

2008-09 SEASON PREVIEW

Taking the next step will be one of themes of the 2008-09 season for the Ferris State University men's basketball team.

Last season proved to be a challenging learning experience for the Bulldogs who battled their own youth and a tough schedule of competition with a freshman-heavy lineup. The team finished 10-19 overall and placed seventh in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's (GLIAC) North Division with a 5-13 slate. But, that on-the-job training the young Bulldogs endured, under seventh-year head coach **Bill Sall**, could pay off this winter as last season's inexperienced college freshmen become this campaign's seasoned sophomores.

This winter, the Bulldogs have seven players returning with GLIAC experience. Five of those seven returners, however, are sophomores. So, even though Sall's young Bulldogs have gained valuable experience, this year's team again features a youthful look with five first-year players from the 2007-08 season expected to take on key roles this year.

"The good thing about the team we have right now is they really dedicated themselves this summer to getting better physically and as basketball players," Sall said. "We had a lot of guys work hard during the summer up here to prepare for this season and it's going to be exciting for us to see that hard work beginning to pay off."

Expect youth to again be served as Ferris returns a team led by standout sophomore forward **Justin Keenan**. Keenan gives the Bulldogs a strong and intimidating presence in the paint. As a freshman, the 6-6 Keenan averaged 15.9 points and 6.9 rebounds for the Bulldogs in a banner rookie year. Keenan, expected to again be a focal point of Ferris' offense, is one of four returning starters for the Bulldogs. Other returning starters include senior forward **Jason Holder** as well as sophomore guards **Darien Gay**, who plays the point, and **Bryan Pasciak**, who plays both backcourt positions. Additionally, redshirt sophomore guard/forward **Lou Williams** and senior forward **Mark Gildersleeve** are back in the mix for FSU. Williams brings height, length and athleticism to the wing positions, at 6-6, while Gildersleeve contributes a relentless work ethic to the Bulldogs' front line at 6-5. The Bulldogs can also go to the bench for some consistent 3-point shooting from sophomore marksman **Matt DeHart**.

"Obviously, Justin Keenan is going to be a big part of our offense. He already has gotten some honors and deservedly so," Sall said. "We're excited to see what Justin can do. He has worked hard in the off season to get stronger and he's looking a lot better. We're going to need him this season to be even better, but we're also going to our other inside guys to step up for this season."

While Ferris does have a large group of returning players, the program also welcomes a host of newcomers to the hardwood. Sall and his staff, including top assistant **Cory Anderson**, signed a strong recruiting class comprised of transfers and freshmen expected to make an immediate impact. **Austin Randel**, a 6-4 guard/forward, is a transfer from North Greenville (S.C.) who brings a great and consistent shooting touch from deep on the perimeter. **Verdell Billingsley**, a 6-foot-6 forward comes to Ferris after competing for Owens Community College where he was a part of a junior-college program with a history of success. Billingsley is expected to give Keenan much-needed help in the paint both on the backboard and with carrying some of the scoring load. **Josh Young**, a 6-foot-2 guard who competed at Kellogg Community College, adds scoring punch to the backcourt. Freshman **Dontae Molden** is a highly-recruited point guard who is expected to see heavy minutes running the show.

Ferris also added **Max Gover**, a native of Lansing who prepped at Lansing Catholic Central and **Rob McPhillips**, a native of Midland who is a transfer from Delta Community College. **Jon Yeazel**, a native of Middleville transferred to Ferris but is expected to redshirt this season before he begins his senior campaign. Center **Jim Boylan**, the Bulldogs' tallest player at 6-10, is back after taking a redshirt season to get acclimated to the college game.

"We have a number of new guys who are coming into our program and some of these guys are going to be counted on to step in and contribute for us right away," Sall said. "We feel like we're a much deeper team than we've been recently and that is really going to help us when we get into the GLIAC."

The newcomers could help the young program take the next step in the climb toward the top of the GLIAC. This group of new Bulldogs provide long-range shooting, explosive scoring punch, size, depth and a history of winning.

One of the first newcomers expected to pay off quickly will be Randel, a native of Lake City who prepped at McBain High School. Randel, a junior, averaged 20.7 points and 5.6 rebounds last season for North Greenville, an NCAA Division II institution. Randel's deep shooting touch and accuracy from the perimeter is expected to stretch defenses and open up the paint for Keenan to operate a little more freely. Also in that mode is Young, a native of Ypsilanti, who can score from the perimeter, but also is a factor on the dribble drive and in transition.

Molden brings quickness and a high level of maturity to the point guard position in spite of being a freshman. As a prep standout at Pershing High School in Detroit, the 5-11 Molden had a banner senior season as he aver-

aged 16 points, eight assists and four rebounds. Another incoming freshman, the 6-4 Gover, averaged 10.5 points and 5.1 rebounds per contest for Lansing Catholic Central during his senior year. Boylan was a redshirt last season in the program after averaging 15 points and 12 rebounds as a senior (2006-07) at Grayling High School. Yeazel, a 6-2 former Central Michigan University player, is redshirting this season and will have one season of eligibility remaining when he is expected to take the court during the 2009-10 campaign.

"I like the blend of guys we have on this team with the combination of the juniors we've added and the freshmen who have come in," Sall said. "We've had some guys who are going to come in and be competitive and that will be a big thing for us. Our three juniors bring us some help in the front court, some depth on our roster and a shooter who's going to really help us."

Ferris and the rest of its rivals in the GLIAC are gearing up for what will be a long and challenging schedule. Gannon and Mercyhurst have left the GLIAC for the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference. Joining the GLIAC this year, however, will be Tiffin University. In the reformatted GLIAC, all teams will play each other home and away as part of a grueling 22-game conference schedule.

With an expanded league schedule, Ferris knows there are many challenges that await it. Beyond the league schedule, however, the team's 2008-09 schedule has a road game against Division II national power Northern Kentucky and a home date against another Great Lakes Valley Conference foe, St. Joseph's (Ind.).

The Bulldogs will be challenged early, in particular, with three consecutive road games to begin December and the GLIAC portion of its schedule with a trip to Allendale, to face perennial league power and archrival Grand Valley State on Dec. 1. Then, on Dec. 4, Ferris is at Ashland and on Dec. 6 is at Tiffin as part of a two-game road trip to Ohio.

"The GLIAC is a tremendous conference and we know it's going to be a challenge every night in the league," Sall said. "We have some younger guys who have gained some experience and we have some new guys coming in, but we're excited for this season and looking forward to the challenging of competing in one of the nation's best conferences."

In a conference like the GLIAC, that continues to improve from top to bottom, Ferris knows the challenge is a great one. Sall and his coaching staff have brought in a strong recruiting class that adds some much-needed experience and depth to a group that has had an opportunity to learn and grow together. Once again, the GLIAC will be one of the strongest Division II leagues in the nation led by the University of Findlay, one of the top teams in the country. Additionally, traditional powers like Grand Valley State will be strong again while Ferris is one of several teams on the rise.

*Preview Courtesy of **Sandy Gholston** (Bulldog Athletics Blog)

Returnees

No.	Player	Pos.	Yr.	Ht.	Exp.
2	Bryan Pasciak	G	So.	6-1	1L
4	Darien Gay	G	So.	5-10	1L
5	Matt DeHart	G	So.	6-3	1L
21	Lou Williams	G/F	So.	6-6	1L
34	Jason Holder	F	Sr.	6-4	2L
40	Justin Keenan	F	So.	6-6	1L
42	Mark Gildersleeve	F	Sr.	6-5	3L

Newcomers

No.	Player	Pos.	Yr.	Ht.	Exp.
1	Austin Randel	G/F	Jr.	6-4	T
3	Dontae Molden	G	Fr.	5-11	HS
24	Josh Young	G	Jr.	6-2	T
31	Jon Yeazel	G	Sr.	6-2	T
32	Max Gover	G/F	Fr.	6-4	HS
33	Verdell Billingsley	F	Jr.	6-6	T
50	Rob McPhillips	F	Jr.	6-5	T
54	Jim Boylan	C	Fr.	6-10	HS

G – Guard
HS – High School

F – Forward
T – Transfer

C – Center
R – Redshirt

