

And then, finally, there were four

Duke's chance on Duhon paying off in postseason

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS — Mike Krzyzewski faced a tough decision as the season wound down: Stick with a slumping senior or start a rookie with the postseason looming.

Duke's coach took a chance, benching Nate James in favor of Chris Duhon, the Atlantic Coast Conference freshman of the year.

Good move. Duke is 8-0 ever since and back in the Final Four.

"I'm still trying to fit my way into a program with such great players," Duhon said.

He has, adding more speed and better ball-handling to a team that needed the help after losing center Carlos Boozer to a broken right foot.

With Duhon as a starter, the Blue Devils beat North Carolina at the Smith Center to close out the regular season, then defeated N.C. State, Maryland and the Tar Heels to win a third-straight ACC championship.

The 6-foot-1 guard had 17 assists and a team-leading 11 steals in Duke's four NCAA tournament games, won by an average of 20 points.

Duhon also hit a pair of key 3-pointers in the second half of the team's East Regional victory over Southern Cal to get the Blue Devils (33-4) to Minneapolis.

Krzyzewski and his assistants have urged Duhon to shoot more, but he's been reluctant.

He often defers to All-

Americans Shane Battier and Jason Williams, who provide most of the offense.

"He understands where Jason and Shane are at in their careers," Krzyzewski said.

"They're better, and he wants to help make them better. What he is learning is by taking his shot or being a little bit more aggressive, he's doing that also."

Duke arrived at its hotel Thursday afternoon and were ready to get down to business.

"It's about time," Battier said. "This week seems to drag on. We've had some great practices this week, but we wanted to get on the plane and get up here."

On Saturday, Duhon will probably go up against Maryland's top scorer, Juan Dixon.

"He plays hard," Duhon said of Dixon. "He's a great defender, and he gets a lot of baskets off breaking out a rebound or getting a steal and taking it home in transition."

"If we can limit his touches in their offense, we should be able to contain him a little bit."

Maybe more important than his quickness, defense and outside shot, Duhon's increased time on the court has given Williams a break at point guard.

By sharing some of the ball-handling duties, Williams has been able to be more aggressive on offense. He's averaging 28.8 points, hitting 20 of 46 3-pointers. He averaged about 21 points coming into the tournament.

Williams is also helping Duhon grow as a player and floor leader.

"Jason has just started being more vocal with me," said Duhon, one of seven former prep All-Americans on Duke's roster. "He says, 'Watch me, and you'll learn.' That's all there is to it - watching a magician at work."

The move to start Duhon has also helped James, a 6-6 wing player who was out of position as the team's second guard.

He is shooting better now, hitting 13 of 21 shots (62 percent) while averaging 5 rebounds in the NCAs. Coming into the tournament he was shooting about 48 percent. James also hit the winning shot against Maryland in the semifinals of the ACC tournament.

"Nate is a team guy," Krzyzewski said. "He knows what we're doing is best for this team."

"Now we're just trying to make sure he sees his openings."

Unlike some players who get benched, the veteran James took his role change in stride and remained positive. Players and coaches said that helped the transition and made the Blue Devils an even better basketball team.

"Sulking is not part of what you do here, and if you want to sulk, you should do it someplace else," Krzyzewski said.

"If you want to be a champion, you don't do what other people do or everyone would be a champion. Nate is a champion."

Woods reluctant to receive praise

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TUCSON, Ariz. — Loren Woods doesn't want to talk about himself.

"I'm one of five guys on the floor; I'm one of 15 guys on the roster," he said. "So it's just about the Arizona team."

But his teammates and coach know it will take a concerted effort by the 7-foot-1 center for Arizona to hold off defending champion Michigan State on the boards during Saturday's NCAA semifinal.

The Spartans are the nation's best rebounding team. During the season they outrebounded teams by an average of 15.7 a game. In the tournament, the margin has been 18.

Woods, a fifth-year senior, has had an erratic season for the Wildcats (27-7).

He missed the final eight games last season, including the tournament, after a respiratory infection and back surgery.

This year, Arizona was the preseason No. 1 pick, and Woods predicted his team could become one of the all-time greats.

Disaster followed. Woods was hit with a six-game NCAA suspension for receiving improper benefits from a family friend. Arizona lost at Purdue, then again three games later at Connecticut in Woods' first game back. In that game, he was hit with a goaltending call with 1.8 seconds left.

Three weeks later, on New

Year's Day, Coach Lute Olson's wife, Bobbi, died.

The Wildcats plummeted to 8-5 before going on a tear, winning 19 of their last 21 games, including the last 10.

Even so, for much of the season Woods was a self-doubter, far from the shot-blocking force he was last year. His frustrations were written on his face.

He scowled over mistakes, missed shots, errant passes, bad block-outs, missed rebounds.

Late in the Pac-10 campaign, he started coming around, becoming more aggressive defensively, altering and blocking shots and going after the boards.

Olson insisted Woods needed to stop beating himself up. And finally, in the last 10 to 15 minutes of Arizona's Midwest Regional victory Sunday against Illinois, the message seemed to get through.

He scored his first basket of the game with less than six-and-a-half minutes left, and finished with 18 points, 12 from the free throw line, seven blocks and five rebounds.

During the first half, he had two points, no rebounds, one block and three turnovers.

"My thinking is, it's just a matter of staying focused on what's the immediate thing that needs to be taken care of, instead of what happened the last play or two," Olson said. "It's very obvious what a difference it made once that happened."

Olson said Woods' suspension set him back, as did not playing at midseason form immediately upon returning.

"But the last month and a half now, he's been practicing really well, playing really well, much more aggressive with the ball, and critical to us just as he was against Illinois, even though he didn't play well the first 25 minutes."

Woods has averaged 15.8 points and 6.8 rebounds, with 17 blocks in the tournament. He's made 23 of 24 free throws.

"As far as his effect for us on Saturday, he's the guy that makes it tough for people to take the ball to the hole," Olson said. "Because if he doesn't block it, he's going to certainly affect the way the guy looks at his shot."



The Nebraska baseball team takes on the Oklahoma Sooners in a three-game series in Norman starting today.

Rodaway earns start job

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He credited his success to simply throwing the ball over the plate.

"I'm throwing a lot more strikes," he said. "That gives me a lot more opportunities to pitch. That's all I'm really asking for, an opportunity."

Van Horn said Rodaway deserved a chance to start and had the potential to become part of the main starting rotation.

"He's earned it," Van Horn said. "We got to give him a chance. He's played patiently, and it's time to let him have the ball."

Van Horn said Rodaway had improved a great deal since he came to Nebraska four years ago from Lincoln High.

"He's gotten a lot bigger and stronger," he said. "His velocity's picked up probably six or seven miles per hour, maybe more. He's done a good job developing mentally and physically."

In today's game, NU, as usual, will send Komine to the mound. The junior has been the Huskers' most consistent starter this season, going 6-1 with 4.15 ERA.

Jamie Rodrigue, who suffered a knee injury pitching against

Missouri, is scheduled to start the second game. Rodrigue (2-3, 6.10 ERA) has struggled recently, picking up losses in his last two starts.

If Rodrigue can't go, Van Horn said he would likely use Waylon Byers or Thom Ott, who both saw action in relief against Missouri.

While NU's starters struggled against the Tigers last weekend, the bats also were not as hot as they had been in the past.

The Huskers produced just two runs in each of the last two games and five hits in the third game.

But the Husker offense came back alive Wednesday, exploding for 32 runs in a doubleheader against Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Van Horn said the NU bats must remain hot against Oklahoma and its starters needed to be more consistent than they were last weekend.

Hopefully, Rodaway will be able to provide a solid outing, Van Horn said.

"The key is being consistent," he said. "If (Rodaway) is, he'll get a chance again next week."

"This is a big game for him personally. He knows that we need him to do well to help the team."

Komine finding his groove

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counts and compounded mistakes with more mistakes.

It was right before Nebraska's game against Northwestern (La.) State that Childress and Komine had a conversation that sent the Husker ace on the road to recovery.

"He just told me to go back to how I was pitching last year and forget trying to throw the slider," Komine said. "We were only going to use the slider in situations where we really needed it."

Komine responded with his best performance of the season, recording 13 strikeouts. The turnaround, he said, had begun right there. He'll try to continue it today in a start against Oklahoma.

The junior is beginning to reach the comfort level he enjoyed in 2000, when most games fell right into place. College pitching is about rising to the one-week occasion, and Komine, relying on his talent and growing tendency to study scouting reports, has become a more effective and subtle competitor.

There was a time when, like many young pitchers, Komine reared back and threw. Teammate and relief pitcher Brian Rodaway noticed the difference.

"He began to think more about that stuff, and he was already talented," Rodaway said. "It's hard to hit Shane if he has it all together."

Komine's growth was aided by catcher Justin Cowan, with whom he had developed a rhythm. This year, Komine had to start over with two new receivers, Tito Rivera and Jed Morris, who alternate the job. It was hard and remains an adjustment.

But it will get comfortable, Komine believes, and he'll find his stride like he did last season.

"I'm just into pitching well," Komine said. "For me, good is just making the pitches."

Under 3.00 ERA? "Yes."

Under 2.00? "Well..." Komine laughs and turns back to the baseball field. He's already had a heck of a time trying to figure the number of UWM's new pitcher. It's the hardest thing for him to worry about on an easy day.

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More forego college for NBA

NBA from page 10

you would tell them to practice saying, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Commissioner Stern."

Don't be so naïve to think that race isn't an issue here, which leads us back to the differences between baseball and basketball prospects. The same biases that operate there underlie the scenario that has media outlets still questioning whether Duke sophomore All-American Jason Williams will stay a Blue Devil next year, as he claims he will, while Stanford sophomore All-

American Casey Jacobsen makes the same statement and isn't second-guessed.

Further, ask yourself: If Curry, Chandler, Diop or Cisse didn't have phenomenal skills in the post and a knack to block shots, would you even care in the least whether they went to college? If they were faceless bodies in the public school system, would you concern any of your time with the controversy that perplexes you now?

I think we all know that answer. Let the kids do what they want.

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