (April 23, 2021)

Griffin, Moore and Roach should get plenty of minutes in the backcourt, along with Keels.

That's a solid seven-man rotation. Baker could be the eighth if he regains the 3-point shooting stroke that evaded him far too often last season when he hit only 31.4% from behind the line.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

Team chemistry and camaraderie will be very important with this group. The newcomers arrive from all parts of the country at different stages of their careers. The four holdovers from last season have to introduce them to what's expected as Duke players.

The restrictions in place last year due to the pandemic cost Duke big time in this area. It doesn't appear to be as onerous a task this time around, thanks to widespread vaccinations that should lead to more time together in a closer-to-normal campus setting.

One thing to note, though, is that Baker is the only player on the roster to have played in an NCAA tournament game for Duke. As a freshman, he played seven minutes in the second half of a blowout win over North Dakota State in the 2019 tournament.

John played in one NCAA tournament game, also in 2019, for Marquette.

Bates Jones played less than one minute as a freshman when Davidson lost 78-73 to Kentucky in the 2018 NCAA tournament.

That is the extent of Duke's experience in the event the entire team will be striving to first make and, in their ultimate goal, win.

That's something to keep in mind as the season progresses toward March.

Duke basketball adds a second grad transfer big man

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (April 16, 2021)

DURHAM - A busy week reworking Duke's basketball roster continued Friday when another graduate transfer big man said he'll join the Blue Devils for next season.

Theo John, a 6-9, 255-pound forward who played for Marquette the last four seasons, announced on Twitter he'll play his fifth season for Duke.

"After conversations with my family, I have decided that next year I will be attending Duke University for my final year of eligibility," John said. "I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of my basketball journey. Happy to be joining #TheBrotherHood."

John is eligible to play a fifth season due to an NCAA rule instituted last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020-21 season did not count against a player's eligibility limits, which normally allow athletes five years to play four seasons.

John joins 6-8 forward Bates Jones in playing a fifth season with the Blue Devils. Jones played four seasons at Davidson but, because that school doesn't offer graduate courses, he said Thursday he'll use his super senior season with the Blue Devils.

At Marquette, John played for head coach Steve Wojciechowski, the former Duke player and assistant coach. Wojciechowski was fired last month following seven seasons with the Golden Eagles.

After coming off the bench to play in 33 games as a freshman in 2017-18, John started 87 games for Marquette over the last three seasons while establishing himself as a strong defensive player. He averaged 1.5 blocked shots per game last season after averaging 1.8 as a junior and 2.1 as a sophomore.

Last season, he averaged 8.0 points and 5.0 rebounds while hitting 57% of his shots from the field.

John and Jones give Duke much needed depth in their frontcourt after departures of 6-9 Matthew Hurt (NBA), 6-9 Patrick Tapé (transfer to San Francisco) and 6-8 Jaemyn Brakefield (transfer portal) since the season ended.

Duke returns 7-foot center Mark Williams, who averaged 7.1 points and 4.5 rebounds last season as a freshman, and 6-7 rising sophomore reserve forward Henry Coleman.

The incoming freshman class includes two five-star big men in 6-9 Paolo Banchemo and 6-7 A.J. Griffin.

Duke's backcourt will include returning starting point guard Jeremy Roach, a sophomore, along with junior small forward Wendell Moore and incoming freshman shooting guard Trevor Keels. Senior small forward Joey Baker will also provide depth and perimeter shooting off the bench.

Duke also has a scholarship offer out to 6-2 guard Jaylen Blakes, a four-star recruit from Blairstown, New Jersey.

Nolan Smith is now a Duke assistant coach because he trusted his boss

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (April 15, 2021)

Nolan Smith didn't have to wait.

Last summer, Memphis coach Penny Hardaway approached Smith with an opportunity he has always coveted: to become an assistant coach. Smith was Duke's director of basketball operations, a vital behind-the-scenes role – but not nearly the same thing as being an assistant, who are allowed to recruit on the road, scout opponents and work directly with players. A DOBO? Not so much.

But Smith, a former ACC Player of the Year and national champion, didn't take Memphis' offer. Instead, Mike Krzyzewski gave him the same advice he did back when he first recruited Smith to Duke as a teenager: Trust me.

"He said, 'Look, someone is gonna get a head coaching job, and you'll get moved up,'" Smith said on Zoom on Thursday, the day he was announced as a new assistant coach at Duke. "(Coach K) said, stay here. Trust me. It's funny; he's always said, 'Trust me.' And I always have. Always have. I've never wavered in my trust from Coach, and he said, 'You're on the right plan. You're on the right path.' And it worked out."

Smith's promotion comes days after Nate James – himself a former Duke national champion three times over – left as associate head coach to take the head coaching job at Austin Peay. James' departure opened up a spot for Smith, who seamlessly slides to the bench.

This is just the next step in what has been a meteoric rise for Smith up the coaching ranks. Smith, 32, said Thursday that from a young age, coaching was always something he'd wanted to do; his father, Derek, after all, went from his NBA playing days to being an assistant for the Washington Bullets. But injuries robbed the younger Smith of the longtime professional career he imagined for himself, setting him on his coaching path earlier than expected.

That meant a return to Duke in 2016, when he became a special assistant for the program. Two years later he was elevated to director of basketball operations. It's not like Smith has just been biding his time, though, waiting for the next promotion. He already has been a mentor to several classes of Duke players, as was evidenced Thursday when his announcement hit social media. That his former pupils, like Jayson Tatum, as well as those he never coached, like Kevin Durant, reached out with congratulations should tell you all you need to know about Smith's place in the basketball community.

Just as important, though, in the time since Smith has been back in Durham, has been the role he has played in the community. Last summer, as protests against police brutality and systemic racism erupted in the wake of George Floyd's killing, Smith organized efforts in the Bull City. He facilitated meetings between city officials and activists, led marches, and helped Duke establish a deeper series of conversations with generations of former players. Smith said Thursday not only will he continue his community outreach in his new role, but also that's exactly what Krzyzewski told him to do. In other words, "Be you, son."

Now, for all the things that'll remain the same for Smith in his new role – being a mentor, improving Durham – there are some fundamental changes too. Smith will be allowed to serve as an on-court coach, walking players through certain actions and drills. "I was reading Coach's quote about me before I sat down, and he mentioned I can still play," Smith said with a laugh. "So I can actually show them a thing or two now too, so I'm thankful for that. Just to be on the court with these players and teaching them the game of basketball."

He'll also be expected to prepare scouting reports, which he'll then have to teach to the players. He'll have to tell players hard truths, something he said he's not afraid to do. And he'll be able to hit the recruiting trail full-time, rather than doing so only in certain capacities. In that regard, Smith joked he'll need to up his shoe game.

"Look, I'm telling you, that's a big thing," he said. "These recruits, they want to see your shoe game. I have to make sure that's fresh, and make sure my gear is fresh when we get on the road, and I'm just excited to be in those gyms as a full-time coach."

Smith's enthusiasm practically jumps through the Zoom screen. And in that exuberance, you can see why he chose to hold out not just for a job, but for this job. At this place. The one that meant so much to him when he was younger, and the one that has shaped him into the person he is today.

"To love what you do is one thing. But to work at a place that you love, and with people that you love? It doesn't get much better than that," Smith said. "So to be the assistant coach for Duke, with Coach K – who has trusted me since 2007 when he came into my living room and offered me to come to Duke – to this day, that trust and that bond is still there."

When James decided to leave for Austin Peay, the process of finding a replacement was a short one. James told Smith he was more than ready to make the jump, and Krzyzewski felt the same way.

"Nolan is a rising star," Krzyzewski said in a statement. "To get him on the court with our players on a day-to-day basis will mean so much to our program. Our players will benefit immensely from his enthusiasm to teach, but also the fact that he's young enough, he can show them. He can still play. We're very fortunate that he and his wife, Cheyna, are so involved in our program and our community. He is a national champion and has been such a great member of my staff as director of basketball operations, but he's done so much more for our school and our community. Nolan has always used his platform for the good of others. We are so lucky to have him, and Durham is even luckier."

As for what Krzyzewski told Smith when he finally got to follow through on his promise from a year ago?

"He said, you're ready," Smith recalled. "Come in, be yourself. Be yourself with the guys. Keep leading. Keep being a role model. Let's go."

Coach K promotes Nolan Smith to assistant coach. What that means for Duke.

By Steve Wiseman, Raleigh News & Observer (April 15, 2021)

DURHAM - With one former Duke basketball team captain moving to his first head coaching job, another is moving into a larger role on coach Mike Krzyzewski's staff.

Nolan Smith, the 2011 ACC player of the year who also captained the Blue Devils that season as a senior, is now an assistant coach on Duke's staff. Smith replaces the position left open when Nate James, a team captain during his Duke player days before becoming an assistant coach, was named Austin Peay's head coach on April 2.

Smith had opportunities to leave Duke before now, most notably last summer when Memphis coach Penny Hardaway offered him the coach to become an assistant coach with the Tigers. Smith said Krzyzewski pulled him in his office and their conversation was brief.

"(Coach K) said, 'Look, someone's going to get a head coaching job, and you'll get moved up,'" Smith told reporters on a video conference Thursday. "He said, 'Stay here, trust me.' It's funny, he's always said, 'Trust me.' And I always have. I've never wavered my trust from coach and he said, 'You're on the right plan. You're on the right path.' And it worked out."

A first-round pick by the Portland Trail Blazers following his Duke playing career, Smith returned to Duke as a special assistant on Krzyzewski's staff in 2016. In 2018, Smith became the team's director of basketball operations and player development.

Both roles, though, didn't allow him to work on the court with players or recruit off-campus full time. NCAA rules limit those duties to the head coach and three assistant coaches. The rules did, however, provide Smith a small window to fill-in on occasion in one of their four spots on the road recruiting. It gave him insight into the first thing he has to do now that he'll be full time -- "step up his shoe game."

"I'm telling you that's a big thing, these recruits, they want to see your shoe game," Smith said. "I have to make sure that's fresh and make sure my gear is fresh when we get on the road. I'm just excited to be in those gyms as a full time coach and watch the high school players play and look for the right fit for Duke basketball."

With his promotion, the 32-year-old Smith can now fulfill those duties along with Duke associate head coach Jon Scheyer and Blue Devils assistant coach Chris Carrawell.

As a player, Smith was a two-time, all-ACC selection as a guard while helping the Blue Devils win the 2010 NCAA tournament championship. He and Scheyer comprised Duke's starting backcourt that season.

As a senior, Smith averaged 20.6 points per game and was named a first-team, all-American in addition to the ACC's player of the year and tournament most valuable player.

5-star guard Trevor Keels will join Jeremy Roach, giving Duke a lethal backcourt

By Brendan Marks, The Athletic (April 2, 2021)

As is always the case with Duke and recruiting, Mike Krzyzewski is the closer.

And for good reason, right? You roll out those five national championship rings, list all the dudes you've sent to the NBA, and ... well, that's a pretty convincing pitch. Then you tack on the entire staff, all of them former players of Krzyzewski's – and former national champions, at that – and you're talking about a darn-near ironclad proposal. You want tradition, or banners, or a Hall of Fame coach, or a proven development system? It's all there, all yours for the taking.

Now, that all said, a little help never hurts.

Which is exactly what happened in this particular case. On Friday – the day after freshman guard DJ Steward announced he was entering the NBA Draft – Duke officially landed the commitment of five-star combo guard Trevor Keels. Keels, who stands 6-foot-5 and weighs 210 pounds, is the No. 20 overall player in the country, per the 247Sports composite. Given the offseason departures thus far of Steward and senior point guard Jordan Goldwire, Keels fills a major need for Duke in the backcourt, especially as someone capable of playing both positions.

Know why the staff has faith he can do that? Because he's done it before – with his new Blue Devils backcourt mate, rising sophomore Jeremy Roach.

Roach and Keels played together in high school for Glenn Farello at Paul VI Catholic, where they won two championships together and regularly torched opponents. At one point, that duo also played with Anthony Harris, now a rising redshirt sophomore at North Carolina. "We used to call it like this: We had two Batmans and a Robin," Farello told The Athletic

But when Roach and Harris, the two elder guards, both went down with ACL injuries in a compressed time period, that left Paul VI needing much more out of then-sophomore Keels. "We had to get Robin to go be a Batman," Farello said. And Keels' response, even two years ago – he went on to win WCAC Player of the Year that season – says everything about the type of player Duke just landed.

It also says everything about the bond between Roach and Keels, who now represent Duke's new-look backcourt. Keels, who announced his commitment live on ESPN2, even mentioned how the four years he played with Roach was a significant factor in his decision. "He's always competitive – that's what I really like about him – and we work out all the time. We always go at each other in practice when I was at PVI, when we played together, and he recruited me," Keels said. "Recruited me hard, too. So he told me the things he did like, the things he didn't like, and he always kept it 100 with me. That's one thing I liked."

In addition to Roach's influence, Keels said that his relationship with Krzyzewski helped push Duke over the top. (Keels' other finalists were Kentucky, Villanova, and Virginia.) "All four coaches are Hall of Famers in my eyes, but I think that relationship I had with Coach K, it's just different," Keels said, donning a flat-brimmed Duke cap. "We really connected."

As for what Keels brings to the Blue Devils, he's much more than just another body. In some ways, he's the missing piece of what could become Duke's next national championship team.

The program was already set to bring in forward Paolo Banchemo and wing A.J. Griffin – the No. 3 and 7 players in the class, respectively – as one of the better freshmen duos in the country. Those two, combined with rising sophomore center Mark Williams, are expected to make up one of the nation's best frontcourts next season. (Matthew Hurt, the team's leading scorer, has also yet to declare for the NBA Draft, although that still remains an option.) But the balance on the roster, especially with Goldwire and Steward on their way out, was clearly off. Before Keels' commitment, Duke really only had Wendell Moore Jr. and Roach in the backcourt, with Joey Baker capable of playing some two guard if needed. But now? Keels isn't just that much-needed depth; he's the versatile chess piece capable of alleviating either Moore or Roach, depending on different situations.

"The two of them (Roach and Keels), they complement each other really well. They play off one another really well. They're both very versatile, playmakers and they can score as well," Farello said. "They can both play with the ball in their hands and without the ball in their hands. And I think that's what makes this a very unique situation for the two of them."

As for Keels specifically, what sort of attributes does he bring to the next level? For starters, he's one of the stronger, more physical guards in the class. He also brings a much-needed skill: shooting. Hurt was the only regular rotation player for Duke last season to make more than 40 percent of his 3s, and Keels certainly should be able to help in that department. He averaged 28.7 points, 9.1 rebounds, and 7.2 assists this season, not to mention recording six double-doubles. But for as strong as Keels is, as good a shooter as he is – "We take his shooting for granted because we've been working with him for four years," Farello said – there's something else about him his high school coach believes will translate more immediately at the ACC level.

"I know he's an elite shooter; I would not say that's what would translate quickest," Farello said. "It's just his ability to read the floor – his feel for the game and court awareness, I think, is what is elite. That's what really separates him, not just the shooting."

Here, Farello mentions that Keels never really gets sped up. From the time he had to take over as the alpha for Harris and Roach, he learned how to impact games – how to contribute to winning – without being fazed by what opponents threw at him. It helps that he can drain buzzer-beating bombs from outside the arc. It helps that his strength keeps him on balance, prevents him from getting pushed around. But it's Keels' mentality and awareness, Farello said, that separates him.

Keels already knows both Banchemo and Griffin, in addition to Roach, which should seemingly expedite the entire class' transition to the next level. But with the focus Friday on Keels, Duke fans can take pride in the fact that they added another piece to a championship puzzle.

And that the assist came from one of their own players should only make Keels' commitment that much sweeter.

"If you talk to Trev, you want to play with someone you know and respect and who plays the game the right way. He also knows the guys coming in in his class, and he's very comfortable with those guys, too," Farello said. "In a time where a lot of people are out for themselves – and we understand that's the nature of the sport, people are trying to get places – you want to surround yourself with some players who still care about their teammates, and want to be a great teammate, and care about the bigger picture."

"That's what Trevor felt really comfortable with, and Jeremy was such a good influence on that, as well as the players that are still there and the ones coming in with him."