



2006-07 OUTLOOK

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History is a word synonymous with Lynchburg, one of the oldest cities in the Commonwealth. The city has seen the progress of a nation from infancy to the present. It witnessed a Civil War battle 142 years ago and now, just miles from that bloody battlefield, the city will observe a different type of history.

Atop Liberty Mountain, history looks to be made in the form of Larry Blair. The senior guard from Charlotte, N.C., enters his final campaign with 1,580 career points. He is looking to become the most prolific scorer in school history as he has his eyes set on the Big South conference (2,151) and the Liberty (2,273) career point records.

Blair returns his high-octane game to the Vines Center after earning Big South All-Conference honors for the third-straight season and garnering first-team accolades for the second-straight year. Blair finished the 2005-06 season averaging 22.6 points per game, good for second in the conference and his point output accounted for 35% of the team's scoring as the Flames averaged 63.8 points per game last season.

It was a down year on the Mountain in 2005-06 as the Flames went 7-23, marking the fewest victories under head coach Randy Dunton in his five year tenure. However by looking at the body of work Dunton has accomplished at Liberty, including a Big South Championship, an NCAA Tournament appearance and two second place conference finishes in the previous three years, last season's record is far from a sign of things to come.

There were certain circumstances within the program last season that led Dunton to dismiss student-athletes off his roster prior to the start of school. "You want to help these young men to develop and succeed, but there were situations that required the removal of some players," said Dunton. Those moves left the roster lacking depth and interior play. Each night the Flames went toe to toe with their opponents, but without depth they ran out of gas. On top of things, an injury to freshman Tyler Baker prior to the season put the program's deadliest shooter on the

bench all season, resulting in a redshirt year.

The Flames, like a prize fighter, staggered last season when hit on the chin with adversity but they turn to the 2006-07 season with stronger legs, a strong base and an eye on the program's path to where Dunton sees it going in the immediate future—"the top of the Big South Conference." Leading the Flames on that path will be a strong core of guards that will be looked upon to ignite the offense and spearhead a stingy defense.

A problem for the Big South Conference and non-conference opponents alike is the return of Blair. "Larry is a special talent that can score as well as anybody in the country and we walk on the floor every night with a known commodity," said Dunton. When you didn't think Blair could improve any more, Dunton will be the first to tell you he has, "He has improved every facet of his game this summer and he is a more complete player heading into his senior season," Dunton stated.

Entering the season, Blair looks to easily pass Peter Aluma's Liberty Division I record of 1,715 career points and has a chance to reach the school record of 2,273 points by Karl Hess when the program competed at the NCCAA level. Blair was honored on the Preseason All-Big South team and placed second in voting for Preseason Player of the Year behind Winthrop's Torrell Martin.

Adding to electricity that Blair will bring is sophomore Anthony Smith who as a freshman was second on the team in scoring at 9.2 points per game, earning him Big South All-Freshman team honors. "Anthony has had a great off-season and is going to be counted on to be a defensive stopper," commented Dunton. "He has improved his shooting game and has done a great job in the weight room, making him very physical when penetrating."

The perimeter shooting game got better with the addition of junior college transfer Larry Franklin from Eastern Oklahoma CC. Franklin averaged 18.0 points per game and 7.0 assists per



Larry Blair

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contest last year at Eastern Oklahoma. He started in the Region 2 and Region 6 All-Star games and was named to the all-region second-team squad. At Oklahoma City University (OCU), Franklin averaged 15.0 points and 6.0 assists per game as a freshman starter, while leading OCU to the NAIA National Tournament where the Stars advanced to the Elite 8. Dunton is excited about the junior, stating "He is a tremendous shooter who can catch and shoot with range." Dunton added that "[Franklin] is strong and physical and will be a positive force on the defensive end."

Another exciting new addition to the Flames' backcourt is freshman B.J. Jenkins, a top-rated guard out of Virginia Beach. Jenkins was a three-year starter for Green Run High School where he finished his career with 1,357 points (17.4 per game average), 506 rebounds, 511 assists and 383 steals. "I am real excited about B.J. He is a gym rat supreme, an outstanding shooter who is going to get minutes at the point guard position because of his ability to find teammates and get distribute the ball," commented Dunton.

A special addition to the guard core is the junior transfer from Providence Dwight Brewington who plays with 60 percent hearing loss. "You don't come with all the accolades that Dwight comes with and not be able to play the game," said Dunton. Brewington battled injury last year at Providence before leaving the university after the fall semester which, due to the NCAA D-I transfer rule, will force him to sit out all games scheduled during the fall semester until Liberty's December 16th game at St. Francis (Pa.). When healthy at Providence, Brewington was a force, averaging 13.3 points and 4.3 rebounds a game his sophomore year in 2004-05. "[Brewington] is a real special player that can play an inside/outside game and possesses a tremendous basketball IQ. It is like having a coach on the floor," added Dunton.

Rounding out the guards are sophomore Justin Holland who appeared in 20 games last year for the Flames and walk-on Kyle Ohman. "[Holland] has

demonstrated a tremendous competitive nature in terms of being able to pressure the ball and is very athletic," said Dunton. "[Ohman] has been very impressive and will contribute to this team as a walk-on."

The front court will be a brass of an exciting group of young players to watch led by senior Damien Hubbard. Last season, his first at Liberty, Hubbard started all 30 games, averaging 32 minutes per contest. Hubbard was third on the team with 8.7 points per game and led the team in rebounding with 5.6 boards per game. "Damien brings experience and maturity to the team," said Dunton. "He can handle the ball very well, shoot it, post up and he is a proven rebounder," added Dunton.

Rell Porter returns for his junior season and joins Blair as co-captains for the second-straight year. Porter averaged 5.1 points and was second on the team

with 5.5 rebounds per game.

"Rell brings toughness, persistence, discipline and will lay it on the line every night," said Dunton. "[Porter] is an improved shooter with the ability to knock down three-point baskets and is ready to go to war every night on the opponent's toughest match-up."

After redshirting last season with an ankle injury, Tyler Baker looks to get his first college action. Baker has the potential to be a great inside/outside player and has grown from 6-7 to 6-10 since he first stepped on campus during the fall of 2005. "Tyler has a skill package to be excited about and is capable of being the best shooter in the program," said Dunton.

Another exciting newcomer is junior transfer Alex McLean. The native of Bay

Rell Porter

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Shore, N.Y., is a tremendous athlete at 6-8, 235 pounds who runs a 5:10 mile and can bench press 325 pounds. McLean will be looked upon to use his strength to put a lot of pressure on the defensive transition game. McLean has the ability to play on the block and is athletic enough to put the ball on the floor and penetrate to the basket. "With Alex we look to see how close he can get to averaging a double-double every night because of his tremendous feet and rebounding skills," said Dunton.

Returning to the front court is junior Russell Monroe. As a sophomore, Monroe played in all 30 games, while starting 17 of them. The 6-11 native of Alma, Mich., averaged 3.8 points and 3.1 rebounds a game. This year looks to be a breakout year for Monroe who has the ability to really contribute. "Russ is strong and a great shooter when he faces up and is moving and running better," commented Dunton.

A couple freshmen looking to add depth to the front court are Armon Jones from Atlanta, Ga., and Lamont Winters from Jamaica, N.Y. Jones had a tremendous summer workout and will be a strong presence in the post for the Flames. During his senior year at McEachern High School, he averaged 10.0 points and 10.0 rebounds per contest and was an all-defensive selection second-team for the Indians. Jones ranked as the 69th best fifth-year senior in the country by Hoop Scoop Basketball rankings last year when he attended Charis Prep High School in Goldsboro, N.C. "Armon is a great prospect and a tremendous post passer with a lot of basketball-savvy tools," commented Dunton.

Winters is a physical specimen that was rated as a high major recruit by some polls coming out of high school. Winters comes from Genesis One Christian High School in Mendenhall, Miss., where he averaged 12.0 points and 10.0 rebounds per contest as a senior. "Lamont is a tremendous signing for us. He is gifted athletically, a great rebounder who can seal players off as well as anybody," commented Dunton. However, the Flames will have to wait

and see when Winters will be available as he dislocated his ankle at the end of the summer. The time table for his return is uncertain.

With the program moving forward and a talented roster set as the foundation for future success, the Flames will compete this season with their main goal being a Big South Championship. However, Liberty will have their work cut out for them according to the Big South preseason rankings as the Flames were picked to finish fifth

out of eight teams in the preseason coaches and media poll.

The Flames will open the 2006-07 season in Norman, Okla., against Big XII power, Oklahoma on November 16, marking the first meeting between the two programs. That contest will be followed by six-straight home games. Liberty will face Cincinnati Christian in its home opener on November 21 followed by games during Thanksgiving week with Houghton College on November 25 and Southern Virginia on November 27.



*Russell
Monroe*

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Liberty continues the homestand with East Carolina on December 2, St. Francis (Pa.) on December 4 and Longwood on December 9.

“With seven home games prior to the Christmas break, including East Carolina, St. Francis (Pa.), Longwood and Lipscomb, we have an opportunity to establish successful chemistry prior to the conference games,” stated Dunton.

Liberty returns to the road to conclude its season series with St. Francis (Pa.) on December 16 and then travels to Buffalo on December 18. Liberty returns home against Lipscomb on December 21.

The Flames then take part in BYU’s Holiday Classic in Provo, Utah, on December 28-30. Liberty will take on BYU on December 28, Seton Hall on December 29 and Oral Roberts on December 30. The Flames will start the new year on the road at defending national champions, Florida of the SEC on January 2.

Dunton’s squad opens up their Big South Conference schedule on the road at UNC Asheville on January 6 before returning home against Radford on January 9 and Winthrop on January 13. The Flames will then take to the road for three games against High Point on January 17, Coastal Carolina on January 20 and Charleston Southern on January 22.

Liberty will return to the Vines Center on January 27 against VMI, followed by home contests with UNC Asheville on January 30 and High Point on February 3. The Flames make a quick road trip to Winthrop on February 7 before returning home for games against Charleston Southern on February 10 and Coastal Carolina on February 12.

The Flames play their next two games against non-conference opponents. First, Liberty will conclude the season series at Longwood on February 15, before taking part in ESPN’s BracketBuster on February 17. The BracketBuster opponent will be chosen by ESPN approximately three weeks prior to the game.

“As a program, we are honored to have an opportunity to participate in the

ESPN BracketBusters field,” commented Dunton. “It presents quality competition with a tournament game atmosphere. This is valuable experience for our players and can be used effectively for post-season preparation.”

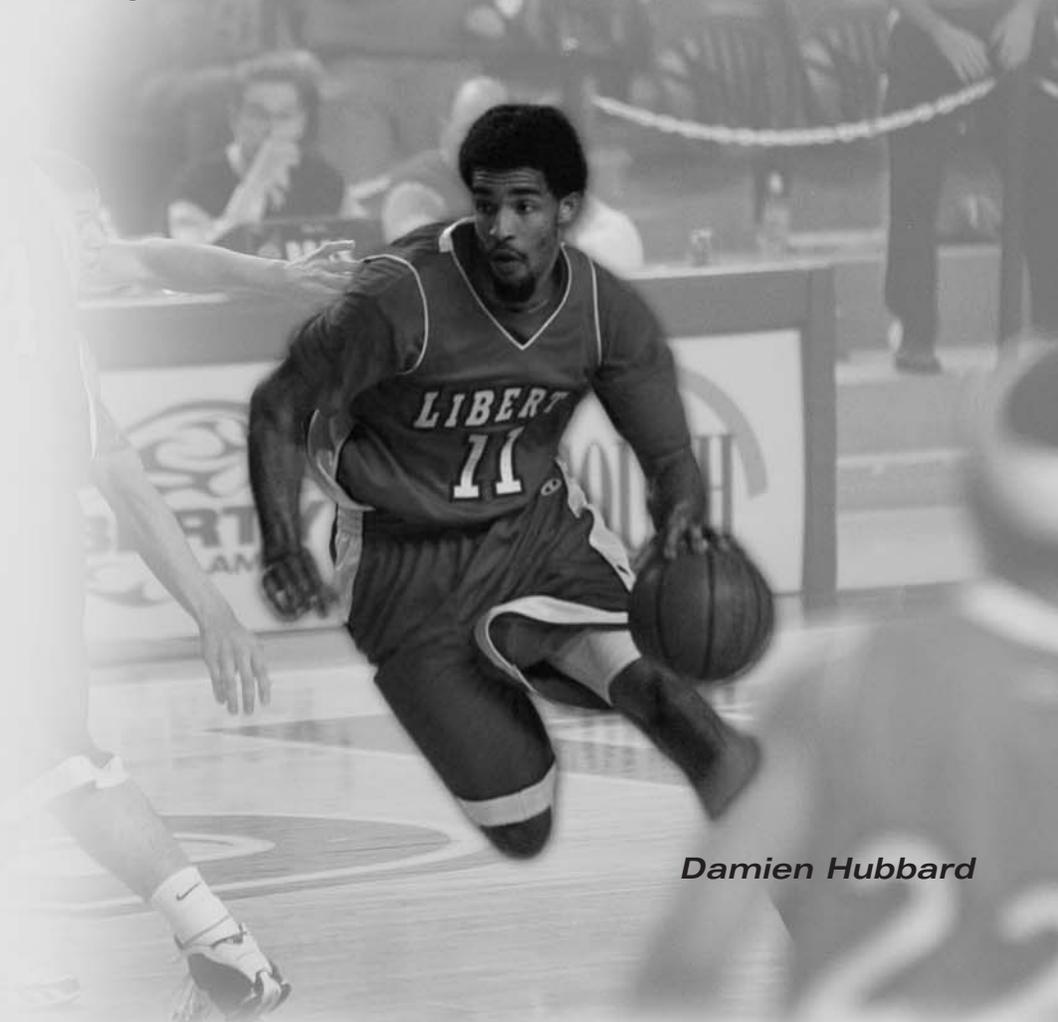
The Flames conclude the regular season on February 21 at VMI and Radford on February 24 before the Big South Conference Men’s Basketball Championship begins. The four quarter-final match-ups will be played on February 27 on the home court of the higher seed. The two semifinal games on March 1 will be played at the regular season champion’s home court to accommodate ESPNU which will be covering both games. The championship game will be played at the site of the higher seed on March 3 and will be broadcast by ESPN2 at noon.

“This schedule is highlighted with the defending national champion Florida Gators, Big XII contender Oklahoma

Sooners, the Brigham Young University Holiday Classic and another action-packed Big South Conference season,” added Dunton.

Representation and identity are two words that reflect the Flames. The Flames see their responsibility to represent the university academically, socially and athletically. “Representation is a driving force for us and true confidence comes because you grab a hold of the identity you create bringing resounding clarity to the program,” commented Dunton. “You grab that and go out there every night; you go out and go to war.”

In the historic Civil War town of Lynchburg there is new history to be made. There is a different type of battle brewing as Liberty will take to the court with its high-electricity game and strike fear into its opponents as “The Furnace” is about to engulf all foes in Flames.



Damien Hubbard

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One More Lap With Liberty's Larry Blair

Read what senior guard Larry Blair had to say about the upcoming season and his experiences at Liberty in a one-on-one interview prior to the start of the 2006-07 season.

It is your senior year here at Liberty and what are your thoughts coming in to it?

I want it to be a successful year and help my team any way I can to get us to another conference championship and another NCAA Tournament bid. I would also like to concentrate on my classes and graduate in May.

What are some of the things you have worked on between your junior and senior seasons to make it your best season possible?

I worked on my ball-handling skills in order to play point guard which I will need to play at the next level. Defensively I worked on getting better at my lateral movement, staying down and pressuring the ball handler more. I improved on things I was already good at like shooting and my offensive skills. I have tried to become a better leader.

At the end of your junior season you applied for the NBA draft. Take us through the process of applying for the draft.

I started out by filling out early entry forms to send in. Once those forms were in, I had to wait for an invitation to go to pre-draft camp in the summer. I had to pull my name out in the end because I couldn't go to any work outs or the pre-draft camp because I was in summer school. I faxed the NBA and let them know that I was pulling my name out for consideration.

You mentioned the point-guard position earlier. Has Coach Dunton talked about you possibly taking a more assertive role at that position?

I am going to handle the ball a lot more than previous seasons, but I will be playing a lot of my natural position of shooting guard as well. I can contribute more to the team from the two different spots.

Do you feel comfortable by taking on that role?

I am always comfortable taking on new challenges. I played point guard before I played shooting guard in college. It is not too much of a transition for me.

Your whole career at Liberty you have had a chance to experience everything on the basketball court. You're the last player of your class that is left. Talk about the your highlights from your first three years.

Definitely, the highest point is when we won the Big South Championship my freshman year and went to the NCAA Tournament. The ups and downs have made me more mentally tough. I am glad I have had the opportunity to come here and experience those things.

Last season became a year that wasn't the success you were accustomed to. Was last year one of the most challenging for you as a basketball player?

It was challenging, because no one likes to lose especially me. It was a learning experience. It has motivated me to go out there and try not experience that again. You got to look at the positive rather than the negative. Last year it was hard going through that, but now it has turned out to be a great learning experience.

Talk about the development of the team full of new faces. How are you guys coming together?

We play pick up games, hang out with each other and make sure we communicate. In work outs you see the development on the court of our big guys. You can see Russell [Monroe] mature and Alex [McLean] will be strong down low as well. At the guards have Anthony [Smith] played well last year and will be even better this season. There is Damien [Hubbard], Dwight [Brewington] and myself also are trying to do everything we can to be more advanced than we were last year.

People talk about Dwight Brewington and what he was able to do at Providence. Because of the NCAA D-I Transfer rule he is unable to play until after final exams of the fall semester. How does Dwight fit on the team?

Dwight is good, he can shoot, handle the ball and play defense so his skills will be a great contribution to our squad.

What does Coach Dunton mean to you?

He means a lot. He has entrusted the offense to me which is great for my confidence and gives me the ability to showcase my talent and skills. I really appreciate him as a coach. As a person he does everything he can to help people out even if they aren't apart of the team. I appreciate him for trying to make every situation better.

You have played on the national stage in the NCAA Tournament, against perennial powerhouses like Arizona, Kentucky and Maryland. Talk about the schedule. You have games at Oklahoma, the BYU Tournament as well as a road game at defending national champions Florida.

We have scheduled high major teams that have had success. I am going to use my past experience to keep my confidence up and keep me motivated. Against any team, I feel I have the ability to succeed. It gives me a chance to showcase my talent and be a team player. Hopefully, I can help put us in a place to win.

Tell us one thing about Larry Blair that might surprise some people.

I like cartoons and watch them all the time in my spare time.

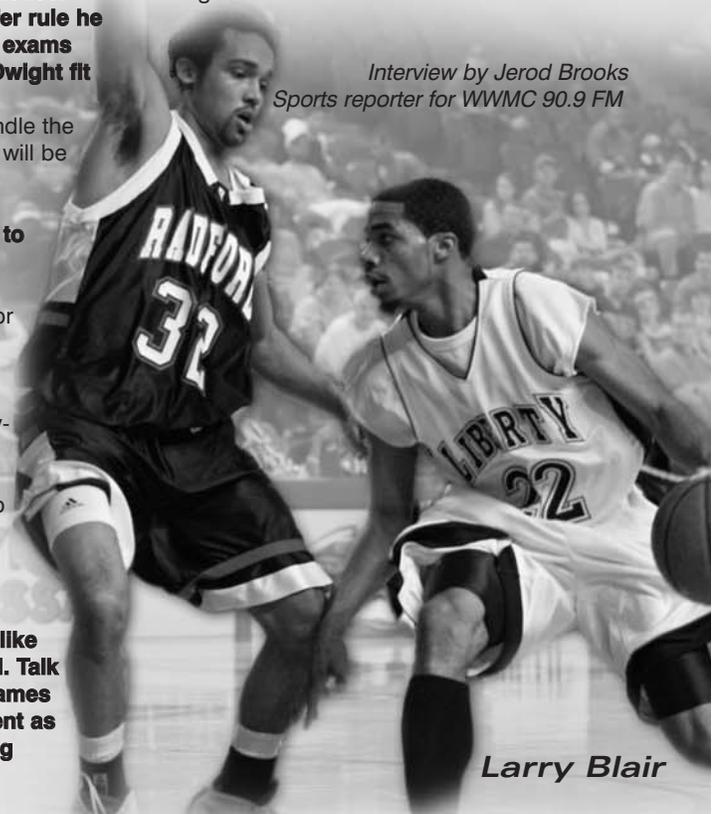
When your basketball career is over whether it's in a year or five to ten years. What would you like to do then?

I will either be working in a recreation center in my hometown of Charlotte or I might become a physical education teacher and have an opportunity to coach. I have a few options to choose from. I use basketball as a tool to interact with kids. I love kids and I love basketball. I want to be involved with youth and basketball and these career options give that opportunity.

What are your goals this year as a team and personally since you are very close to breaking some career scoring records in the Big South and at Liberty?

The individual goals are good, but most of all, I want to win a conference championship for the second time. I want my teammates to know how it feels to win a championship. I feel I was very blessed to win a championship my first year. I've been there and want to go there again.

*Interview by Jerod Brooks
Sports reporter for WVMC 90.9 FM*



Larry Blair