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COACH K CLIPS

Duke's Mike Krzyzewski says 'Now is not the time for a Band-Aid' to fix NCAA basketball

Mike DeCourcy, Sporting News

November 4, 2017

DURHAM, N.C. — Mike Krzyzewski just directed his exceptionally talented Duke basketball team through a two-hour practice that included more than a few spectacular plays, so he has plenty of reason to be enthused. But we are not talking about the Blue Devils at the moment.

We are talking about his belief the time is right for fundamental change in college basketball, and Krzyzewski is so jacked about the possibilities he seems to shed half his 70 years during a 35-minute conversation.

“It’s an incredible time, a good time. I’m excited about it,” Krzyzewski told Sporting News. “I’m not saying I have all the answers. I’m saying: Let’s look at that, let’s look at this ... and let’s put somebody in charge of college basketball, which I’ve been saying for 25 years.”

During a one-on-one interview Thursday, Krzyzewski made it clear on multiple occasions he is not delighting in the misfortune of others: the arrests of 10 men, including four NCAA Division I assistant coaches, on various charges resulting from an FBI investigation into illicit activities in the sport.

“I’m sorry that these events occurred, obviously,” Krzyzewski said. “But sometimes only when something bad happens will people look at change. It’s not time for a Band-Aid. It’s time for a major overhaul — of this entire journey, not just our part of it. Our part is the one that is furthest behind, or the one that is not in touch.”

The journey Krzyzewski is referencing involves the advancement of the basketball prospect from high school and summer basketball through the NCAA and, in some cases, onto the professional game. College basketball’s circumstance became complicated by the FBI sting operation that led to the arrests of coaches from Arizona, Auburn, Oklahoma State and Southern California as well as executives from Adidas and individuals involved in agency and management businesses.

In response to those criminal complaints, NCAA president Mark Emmert convened a commission of accomplished individuals to examine the issues affecting college basketball and to propose solutions to the problems identified. Its first meeting is expected to be Nov. 16.

One concern that immediately arose about the panel’s composition is that there is almost no one involved, other than former college coaches Mike Montgomery and John Thompson III, with recent hands-on experience inside college hoops. Krzyzewski allowed that he wishes Jim Haney, the president of the National Association of Basketball Coaches, had been included along with someone representing the NBA.

There are several commission members Krzyzewski knows well, though, some because of ties to Duke. Grant Hill starred for the Blue Devils in the early '90s. Hall of Famer David Robinson's son Justin plays for the Blue Devils now. Retired Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, now chairman of USA Basketball, was a fellow at Duke last year.

Krzyzewski wants the panel not to arrive with "preconceived notions" about how to improve the game.

"Hopefully they weren't given the mission to see how this fits the old mold," Krzyzewski said. "Hopefully they just can look at everything. I think that is what has happened.

"They are really smart people. Now, do they know the neighborhood? They don't know the neighborhood. I think they will bring the people from the neighborhood in.

"I'd be the congressman that goes into the neighborhood before going to D.C. and voting on a doggone bill. Find out what's going on."

These were Krzyzewski's thoughts on the key areas for the commission to address:

Summer basketball

Krzyzewski strongly endorsed the continuation of tournaments commonly (though incorrectly) labeled "AAU basketball." Many have criticized the involvement of athletic apparel companies in funding and sponsoring teams and tournaments involved in the circuit, and some have called for its abolition.

"That's not a good idea because that would stop thousands and thousands of kids from being seen" by the 350-plus Division I programs. "Just the expense of 'Now I've got to see one kid over there' – it's ridiculous.

"So figure it out," Krzyzewski said. "Find out why grassroots is so important for the shoe companies. See how it can blend in."

Krzyzewski rejected the assertion by some that USA Basketball should take over the summer scene, explaining it does not have the resources to manage such a vast enterprise. He also noted that his experience with summer ball extends beyond his experience as a college coach; his two eldest grandsons are playing. "They love it," he said.

Krzyzewski believes the commission should speak with prospects and parents to see what their experiences have been.

(If they do, they will discover there is a near desperation among the family members of many college prospects for their sons to be scouted.)

"We certainly shouldn't get rid of camps, and we certainly shouldn't get rid of tournaments," Krzyzewski said. "That's how these kids are seen. That's how 351 staffs get to see a kid."

Shoe companies

Although two executives from Adidas were among those charged in the case, Krzyzewski rejected the widespread condemnation of the major athletic apparel companies. He contended their presence in college athletics has been overwhelmingly positive.

"The shoe companies are good," he said. "Our school is under a Nike contract — millions of dollars. UCLA is on an Under Armour, someone's on an Adidas. . . . Our women's soccer team, everyone is fitted . . . it pays for a lot.

"Now, how they deal with us in a bureaucratic state? Find out how that is. It doesn't mean they deal with AAU and their grassroots the same way, because they're not under the same rules. It's not illegal if your son is really good, the company outfits his whole high school team, starts an AAU program and asks you to be the coach and they pay you. If the kid is good enough along with 12 other kids, they take you to Italy. Would you go on that trip? Of course you would. And they should. Is it illegal? No.

"Understand that ... Understand it better."

Krzyzewski said there has been a massive change over the past three to five years in how grassroots basketball has operated. "Amazing," he said, noting that neither the apparel companies nor the athletes at that stage must answer to any governing body.

Amateurism

Krzyzewski believes it would be wise for the NCAA at least to examine its amateurism model and decide whether that is the proper way forward — and whether it might make sense to treat basketball differently than other sports.

Monetary exceptions already are made to a great extent in sports such as tennis, and with swimmers who succeed at the Olympic Games.

"Learn from the NBA, learn from the shoe companies. These people are big businesses. We try to say: We're not doing that. We should know all that stuff. Then, if it can be incorporated — do you look at men's college basketball differently than any other sport?"

Krzyzewski insisted Duke never has been asked for money from recruits or their families, and he doesn't contend the players the Devils lose are choosing other programs to get paid.

"The NBA right now is the promised land. If a kid and his family feels they're going to get there earlier and be developed there, they should be afforded that opportunity," he said. "However, that doesn't mean that we don't change things so our thing becomes a little bit more enticing. Make everything more enticing. Get current.

"We're way behind. And if we have this old thinking of, 'Well, what we do with them means we have to do it with everybody,' it's not going to change."

Commissioner

Krzyzewski has been advocating for college basketball to have a commissioner to advance the sport's interests for more than two decades, and it's an idea that has gotten essentially no traction. The NCAA does now have an exceptionally capable person in Danny Gavitt who serves as senior vice president of basketball, but he has less unilateral authority in that role than would be necessary to effectively govern.

Gavitt would be an exceptional choice to fill a commissioner or CEO of college basketball-type role, were it to be created, but first the NCAA would have to take a step away from operating everything by committee and empowering that individual.

"I will never have a relationship with a committee, but I can have a relationship with you," Krzyzewski said. "That's how our big TV deals in college sports were done; they weren't driven by a committee. They were driven by relationships. Run it like a business. The entities involved at either end, they're businesses.

"I'm really big on all this. I'm not condemning anybody. I'm just saying: Let's go, man."

Coach K Is Still Listening

The host of one of sports radio's best shows has five titles and the country's No. 1 men's college basketball team

Jason Gay, The Wall Street Journal

November 13, 2017

At this point, why should Coach K listen to anybody?

Still, here we are, on a recent morning, amid a tangle of cords and headsets, in a room not far from that rowdy mousetrap, Cameron Indoor Stadium. Mike Krzyzewski—the winningest coach in men's college basketball history, the holder of five national titles—is sitting at a conference table, dressed in a spiffy Blue Devils pullover, quietly...*listening*.

To A.J. Hinch, manager of the newly-crowned World Series champion Houston Astros, who talks about being the “calmest heartbeat” in the clubhouse.

To Alex Rodriguez, currently transforming from baseball pariah to beloved TV personality, who talks about trying to convert Jennifer Lopez to a Miami Hurricanes fan.

“You are so damn interesting to talk to,” Coach K coos at one point to A-Rod.

This is “Basketball & Beyond with Coach K,” Krzyzewski's national radio show, now in its 13th season on SiriusXM's ESPNU station. The Duke coach, now 70, maintains his high-profile day job—the Blue Devils began the 2017-18 season ranked No. 1 in the country, and face No. 2 Michigan State Tuesday in Chicago—but he somehow finds time to host a weekly interview show where the guests have ranged from LeBron James to Richard Petty to former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey.

Coach K has had Bill Belichick on twice. Twice! And Football's Favorite Grumpy Lobster Boat Captain was downright *gabby*.

“I can't believe how much he talked,” Krzyzewski says.

“Basketball and Beyond” is not typical sports radio schlock. Coach K does not do the hot take—as a host, he's low-fi curious, like NPR's Terry Gross, or his friend and Duke grad, Charlie Rose. He pulls questions from pages of notes. He's not an interrupter. He never rambles. There are no gotcha moments, though he does bring up A-Rod's steroids past, allowing him to address it and tactfully pivot away.

A couple of weeks back, Krzyzewski and former NFL coach Tony Dungy managed to have a lengthy, thoughtful conversation about the athlete protests in the NFL without anyone throwing a Papa John's pizza.

It felt like a minor miracle.

Look: Duke men's basketball has brought me great misery, and I wanted to hate “Basketball & Beyond with Coach K.” But it's good.

Krzyzewski used to do the typical sports radio coach's show, back when he began in Durham. He did not love it.

"I'd go to a studio someplace, and Sam from Apex would call, and Jim from Raleigh," Krzyzewski tells me in his office after a show taping. "I'm saying, 'Yeah, I should be home talking to my family, not these guys.'"

But Krzyzewski enjoys 'Basketball & Beyond', "because it's not a call-in, and I get a chance to really visit with top-notch people. I learn a lot, even in the preparation of it. You get out of your own world." He says he likes the show so much, he'd want to expand it when he steps away from the bench.

Don't panic, Dukies: K does not sound in a rush. Krzyzewski may have an office stuffed with memorabilia—in the hallway is a basketball from Duke's 2015 title over my Wisconsin Badgers that I wanted to steal and punt out a window—but he's thoroughly in the present, with another stacked team expected to make noise in late March.

Being No. 1 is an "honor," Krzyzewski says, though with four freshmen starters, he compares it to "staying at your uncle's beach house."

"It becomes a challenge when freshmen who have not done anything are ranked number one," he says.

Like a lot of his colleagues, Krzyzewski has adapted to college basketball's fleeting "one-and-done" landscape, in which top players stay only a season before departing for the NBA. He's been good at it—this season, Duke has star frosh Marvin Bagley III, who should be a top NBA pick this spring, and next season, they will bring the touted Canadian prospect R.J. Barrett to campus.

This isn't to say Coach K likes "one-and-done"—he doesn't. And amid the current FBI bribery case involving college teams, sketchy agents and intermediaries — a development that led to the NCAA's Commission on College Basketball—Krzyzewski wants to put the entire system up for reconsideration.

"The whole journey has to change," Krzyzewski says.

I thought Coach K might be old-fashioned about change. But he sounds open to everything: not just eliminating one-and-done, but strategizing different compensation ideas for players, and growing the NBA's role, perhaps through the G League or an academy-style track similar to what it does overseas.

The only thing he's dead opposed to is a hard rule on how much time a player spends in college.

"Once we get a player, he becomes a part of Duke," he says. "We have a responsibility to educate him, to coach him and all that, but he has the right to determine whether he comes here or not, and then how long he stays here. We shouldn't put any restrictions on it. That's the way the world is."

On the issue of compensation, I tell him that any time I write about paying college athletes, I hear from folks who feel a scholarship is a more-than-fair deal.

"Well," Krzyzewski says, "Not to say that one is more important than the other, but there are different levels of college athletes."

He continues: “And college teams. The sport of football, the sport of men’s basketball, the revenue producing element, especially at the power five conference level—it’s apples and oranges. It isn’t all apples. Do we have a system that can figure that out?”

It’s not simple. There are legit concerns about what paying athletes would mean for athletes in non-revenue sports—or if it’s legally possible with Title IX rules. Could revenue sports like football and men’s basketball be legally reclassified as something different?

“That’s a possibility,” Krzyzewski says. “I’m a proponent for change. It’s not working. I don’t have the solution. I would hope that this [commission] comes up with some courses of action.”

The focus should be the people on the court, he says.

“The game is the kid,” Coach K says. “The game is the player.”

And with that, the winningest men’s college basketball coach has to wrap. Basketball games were coming, and a season’s worth of radio shows, too. It’s time to get back to work...and listening.

Mike Krzyzewski knows fix for Duke's defensive issues is simple, but not easy

**Mike DeCourcy, The Sporting News
January 8, 2018**

The burgeoning irony of the 2017-18 Duke basketball season is that the Blue Devils earned their most significant victory to date with their defense.

That's hard to figure.

They are the No. 104 defense in college basketball according to KenPom.com, which measures effectiveness by the number of points allowed per possession. They rank 76th in field goal defense and 244th in 3-point defense. Their three ACC opponents to date have averaged 92.7 points.

In the third game of the season, though, Michigan State was not prepared for the 2-3 zone Duke presented and committed 17 turnovers that were decisive in an 88-81 Blue Devils victory. The Spartans won their next 14 in a row and rose to No. 1 in the polls before an upset loss to Ohio State on Sunday.

Since that night, Duke found a way to compile a 13-2 record without really stopping anyone in its weight class. Major opponents are averaging 86 points against this defense. Some of that is a function of Duke preferring the fastest pace possible to maximize the impact of its extraordinary offensive capability. Some of it is not.

"We played young, which we are," coach Mike Krzyzewski said following the team's 96-85 loss to N.C. State late Saturday. "They're 18, 19 years old, but they're playing against guys who have played. Have lost, have won, have been hurt — and we're they're opportunity. They've never experienced anything like that, where the team that you see on tape isn't the team that shows up against you."

Duke operated a lot in the 2-3 zone against the Wolfpack, but it wasn't effective, and when the Blue Devils switched to man-to-man, they struggled noticeably to defend pick-and-roll situations and also to rotate properly.

N.C. State shot 50.7 percent from the field and won even though it didn't have an overwhelming edge in free throw attempts (only two more than the visitors) and didn't connect on a substantial number of 3-point attempts (only 5-of-14).

Although he praised N.C. State effusively, Krzyzewski suggested some of the problem with the Devils was a schedule that had them play only three times since Dec. 9, which he said limited the ability to develop cohesion.

"We played crappy defense. We were frantic. They played their butts off. We've got to get better," Krzyzewski said following the game. "Now, the process of getting there, that's what we have to figure out. For the most part, we've been able to do that. And hopefully we'll be able to do that again."

"And if we don't, then you'll see us lose again. And you'll ask if we're working on our defense. And I'll tell you that we are working on our defense, but it's not working."

Duke starts four freshmen — all of them potential first-round draft picks — along with senior guard Grayson Allen. Although the team played Saturday without backup big man Marques Bolden because of a knee injury, the rotation is heavily weighted toward frontcourt players. There is no perimeter sub playing significant minutes since the Devils resumed ACC play in the FSU game.

In 2014-15, Duke also had an exceptionally gifted group of freshmen and struggled for much of the year to develop an effective defense even while compiling a 29-4 record and earning a No. 1 seed. When the NCAA Tournament began, the Devils ranked No. 57 in the nation in efficiency; no team since statistician Ken Pomeroy began tracking these numbers had ever won with such a porous defense.

Krzyzewski was able to make a lineup adjustment late in the season, though, inserting 6-7 Justise Winslow as power forward in place of 6-9 Amile Jefferson. The Devils became more dynamic. They surged all the way to No. 11 in the final defensive rankings and won the NCAA Championship by holding Wisconsin to 63 points and 41 percent shooting.

He doesn't have a Winslow this time, so the guys he has will need to improve. That begins with better pressure against the basketball, whether the Devils are in man or zone; too often N.C. State was able to pass without any discouragement.

Big men Wendell Carter and Marvin Bagley have to improve their awareness of the basketball and of offensive intent, although Carter is blocking nearly two shots per game. With his length and experience, Allen should be a defender capable of impacting a game, but that doesn't happen frequently enough. As a team, Duke gets only seven steals per game, which ranks outside the top 115 among Division I teams.

"Keep working. What answer would you want me to say?" Krzyzewski told a reporter. "It's pretty simple. You try to keep getting better."

Why Tommy Amaker was a such an important part of Mike Krzyzewski's success at Duke

Ron Morris, The News & Observer

January 24, 2018

Harvard had a mere seven seconds to go the length of the court for a chance at defeating Wofford in a recent men's college basketball game at Richardson Indoor Stadium. Without using a timeout, the Crimson executed its coach's plan to perfection and moved the ball into the hands of its best post player who got the shot he wanted near the basket.

The shot missed and Harvard lost, 63-62.

No one who has followed the 21-year coaching career of Tommy Amaker was surprised at how flawlessly, with great calm and precision, that his Harvard team did everything right on the final play. Amaker's teams, first at Seton Hall, then at Michigan and now in his 11th season at Harvard, have been known for being prepared, applying pressure defense and for playing smart basketball.

This is the same Tommy Amaker who arguably was the most important player in the building of Duke's 32-year run as a basketball kingpin under Mike Krzyzewski. "He's as valuable a person as we've ever had in our program, especially when we started," Krzyzewski says. "Tommy was amazingly important for what we've been able to build."

There is a chance Duke might have eventually won five NCAA championships, played in 12 Final Fours and captured 26 ACC regular-season and tournament titles under Krzyzewski had Amaker played elsewhere. There also is a chance the program never would have taken flight had Amaker elected to play collegiately at his first-love, Maryland.

"We needed him. His maturity right away and his knowledge of the game made him really an extension of the coaching staff out on the court," Krzyzewski says. "You knew that your game plan was going to be followed. He was so poised."

Krzyzewski had broken through with his first big recruiting class for the 1983 season, his third at Duke. Guard Johnny Dawkins and frontcourt players Mark Alarie, Jay Bilas and David Henderson formed the nucleus of a highly rated class that provided Krzyzewski with everything except a point guard.

Enter Amaker, who proved the following year to be the necessary mortar to the bricks Krzyzewski already had placed in his program's foundation. When Amaker signed with Duke, Krzyzewski could move Dawkins to his more natural shooting guard position.

Three seasons later and Duke was playing in the national championship game, where it lost to Louisville. Amaker's four seasons culminated in being named the national defensive player of the year as a senior. Despite averaging a paltry 8.5 points in a 138-game career, Amaker's leadership and ball handling skills remain perhaps unmatched in the program's history. He finished with 708 assists to 336 turnovers.

It all might not have happened if Amaker had not believed in a young coach who taught him during recruiting the difference in the words "need" and "want."

“He thought a lot of people truly wanted me,” Amaker says of Krzyzewski. “But he talked about how much he and Duke really needed me.”

Amaker had attended several Maryland basketball camps as a youngster, and his idol growing up in Falls Church, Va., was the Terps’ All-American guard John Lucas. But as Maryland began to show more interest in guard Keith Gatlin, who eventually had an outstanding career for the Terps, Amaker swung his allegiance to Duke.

Some believed it was a gamble for Amaker in going to Duke because there were doubts whether Krzyzewski could build a winning program in Durham.

“It’s always been important for me to believe in something, and I wholeheartedly believed in him,” Amaker says. “Never once did I ask myself or ask him (about winning) because it never dawned on me that maybe we wouldn’t win. I just didn’t think of that.”

After going 21-34 in the two seasons before Amaker’s arrival, Duke won 108 of 138 games with him playing point guard.

“We established the identity of the program going forward, what (Krzyzewski) really wanted and he believed in, the philosophy of how he wanted to play,” Amaker says. “You play a certain way, kids believe in it and have success at it, then you start to recruit toward that.”

Amaker says he has employed the same principles in guiding Harvard to four Ivy League championships and the same number of NCAA tournaments. Those principles were on display at the end of the recent game against Wofford.

GRAYSON ALLEN

Duke captain Grayson Allen: 'I'm still growing and maturing'

Jeff Goodman, ESPN Insider

October 3, 2017

DURHAM, N.C. - Duke senior Grayson Allen says he is healthy -- both physically and emotionally.

Allen, who last season dealt with numerous injuries and a third tripping incident, is optimistic he will be able to control his emotions this season. However, he also understands previous transgressions may forever tarnish his reputation in the minds of many.

"Polarizing," Allen told ESPN on Tuesday about how people perceive him. "I can't really pick one because there's probably a big divide. Half of the basketball world thinks I'm this hothead, dirty player who can't get anything under control and probably thinks I'm arrogant and a selfish guy. And another group that thinks I'm a lot better than I actually am."

Allen is the lone senior on the Blue Devils this season and was named a captain by coach Mike Krzyzewski. Each of the heralded freshmen -- Marvin Bagley III, Gary Trent Jr., Trevon Duval and Wendell Carter Jr. -- all spoke glowingly to ESPN of Allen's leadership thus far.

"I had another year of growth, but I'm still growing and maturing," Allen said. "This is the time to do it, in college. This year, I think I have a lot more perspective on things. I've learned a lot from what I've gone through, but I feel so much different. Better, not only on the court, but my mentality off the court as well."

Allen said that he's optimistic that his new role as a senior leader and captain will help him focus his energy and emotion on the court. Last year's incident came against Elon on Dec. 21 and was followed by a heavily criticized one-game suspension.

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski says that while he doesn't have a solution, "a bunch of people have the ideas" to evolve with the changes in college basketball.

Grayson Allen has regained his position as a captain of Duke's basketball team.

"It's a change of mindset," Allen said. "I know I'm the leader this year, the only captain, the only senior on the team. Everything I do has to be focused on us and the guys that I have. Being the competitive guy that I am, I can't get into individual battles like I have. A lot of my learning with Coach has been learning to play with emotion and not just get rid of it."

Allen was considered a potential lottery pick after a sophomore season in which he averaged 21.6 points per game, but he dealt with hamstring, ankle and toe injuries early last season that hampered his play. He finished the season averaging 14.5 points and still trying to regain his love for basketball.

"I don't know if I was ever fully having fun by the end of last season," he said. "But I know I have it back now."

Allen isn't surprised that he's still in college despite multiple opportunities to leave early. Multiple NBA executives told ESPN that Allen would have likely been a first-round pick after his sophomore campaign,

but his stock slipped last year and he would have likely slid into the second round if he had opted to leave school early.

"I just wanted to be here," Allen said. "I felt like I wasn't finished here. At the end of the day, it's about my happiness and I felt like I was going to be 100 percent happy here."

How Duke's Grayson Allen will handle his second chance at being a leader

Steve Wiseman, Durham Herald-Sun
October 3, 2017

DURHAM - His first chance at being a Duke captain ruined by his own legs and a lack of self-control, Grayson Allen is confident his second go-around will be successful.

"It's not going to happen," Allen said Tuesday. "For me, my focus this year is going to be on the team, and that's what I have to do as the leader. What I've learned is, these individual battles, you have to deal with emotion. So when I play with emotion, I can't get focused on one-on-one stuff with someone on the other team. If I get angry, I have to turn that to my team. If I get excited I have to turn it to my team and not an individual battle."

The calendar year 2016 proved nightmarish for Allen. As a sophomore, he had twice tripped opposing players in February, making him college basketball's top villain and earning him a public reprimand from the ACC.

In December, after having been voted a captain by his teammates, Allen tripped Elon's Steven Santa Ana during a game at Greensboro Coliseum. A video of Allen throwing a tantrum on the Duke bench went viral.

"I know a lot of people probably thought I was mad at the call," Allen said. "But I knew what the call was. I knew what I'd done wrong. It was a much bigger picture than just a foul called in one game. The whole game, the consequences that were going to come from the game. The whole thing after it. Kind of that big picture flashed before me."

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski suspended Allen for an 89-75 loss at Virginia Tech on Dec. 31 and stripped him of his captaincy.

That didn't satisfy the hordes of college basketball fans nationwide who saw Allen as petulant. Still, Allen decided to stay at Duke for his senior season rather than enter the NBA Draft. He came to a place where he's able to tune out his critics.

"I honestly think I don't care at all," Allen said. "That's better for me. That's something I had to learn. I'm not a person who has a lot of social self-confidence. I put a too much meaning into stuff people say. Now I'm to the point where I can't do that at all. I think I'm to a point where I don't care. That was part of my process coming back. I wanted to be at Duke for so long. Why would I let what someone said force me to leave early. I know this is where I wanted to be, and I'm happy here."

His teammates and coaches believe he's in a better place, too.

Last month, before this year's Blue Devils started practice, the players voted Allen as their lone captain. His job now is to handle his second chance better than he did his first.

“He deserves the opportunity to lead,” Krzyzewski said. “A lot of times the best leader is the one who has been through the most experiences because they can have empathy for highs and mediums and lows. I think it’s a tremendous opportunity for him and the guys. He’s done a really good job. He’s not this vocal guy. But in huddles he’s good. He’s in great shape, and he’s playing lights out basketball right now. The best thing that he can do is just play hard like that.”

Allen rarely was able to just play basketball as a junior. As a sophomore, he was an all-American when he averaged 21.6 points per game.

Why Grayson Allen came back for more

Seth Davis, The Fieldhouse

October 6, 2017

He needed to sit for a minute. Just settle into the quiet, alone with his thoughts. For weeks, Grayson Allen had been struggling to decide whether he should enter the NBA draft. Each time he was about to make up his mind, he pulled back. Now, he had decided, but before he called his parents, he wanted to think things over one last time.

There were plenty of reasons for Allen to leave Duke in the wake of his tumultuous junior season, during which he had become a national pinata as a result of bad behavior on the court. Though there was no guarantee he would be selected in the first round, he knew he would get drafted, and he felt confident he could find a place on an NBA roster. Lots of college players would turn pro under those circumstances, even before weighing the scrutiny and hostility Allen would face if he returned for his senior year. Many people told Allen that leaving was the logical thing to do, but he could never quite convince himself of that.

During his winter of discontent, Allen had learned the value of occasionally sitting quietly by himself. He'd lay in one of the hammocks that hang around the Duke campus, or maybe chill in a rocking chair in a study area. This time, he found a bench outside the main entrance of Cameron Indoor Stadium. "I just wanted to take some time to say, OK, there's no one else around. What do I want to do? What is the best thing for me?" he recalls. "Once I got down to that, it was so easy. For ten years, I've wanted to be at Duke. Now I'm here, and I'm going to leave early?"

While Allen had grappled with the decision for weeks, his coach, Mike Krzyzewski, gave him space. Whenever Allen asked what he should do, Krzyzewski promised he would get Allen information about what NBA scouts and executives thought of him, but in the end it had to be his decision. Yet, Krzyzewski sensed Allen's reluctance to leave. The coach had been through this exercise enough times to know that if an underclassman turns pro, it should be because he wants to conquer the world, not because he is running from something. Finally, during a meeting in the coach's office, he told Allen what he really thought. "You're going to stay," Krzyzewski said. "You want honest? I'm giving you honest. You're not going to leave Duke this way. You and I are not finished."

The words resonated with Allen. He knew his coach was right. After he sat on the bench and cleared his mind, Allen called his dad and let him know what he wanted to do. Then he called his mom. She was happy for him, but she suggested he wait one more day. Wear the decision for 24 hours, she said. See how it feels. Sleep on it. Grayson took her advice. "I slept and woke up like it was my first day at Duke," he says.

Allen sent Krzyzewski a text message and asked if he could come see him. Krzyzewski was leaving a player workout as Allen was walking into Cameron. They all but soared into each other's arms as Allen told Krzyzewski he was returning for his senior season.

In the days that followed, they mapped out a plan. Allen was still experiencing pain in his right ankle, stemming from an impingement in the joint that was caused by multiple sprains. He

underwent arthroscopic surgery in May. As they talked about what Allen would do the rest of the summer, Krzyzewski issued a directive he had never given to another player: "I don't want you to touch a basketball for three months." At first, Allen thought Krzyzewski was talking about the need to rest and recover from surgery. But Krzyzewski aspired to a different kind of healing. He wanted Allen to get away from basketball, to decompress and spend time around people whose lives didn't revolve around X's and O's. He hoped the respite would help Allen fall in love with the game again.

Allen did as his coach instructed. When school ended, he spent time relaxing and reading at his parents' house in Jacksonville, Fla. He traveled to Chicago for a few weeks and did an internship at Intersport, a media company. Aside from tossing a ball at the ceiling of his bedroom, he didn't play at all. At first he was antsy. Then, he grew despondent. "Borderline depressed," he says. The strategy worked. For too long, Allen's life had been consumed by noise. Now, finally, he couldn't stand the quiet.

As soon as Allen made the mistake that would turn his world upside down, he thought, *I blew it*. It wasn't just about the game or the season, or even his reputation, which had already taken a beating after he tripped two players during his sophomore season. "I was worried that I had messed up what I had worked 10 years for," he says. "I mean, I know I'm not Ben Simmons. I'm not Brandon Ingram with a seven-six wingspan. I'm thinking that if I don't get my act together, I'm not playing basketball anymore, you know what I mean? So it was a way bigger picture that flashed before my eyes."

While it may seem odd that the lapse would come in what appeared to be a meaningless December game in Greensboro, N.C., against Elon, Allen does not see it that way. "Every game is a big game," he says. It happened with 4:15 remaining in the first half. As Elon guard Steven Santa Ana drove to the basket, Allen wrapped his right arm around Santa Ana's waist and was whistled for a foul. When the whistle blew, Allen raised his right leg and stuck his foot in the back of Santa Ana's left knee. Santa Ana tumbled to the floor. The referees watched the replay and assessed Allen with a dead ball contact technical foul. As he took his seat on the bench, Allen let his emotions boil over. The coaches tried to calm him, but it was to little avail.

In the weeks and months that followed, Allen was beamed to the world as a two-dimensional caricature, the avatar of the young, entitled athlete. He was cast as the latest in a long line of arrogant, white Duke players worthy of the public's hate. It was a far cry from how he saw himself. Allen had always been intensely shy while growing up in Jacksonville, an only child who found it hard to speak to his peers, much less adults. It was only through sports that he derived any confidence.

His first love was soccer. He wasn't big, but he was fast and agile, and intensely competitive. By the time he got to junior high school, he was bigger than most of his friends, and he turned all of his attention to basketball. Allen was obsessed with dunking. He would turn over the family's recycling bins and launch himself towards an eight-foot hoop in the driveway. He operated under the assumption that all the other kids were more gifted than he was, so he had to work harder than they did. When he got older, he would ask his mother to drive him to his high school at 6 a.m. so he could work out before class. He loved being in the gym. It gave him an edge, and he enjoyed the solitude.

If it weren't for Tonan Ferrell, Grayson might never have talked to anyone. Tonan was a boy in Grayson's third-grade class at Grace Lutheran Elementary School who had a difficult home life. The school's principal sent an email searching for families with whom Tonan could stay for a few nights. Grayson's parents, William and Sherry, volunteered their home. A few nights turned into a few years as Tonan became Grayson's de facto brother. They were quite a duo. Grayson was tall and white; Tonan was short and black. Grayson was an introvert; Tonan was bubbly and outgoing. Grayson remembers seeing a tall man in Starbucks one day but being afraid to ask his height. Tonan did it for him. "There were times when I'd be way too shy to even order at dinner, so Tonan would order for me," Grayson says. "Eventually he was like, 'All right, time to grow up and speak.' "

Once Allen stepped onto the court, however, he was transformed. He would need that swagger, sticking out as he did at all those elite AAU tournaments, the white kid playing shooting guard, driving with abandon, trying to dunk on everyone. He was tested, often, and he gave as good as he got. "I thrived in aggressive games," he says. "I always believed that if someone gives you a forearm in your back, you better give one back, or else they're going to step on your throat and you're going to lose." At some tournaments he had to change his jersey several times because it kept getting ripped by clutching defenders. When Sherry begged her son to stop hurtling his body all over the place because she feared he would injure himself, he replied, "I can't do it any other way."

Though he was uncomfortable with having a lot of eyes on him, he was also a big dreamer. He became a huge Duke fan when he was eight years old (J.J. Redick was his favorite player), so when he started getting recruited, he made his desired destination clear. That dream was realized in the spring of 2013, when Krzyzewski offered him a scholarship during a home visit. Allen was tempted to say yes that night, but he decided to wait a week so he could play in an AAU tournament in California. He didn't want the news drawing excessive attention.

When Allen got to campus, the Duke coaches told his parents they didn't want him to use his workouts as an excuse to be a loner. "He was an amazing gym rat, but he didn't really open up and say a lot to you," assistant coach Jon Scheyer says. Allen set an early tone with his new teammates. "Our guys tried him," associate head coach Jeff Capel says. "That's what happens in our sport. He's the white dude, so guys are going to go at him. But he never backed down."

He rarely played as a freshman, and while he never complained, he was not happy. So he did what he had always done when things weren't going well. He headed for the practice gym, where he could take out his anger and frustration on the rims. "I'd dunk like 30 times in a row," he says.

As the season wore on, the program's family atmosphere made an impact on Allen. The more time he spent with his teammates, the closer he felt to them, which allowed him to enjoy being a part of the team even when he wasn't playing. Towards the end of the season, he started to get more playing time, and he responded well. In the next-to-last regular season game, Allen scored 27 points in a blowout win over Wake Forest. He continued to have some moments over the ensuing weeks but nothing that presaged what would happen at the 2015 Final Four in Indianapolis.

After playing just three minutes in Duke's regional final win over Gonzaga, Allen scored nine points in 17 minutes during a semifinal win over Michigan State. However, most of those points were

scored in the second half when the Blue Devils comfortable lead. The circumstances were far different two nights later in the NCAA championship against Wisconsin. Facing a nine-point deficit with just under 13 minutes to play, Allen singlehandedly brought the Blue Devils back. It was such a blur that he barely remembers it. A swished three-pointer from the right wing. A steal and a dive for a loose ball that drew a foul. A driving three-point play. Another lunging drive and a pair of free throws. After each play, Allen let out a guttural scream, and his teammates fed off his emotion. He was so locked in that when the buzzer sounded on Duke's 68-63 win, he continued to chase down the rebound. It took a moment for him to snap out of his trance and celebrate with his teammates.

While his three freshman classmates left for the NBA and became first-round draft picks, Allen returned for his sophomore season. Unlike the year before, he was a known commodity and a marked man. Though his play was mostly stellar – he was the ACC's second-leading scorer (21.6 ppg) and was named first team all-conference as well as an academic All-American – the chippiness that had long served him got him into trouble on two occasions. The first came during a home game in February 2016 against Louisville. As he lay prone after taking one of his many falls to the deck, Allen extended his right leg and tripped Cardinals forward Ray Spalding. Three weeks later in the closing seconds of a home game against Florida State, Allen thrust his right foot behind him and clipped Seminoles guard Xavier Rathan-Mayes, whom Grayson had been mixing it up with for several minutes. Rathan-Mayes fell, but instead of calling a technical foul on Allen, veteran official Tony Greene stepped between the players and told them to knock it off.

In those instances, Allen crossed the line from chippiness to dirty play. The recriminations were swift and severe, intensified because of who he was and where he played. For the rest of the season, Allen was subjected to hostile crowds and a withering press. When it ended, he briefly considered turning pro but decided to return for his junior season, get his degree in psychology, and then leave. That required attending a session of summer school and taking a rigorous academic course load in the fall and spring semesters.

Looking back, Krzyzewski believes the decision to graduate in three years was a mistake because it added to Allen's burdens. While Allen began his junior season as a favorite to win national player of the year, he was also the focus of much speculation over whether he could rein in his volatility. He began the fall semester in superb shape, but he pulled a hamstring and had to cut down on his practice time. Then, in Duke's third game against Kansas in Madison Square Garden, he landed awkwardly on his left foot. He was diagnosed with turf toe, a painful inflammation that can only heal through extensive rest.

Over the next three weeks, Allen continued to play in games but he did not practice. He couldn't even shoot casually. He started to lose his swagger. "I'm not like this naturally confident person," he says. "All my confidence comes from knowing I just took 300 shots so I'll be able to make five in a game. So to not have that was tough."

The pain, the lack of practice, the subpar play that the whole world could see – all of that weighed heavily on Allen heading into December. He powered his way through exam period, pulling all-nighters to finish papers and prepare for tests. He was overcome by sadness on Dec. 19 when a Duke sophomore named Savannah Goodman, a fellow Jacksonville native whom Grayson had befriended, died after a long battle with an immune disorder. Krzyzewski knew Allen was having a

tough time, but only in retrospect did he realize how bad his frame of mind was heading into that Dec. 21 game against Elon. “He was fried, like we all get at times,” Krzyzewski says. “Sometimes, when you’re fried like that, you end up doing the one thing that is the worst for you.”

The postgame scene in Greensboro was chaotic. Krzyzewski tried to defuse the situation by bringing Allen into Elon’s locker room so he could apologize to Santa Ana. It did little to tamp the public’s outrage. Commentators on television and social media immediately called for Krzyzewski to hand Allen a lengthy suspension. When the team got back to campus later that night, Krzyzewski and his assistants met with Allen in a lounge adjacent to the players’ locker room. Allen was so upset that Krzyzewski worried he might try to harm himself. He invited Allen to spend the night at his house, but Allen said he wanted to sleep in his own bed. Krzyzewski called Allen’s roommates, seniors Amile Jefferson and Matt Jones, and told them to make sure Allen was not alone.

The next morning, Allen traveled home for the holidays. His sleepless night was followed by a walk of shame through Raleigh-Durham International Airport, where strangers held up their phones and recorded videos while cracking jokes about tripping. He went home for a couple of days and caught up on sleep, but his mood didn’t lift. “I wasn’t resilient. I was depressed,” he says. “That’s something I never thought I’d feel.”

The morning after the Elon game, Krzyzewski announced he was indefinitely suspending Allen. As it turned out, the coach had his own brewing problems. He had been battling a herniated disc in his back, and it was not responding to treatment. When his neurosurgeon suggested surgery, Krzyzewski said he wanted to wait until he could bring back Allen from his suspension, which turned out to be for one game.

The game Allen missed came at Virginia Tech. While the Hokies’ crowd serenaded him with insults, he sat stoically on the bench and watched his team lose, 89-75. “That honestly might have been the worst of all,” he says. “Just sitting there watching the team lose, knowing you’d be on the court if it weren’t for your own stupid mistake.”

The depression, as he called it, lasted for weeks. During a game at Florida State, Allen’s parents sat in the stands and heard the fans shout “F— you Grayson!” over and over. Allen was frequently compared to hated Duke stars such as Redick and Christian Laettner, but unlike them, and unlike a lot of great players, he is not one to feed off of hostility. “I don’t like going out in public to begin with, because I’m shy around people I don’t know,” he says. “So having all those people know you and dislike you and being so visible, that’s a big deal for someone who’s not naturally self-confident.”

His every move was freeze-framed. During a road loss to Florida State, he dove into the stands to save a loose ball and appeared to shove a Seminoles assistant coach. Or did he? In a game against Boston College, as he lost his balance and raised his right foot to steady himself, his foot landed in an opponent’s groin. Or did it? During a home game against N.C. State, he appeared to intentionally walk through the Wolfpack huddle and provoke a mild shoving match. Or was it unintentional? He did his best to shut out the noise, staying away from TV, deleting the Twitter and Instagram apps from his phone, avoiding every possible news source. He watched a lot of NBA TV to get his basketball fix, but that was about it.

Opposing players did their best to goad him. Louisville guard Donovan Mitchell locked arms with Allen, pulled him to the floor and slapped Allen's forehead as he got up. During a brief scuffle at Wake Forest, Demon Deacons guard Brandon Childress grabbed Allen around the shoulders and threw him into the Duke bench. (Unlike Mitchell, Childress was assessed a technical.) When the scrum started, Allen put his hands in the air and tried to separate himself. His parents were aghast. "When you see your kid walk off the court like that, it breaks your heart," Sherry says. "It's like when someone cowers down and protects themselves because they think they're going to get struck. I had never seen him do that. Something was going on in his head."

The turf toe finally started to heal in January, allowing Allen a three-week stretch in which he could practice and feel like himself again. He scored 25 points in a win at home against North Carolina. Alas, two days later, he badly sprained his right ankle in a win over Clemson. The pain would linger for the remainder of the season.

The emotional toll was the worst part. "He got to the point where it was OK not to be in the gym," Scheyer says. Allen responded by erecting walls between him and the world. That proved problematic at Syracuse on Feb. 22. Allen played terribly in that game. At one point during the second half, Krzyzewski subbed him out. When Allen came to the bench, Scheyer expressed his displeasure, and Allen snapped at him. When Krzyzewski did the same, Allen turned away. Krzyzewski was pissed, even more so when the Blue Devils lost on a banked in three-pointer at the buzzer. He believed Allen was responsible for the loss, not just because of how he played, but how he acted.

After the game, Krzyzewski boarded the bus and blistered Allen in front of the entire team. "That's screwed up, man," he said. "That was not right what you did. You have to let me in – especially me. So whatever that thing was that said, 'Not today, coach,' you better get rid of that. If you get rid of that, we'll get rid of a whole bunch of other things."

His parents were equally frustrated. "There were some games we watched and would think he was scared to drive the ball," Sherry says. "He was thinking too much." Grayson concedes there were times he would walk off the court and wonder if he had done something stupid that would set off another maelstrom. His play, meanwhile, remained inconsistent. He went scoreless in Duke's first ACC tournament win over Clemson, but he averaged 15.3 points over the next three games during the Blue Devils' run to the title. Eight days later, Allen shot 3 for 10 from three-point range as the Blue Devils were upset in the second round of the NCAA Tournament by seventh-seeded South Carolina.

During some of his lowest moments, Allen would allow himself to fantasize about what it would feel like to lead Duke to a title, and then walk off the court without saying a word. No press conference, no interviews, no nothing. Just win it, drop the mic, and be done. So when the Blue Devils lost to the Gamecocks, he did not feel an ounce of relief that his ordeal was over. It was just one more disappointment in a season full of them.

Allen was understandably rusty when he returned to campus this summer. Physically, however, he was finally in great shape, and it didn't take long for him to return to form. During one pickup game

with his new teammates, Allen battled with Gary Trent Jr., a 6'6" freshman guard. They were barking at each other, and things got heated. When Allen hit a tough shot, he screamed at Trent, "You can't stop me!"

Krzyzewski called Allen over during a break. "You're an idiot," he said. "That's exactly what we don't want."

Krzyzewski has not had to admonish Allen since, but there have been plenty of moments when Allen's chippiness has come to the fore. That is good in many ways, but it raises the specter of whether Allen will at some point, you know, trip up again. "If I'm being honest, yeah, I'm always worried because you know people are going to bait him," Capel says. "I think he has learned, but I also know how competitive he is. Hopefully he'll be able to keep his emotions in check."

Allen insists he isn't worried. If anything, he is still trying to rediscover the passion he once played with. "I'd actually argue that it's good to play with emotion," he says. "Even as a leader, I have to be angry at my team sometimes. If we're going on a run, I need to be the most energetic and enthusiastic guy. So I think the proper way to use emotion is to direct it at your team, not the other team. That's what I'm trying to do, learn to master that emotion and not get into some individual battle that's meaningless."

That aside, there is no reason why he can't have a terrific senior season. Krzyzewski believes Allen is one of the most gifted shooters he has ever coached. His three-point percentage dipped to 34.6 percent last season, but he shot 41.7 percent as a sophomore, and he has been lights out during fall workouts. As such, Krzyzewski wants Allen to take more jumpers and make fewer kamikaze drives to the rim. "I've told him I don't want him to be like the Flying Wallendas where you're on your ass all the time after making a drive. Let's get away from jumping off a garbage can and dunking on an eight-foot basket," Krzyzewski says. Whether Allen – and by extension, Duke – is successful will depend much more on his state of mind. "He shouldn't play this year to get back at anybody," Krzyzewski says. "We've talked about throwing away the rearview mirror. Be pure. Be the best scorer in college basketball. Every time you're open, shoot that sucker. Play for the love of the game and the love of winning, not for vengeance or anything like that. Do that, and it will be the best year of your life."

It is not uncommon for athletes to have different personas in and away from competition, but in Allen's case, that chasm has been especially wide. Too wide, perhaps. As he learns how to channel his intensity on the court, so too is he learning to break out of his shell when he is away from basketball. "I'm starting to care way less about being out where someone might know who I am," he says. "One of the positives that have come out of this is I truly just don't care what people think. If I'm out being weird, yes, I'm being weird. That's me."

One of the reasons Allen returned for his senior season was the opportunity to lead a young team. Duke's starting lineup will likely include Allen and four freshmen, with little experience coming off the bench. Krzyzewski has appointed Allen as his lone captain, which is significant considering he stripped Allen of his co-captaincy after the Elon incident. This will put him well outside his comfort zone, but isn't that the point of college? You get uncomfortable, you screw up, you learn, you grow. Then you do it all over again.

While it seems inevitable Allen will screw up at some point this season, it also seems unlikely he will let that derail him. Somehow through the trials of the last two years, he has learned that he is tougher than he thought. He has also learned the value of finding quiet amid the noise. One of the habits he developed to help him do that is reading. His favorite spot is the small balcony next to his off-campus apartment, especially at night when there's a breeze blowing. He prefers psychology and performance books, but he has also taken a liking to books about Zen philosophy, meditation and mindfulness. "I like that it looks calm, but ultimately it's an intense focus on nothing," he says.

He keeps a stack of books on his nightstand, which motivates him to move through the pile. And yes, they are actual books, which Allen prefers over reading on digital devices. For a young man who has spent way too much time living inside of screens, it feels good to hold something real. "It might just be me," he says, "but I like flipping the page."

How former Duke guard Quinn Cook helped a shy Grayson Allen become a leader

Jonathan M. Alexander, Raleigh News & Observer

October 27, 2017

CHARLOTTE - When Grayson Allen first came to Duke, he said he didn't talk to anyone. The Duke guard, who was then a freshman, didn't have anything against his teammates, he was just shy and reserved, he said.

However, then-senior guard Quinn Cook made it a point to get Allen out of his comfort zone. He tried to talk to him every day.

"At the time I was ninth or 10th guy on the team," Allen said Wednesday at the ACC's Media Day press conference. "So I think that type of leadership was big. Quinn led from the top of the group, with Jahlil (Okafor) all the way down to me, who probably wasn't going to play at all during the season."

Allen said Cook's effort to lend a hand stuck with him. Allen as a sophomore became a key piece – arguably the most important piece – in Duke's 2015 national championship win over Wisconsin.

Now a senior, Allen finds himself in that same position Cook was, trying to make his younger teammates feel comfortable. Duke lost nine players via transfer, graduation and the draft after last season. The Blue Devils essentially have a brand new team. Duke returns only one starter – Allen – and brought in a seven-person recruiting class.

"I try to get them to talk more," Allen said of the freshmen. "That's the huge thing. When I came here freshman year, I didn't say anything, and I try to tell them don't learn the hard way like I did. Get it down now, start talking.

"It really helps you get in the game more so you're not caught off by the intensity or anything."

Despite Duke's turnover, Division I head coaches voted the Blue Devils as USA Today's preseason No. 1-ranked team, in part because they had the nation's No. 1 recruiting class. Allen said the team has the potential to do well this season, but he won't know for sure until the freshmen step out onto the court for their first game. As a captain, that's something he'll have to help prepare them for.

"What I'm really hoping for this team is that we really start off strong and we just keep improving throughout the year," he said. "There is really no ceiling that we hit or plateau, that we just keep going because of the young guys that we have. We should just continue to get better."

Duke

Grayson Allen, The Players Tribune
November 14, 2017

Why did you choose Duke?”

I stood at the podium for a second and considered the question.

Why *did* I come here?

And I followed that with another question: *Why did I decide to take a public speaking class?*

I figured it would be easy. I'd been giving different clichés during interviews since I was a junior in high school. How much more complicated could a public speaking class be?

At least, that was my theory. But then on the first day of class my sophomore year, Professor Byerly volunteered me to be the first person to speak. As soon as I got up there, I immediately fell out of my comfort zone.

I'm not much of a talker by nature, and that was especially true my first couple of years at Duke. If it wasn't for interviews about basketball, I'd be perfectly fine not saying a single word all day.

I stared at the other students. They stared back at me. Then I went into a monotone drawl, which is, you know, the way I talk.

“Well, I always dreamed of attending Duke since I was a little kid. And I...”

Professor Byerly stopped me. “That’s a great answer, but give me a little inflection.”

“Uh, well...”

“No *uhs*, Grayson.”

“I watched the team win the national championship in 2010, and I think that’s when I knew that I wanted to play for...”

She stopped me again. “I love that, Grayson. Good posture, but try speaking with a bit more confidence.”

It went on like that until my turn was over — with me awkwardly trying to push out sentences. When I got back to my seat, I remember thinking to myself, *Dude, you just won a national championship with millions of people watching a few months ago. Why are you so nervous doing this?*

But I don't think it's a coincidence that, looking back, that public speaking class has been the single most useful course I've ever taken at Duke. It forced me to come out of my shell.

That first day of public speaking class, I was asked why I decided to come to Duke. At the time, it seemed really simple: It's Duke. Come on. If you love basketball, and you have the chance to go to Duke, then you're going to Duke.

Now people are asking me a different question. “After everything that’s happened the last few years, why did you decide to stay for your senior year?”

That's an interesting one ... we have to go back to the first night Coach K came to my parents' house in Jacksonville. That was a big night in the Allen household. My whole family was nervous. Everything had to look perfect. Every room was cleaned. We dusted under all the lamps. We all put on our Sunday best. And my mom spent the entire afternoon preparing her signature dish.

Mom brought out the big guns. Chicken scampi pasta, sweet tea and my aunt's homemade cookies.

I remember just looking around in awe that night as we were all sitting around my family's dinner table: Mom, Dad, Coach K, Coach Capel, Coach Wojo and me. When Mike Krzyzewski is in your dining room, I mean ... that was all I could see.

This was near the end of my junior year of high school. It was a surreal moment for a lot of reasons, especially because I was somewhat of a late bloomer. I hadn't started taking basketball seriously until around the eighth grade, which is actually kind of late for someone hoping to be recruited by a top school. I had played soccer since I was four years old, so for a long time I didn't think basketball was a thing I had a future in.

I developed my love for basketball at the Dunes Park playground near our house. On those outdoor courts, I learned to play with an edge. Out there, the game was simpler. Let's just say that the rules were enforced only when necessary. You played hard so you could get extra runs in. That was all that mattered. It was streetball.

At school, I was always much more reserved. My grandmother was a high school English teacher, so from an early age, it was drilled into me that school came before everything. As long as I had good grades and stayed out of trouble, I could spend the rest of my time how I wanted. So I would go to the playground.

On the court, I was a completely different person. I wasn't the quiet kid. I was a dog. I was scraping up my knees diving on the asphalt for loose balls, and taking elbows to the chest going up for rebounds. I used to have to referee youth soccer games to get money to buy new basketball shoes because I'd always rip mine to pieces during those games. It was a different side of me, but a side I really liked. When I had a basketball in my hands, I felt a confidence that's hard to describe. I felt ... powerful.

That attitude wasn't just a facet of my game – it *was* my game. For most of my life I had terrible shooting form. I chicken-winged every shot. Just bricks for days. But I still managed to find success because I *competed*. In high school I realized that if I wanted to go anywhere with basketball, I had to learn the proper way to spot up, and that's when I started to develop the shot I have today.

Playing in college seemed like a distant goal. Playing at a program like Duke seemed completely impossible. But as I progressed and grew taller, I started to draw attention from schools, and eventually the scholarship offers started to come. I remember how cool it was to be offered by Florida and Georgia because my mom was a Gator and my dad was a Bulldog. My entire childhood, they tugged me to both sides of the rivalry, but it was useless. Ever since I was a little kid, it was all about Duke Basketball. After the Blue Devils won the 'ship in 2010 in that amazing game against Butler, it was over. That was my school for life.

And now Coach K was eating chicken scampi in our house? It was insane. The entire time I remember just thinking, *Coach K is right here at our dining-room table.*

We were in the middle of dinner when he extended an offer for me to play basketball at Duke.

Inside, I was like, *YES! YES, I WOULD LIKE TO GO TO DUKE! ARE YOU SERIOUS? YES!*

But my parents had specifically told me beforehand not to do anything impulsive, so I waited a few days before officially committing. I had to play in a Nike EYBL event in California the weekend after Coach K offered and I didn't want the extra attention that a Duke commit would surely attract. Seriously, those were the longest days of my life.

I won't be able to do a good enough job of explaining what it means to me to play at Duke. It's impossible.

Some nights after practice my freshman year, I would wait around the basketball facility until people cleared out. When it was mostly empty, I'd go sit alone in the stands at Cameron. I'd take some time to look around and try to make sense of the fact that I was actually there. I was a basketball player at Duke — the place where Grant Hill and J.J. Redick had played. I was blessed to be part of that brotherhood. I almost expected to wake up in my bedroom as a 12-year-old, being told the dream was over and it was time to go to middle school. It was hard for me to feel like I belonged at such a special place. Surreal ... surreal.

Because of that, early on, I tried my best not to be noticed in the locker room. I was surrounded by teammates, but I didn't really feel like I was part of the team. I would hang out with the other freshmen, but for the most part, I just tried to stay out of the way of the upperclassmen.

Quinn Cook wasn't having any of that, though. Not at all.

Quinn was the oldest guy on the team. He was our captain — our heart and soul. Quinn's the type of person who, when he's talking everybody in the room listens. That was partially out of respect, but the other part was also because you knew whatever came next was going to be good.

My locker was next to his, and every day he would come into the locker room and greet me right away. Well actually, he would shout a greeting at me.

"HEY, GRAYSON! WASSUP GRAYSON?!"

Which of course would make the whole locker room look at me.

Then I'd kind of awkwardly respond, "Hi, wassup?"

Now, at the time, I didn't really know why he was singling me out. Why would Quinn Cook even give me, the freshman at the end of the bench, the time of day? Now I get it. And I truly appreciate it more than he can imagine. Quinn wasn't drawing attention to me because he was trying to embarrass me. He was doing it because he was trying to involve me. He knew I needed to come out of my shell.

It didn't take long for me to start looking up to him like my big brother on the team. We eventually made up this ridiculous handshake that we did whenever we saw each other.

Because of Quinn, I started talking a little more my freshman year, which was something I really didn't like to do. And I realize now how important it was to my development. If you're comfortable talking in the locker room and on the team bus, you'll feel comfortable talking when you're on the floor. That can only help the team.

My freshman year, I thought I played pretty well in our team scrimmages and exhibition games. But once the real games started, I stayed on the bench. The first time we played Wisconsin that season, I didn't play a single minute.

I was pretty down about it.

I'll never forget sitting across from Coach K in his office and him telling me, "Grayson, don't think this isn't your year. I need you to stay ready, because you never know when this team is going to need you." Turns out he knew what he was talking about.

After that conversation I stopped thinking, *I'm not getting in the game because I'm not good enough*, and changed my mindset to, *We have a really talented team, and I'm on it for a reason*.

By the time the NCAA tournament came around that year, I had started playing more minutes. The second time we faced Wisconsin was in the national championship game. I came off the bench to score 16 points, and probably had the best game of my life up to that point. After that, I wasn't the anonymous freshman at the end of the bench anymore. People started paying attention to me, wondering who I was. And that was when everything changed.

Why do people do what they do? I think about that a lot.

I took a social psychology class early on at Duke and it really fascinated me. I learned a lot about people's behaviors and motivations. What was most interesting to me was how much psychology and sports overlap. That's what led me to major in psychology at Duke.

Being a skilled athlete is only part of the equation when it comes to sports. Whether a player (and really any person) reaches their full potential is determined by what can't be seen — their mental makeup. It seemed important to learn about that stuff at the time, but I never had any idea how crucial it would be in my life.

I'm insanely competitive. That's always been me. It's a double-edged sword.

The same aspects of my game that help me succeed at this level are the same things that cause some people to have a poor impression of me.

Surely, there will be a spotlight on me — and my talented teammates — this season. I want to finish things the right way. Especially for Coach K. I'm extremely lucky to have a coach who has stood by me and who really believes in me. Over the past couple of years, he's definitely been hard on me after I've fallen short of our program's standards and my own. He's never sugarcoated things when I messed something up. But he's also never tried to shame me. And he's never given up on me, even when countless others suggested he should.

It's funny, my whole life I loved Duke basketball because of its amazing tradition and history. That's what I wanted to be part of when I came here. Today, I still love Duke basketball, but for different reasons. I love this place because people here on campus view me not only as a person who plays basketball well, but also as one who might make mistakes. Basically, members of this program and my Duke classmates understand that I am still in the process of maturing and figuring out who I am, even when the lights are brightest. I'm so incredibly thankful for that. Simply put, Duke is my extended family.

This might surprise people, but sometimes I get fan letters. They come from the whole spectrum in terms of demographics. But regardless of the sender, I've always taken the messages to heart. So many great friendships that I've developed came directly from fan mail. These friendships allow me to see kindness and goodness from my journey at Duke.

I particularly loved this note that I received from a young fan named John:

There are always going to be people who don't like me. I know that. My options are to either buy into that negativity and feel really small, or take the things I hear and use them to grow into a better person. When I considered staying for my senior year, I thought about all of the things that I could still accomplish on the basketball court — becoming a true leader, being more vocal, and trying to be like Quinn for our freshmen. Basketball wasn't the only consideration. I thought about the life I have here at Duke — and how I wanted more of it. Another year of hitting up the West Union for food before heading back to the dorms to get after it playing two-on-two *Rocket League*. Another year of walking across the quad to class, and seeing so many familiar faces along the way. Another year of Cameron — not just as an arena, but also as one of my favorite quiet places on campus, where I can go to reflect. I thought about how good it will feel to finish what I started as part of Duke's class of 2018, and earn my degree — and how proud I will feel when I walk across the stage to accept my diploma. At Duke, or anywhere for that matter, that's a great accomplishment.

Maybe most important, though, I thought about who I am — and who I can become a year from now. That's probably what excited me most. With God's grace and help, I'll have this amazing opportunity to rise — as a vocal leader, as a confident public speaker, as a great teammate, as a better player and as a proud Duke graduate.

Certainly I've harbored a lot of embarrassment and shame for situations on the basketball court that were of my own doing the past couple of years — the ones you saw on TV or read about on social media. They could have easily snowballed more than they did and ruined the rest of my basketball career. What happened after ... well, that is why I'm so thankful to play at Duke. Everyone in the program — from my teammates in the locker room to the coaches and the rest of the staff who support us every day — knows me for so much more than my mistakes. They've never tried to make me feel isolated because of them, and I love them for that. And I'll always be grateful.

I stayed at Duke because, like most college students, I still have some growing up to do — and because there's nowhere else I'd rather do it.

I'm back at Duke because I never left.

—Grayson

Grayson Allen Named Senior CLASS Award Candidate

January 5, 2018

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. – Duke men’s basketball guard **Grayson Allen** is one of 30 NCAA men's basketball student-athletes selected as candidates for the 2017-18 Senior CLASS Award. The award is presented annually to the senior who excels both on and off the court.

To be eligible for the award, a student-athlete must be classified as an NCAA Division I senior and have notable achievements in four areas of excellence: community, classroom, character, and competition.

An acronym for Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School®, the Senior CLASS Award focuses on the total student-athlete and encourages students to use their platform in athletics to make a positive impact as leaders in their communities.

The list of 30 candidates will be narrowed to a field of 10 finalists in February, and those 10 names will be placed on the official ballot. Ballots will be distributed through a nationwide voting system to media, coaches, and fans, who will select one candidate who best exemplifies excellence in the four Cs of community, classroom, character, and competition.

Allen, Duke’s lone captain for the 2017-18 team, is averaging 17.4 points, while leading the ACC in three-pointers per game (2.93) and ranking eighth in the conference in assists per game (4.43). The Jacksonville, Fla., native has played 119 career games for the Blue Devils and is on pace to finish as the program’s 12th 2,000-point scorer. This season, Allen was a preseason first-team All-ACC pick, a preseason All-American from a number of outlets, and a preseason candidate for the Oscar Robertson Trophy and the Jerry West Award.

Allen is a three-time All-ACC Academic Team honoree and a 2016 Academic All-American. Off the court, Allen has routinely volunteered his time at the Duke Children’s Hospital and the Emily K Center, the mission of which is to inspire students to dream big, act with character and purpose and reach their potential as leaders in their communities. Allen and his teammates are involved with the Read with the Blue Devils program, which seeks to aid area teachers in encouraging children to read at an early age. Allen also has volunteered his time to youth basketball clinics, several of which were held in Jacksonville.

Duke has enjoyed a long history with the Senior CLASS Award, as **J.J. Redick** was named the winner in 2006, while **Shane Battier** was the inaugural winner in 2001 with his story helping set the foundation for the Senior CLASS Award.

The Senior CLASS Award winners will be announced during the 2018 NCAA Men's Final Four® and NCAA Women's Final Four® this spring. For more information on each of the candidates, visit seniorCLASSaward.com.

No. 2 Duke (13-1, 1-1) is back in action Saturday at NC State at 8 p.m. on ESPN.

ABOUT THE AWARD

An acronym for Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School, the Senior CLASS Award honors the attributes of senior student-athletes in four areas: community, classroom, character and competition. The award program is designed exclusively for college seniors who are utilizing their complete athletic eligibility, remaining committed to their university and pursuing the many rewards a senior season can bring. Premier Sports Management manages the award.

Duke's Grayson Allen knows he has 'not played well,' Coach K says

Jonathan M. Alexander, The News & Observer

January 9, 2018

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said senior guard Grayson Allen knows he has to perform better than he did this past Saturday in order for the Blue Devils to be a successful team.

Allen scored 8 points in 39 minutes in a 96-85 upset loss to N.C. State at PNC arena on Saturday. He only attempted nine shots, and was 3-for-9 from the field. He was 1-for-4 from behind the 3-point line.

It was one of his worst performances of the season.

When asked whether it was a matter of putting him a better position to score, or Allen looking for his shot, Krzyzewski said "most of the time, it's primarily on a player."

"Because all coaches – we have all good coaches in the league, and they put their players in positions to be successful," Krzyzewski said on Monday. "And he's not played well in these three conference games.

"And he knows it. We have confidence he will play well."

Allen, who is 6-5, 205 pounds, is Duke's second leading scorer overall (16.8 points per game), and leads the team in 3-pointers. He's averaging three made 3-point field goals per game and is shooting 43 percent from behind the 3-point line.

Allen wasn't the only reason Duke (13-2, 1-2 ACC) struggled on Saturday. Duke can blame most of that on its defense and how well N.C. State played. Allen said he felt like N.C. State was denying him the ball all night.

But Duke needs Allen to play well, or "be strong all the time," Krzyzewski said.

In the three ACC games Duke has played (Boston College, Florida State, N.C. State), Allen averaged 14.6 points per game. However, he shot 33 percent from the floor in those games.

Allen, Duke's captain and lone senior this season, starts with four freshmen – guards Trevon Duval, Gary Trent Jr. and forwards Wendell Carter Jr. and Marvin Bagley III.

Duke's last two national championship teams have consisted of multiple upperclassmen to lead the freshmen. In 2010, the team was made up of seniors Jon Scheyer, Lance Thomas, Brian Zoubek, and juniors Nolan Smith and Kyle Singler. In 2015, Allen's freshman season, Duke had juniors Marshall Plumlee, Amile Jefferson and senior guard Quinn Cook.

As "one-and-dones" become more common, particularly at Duke, there is more player turnover.

This year, Allen's captain status carries much responsibility.

"Youth can show more if that one veteran is having a human night, where it's not good," Krzyzewski said Saturday. "His impact on our team is huge."

On Nov. 14, Allen showed what he's capable of when he scored a career-high 37 points against then-No. 2 Michigan State in an 88-81 win.

Krzyzewski said part of Allen's struggles come from playing with new teammates. He said Duke hasn't had continuity in recent weeks after exams and the holidays for Allen to get into a rhythm with his teammates. Duke has played three games since Dec. 20.

"And he has to hunt his shot," Krzyzewski said. "We haven't really hit a transition 3 in a while, and that's a major part of our offense, especially for him. That's one of his best shots, and he really hasn't had that. And that kind of gets him going. He'll play better but he hasn't played well. And we haven't played well, as well as we need to play.

So far, Duke is 1-2 in the ACC, after losing at N.C. State and Boston College. Allen shot below 50 percent from the 3-point line in those two losses. Duke will need Allen's 3-point shooting, when it plays at Pitt (8-8, 0-3) on Wednesday.

Duke is 7-0 when Allen hits 50 percent or more of his 3-pointers.

"When he plays well, we usually play well," Krzyzewski said. "That's what happens when you're the one or two key players on the team."

Duke's Grayson Allen, All Grown Up

Marc Tracy, *The NY Times*

February 7, 2018

Despite playing every minute of Saturday's game against St. John's at Madison Square Garden, the Duke senior Grayson Allen had not done much. Four points. Two assists. Two rebounds.

Yet with 36 seconds left and the Blue Devils trailing by 4, it was Allen who made a 3-pointer to give the game a final burst of life. Allen brought the ball up on a subsequent possession and attempted two more 3s in what was, ultimately, a losing effort. No. 9 Duke (19-4) walked off the court stunned, an 81-77 loser to unranked and unheralded St. John's (11-13) only days before Thursday's showdown at archrival North Carolina.

Despite the debacle, Coach Mike Krzyzewski said he was glad Allen had taken the late shots, not because he is Duke's lone senior, but because they were open. The freshman guard Trevon Duval went further, pointing to the unique presence Allen has on this season's Duke roster. "It's great to have someone like Grayson with that type of experience," he said, "because he's been there."

"Duke senior" is a generic label that once described many of the Blue Devils' best-known stars. Christian Laettner, Grant Hill, Shane Battier, J.J. Redick, Jon Scheyer — they all played four years for Krzyzewski. For more than a decade, that kind of veteran was a point of pride for Duke fans: Our best guys, they bragged, stick around.

"Coach K has not assembled teams of street ballers with natural athletic talent," the political reporter (and Duke graduate) Chris Good wrote in 2010, after Duke won a national championship with a team of scrappy upperclassmen. "He has chosen another path: He has recruited less athletic players that will stay around campus for four years."

But since then, Krzyzewski, the Hall of Famer and leader for coaching victories in major men's basketball, has turned Duke into the most formidable factory of so-called one-and-dones, those highly sought players who spend a single season in college simply to fulfill N.B.A. rules and then declare for the draft (and sign multimillion-dollar pro contracts).

Nine Duke underclassmen were selected in the past four N.B.A. drafts. All five of this season's starters, including Allen, are projected as first-round picks, which would match Kentucky's record from 2010. The other four are freshmen.

Krzyzewski's new way of doing business has also given rise to a new archetype: the Duke Senior — a kind of story Duke tells itself in order to keep being Duke. Allen is the unlikeliest and most intriguing Duke Senior so far.

Recruiting one-and-done talents has a clear upside — it gets you the best players — and in 2015 it produced Krzyzewski's fifth national title. The downside is teams that take awhile to jell (sometimes longer than the season lasts) and, in the meantime, are susceptible to being exposed by lesser squads like the sub-.500 St. John's team that stunned the Blue Devils on Saturday.

"Maturity of the game, not just individually but collectively, is something we have to teach in a condensed period of time," Krzyzewski said.

The one-and-done model can also cause malaise among fans. Throughout college basketball, traditionalists complain about the increased prevalence of underclassmen, who not only betray their inexperience but rarely have time to forge a connection between fan and team. “You used to get the chance to know them,” goes the common refrain. “Now I don’t even know half their names.”

Duke fans feel this grievance viscerally because Krzyzewski avoided recruiting one-and-dones longer than some other top coaches, and now does it better than any other.

“I’m tired of watching it,” the longtime Washington Post sports columnist (and Duke graduate) John Feinstein tweeted after Saturday’s game, referring to “one-and-dones who pretty much only care about their draft position.”

This development has not stopped Duke fans from being Duke fans.

“Any fan base, and it doesn’t matter which, they’ll rationalize whatever they’re doing,” said the ESPN analyst Jay Bilas, a former Krzyzewski player and assistant coach.

Instead, Duke fans and players, led by Krzyzewski, have grabbed hold of the idea of the Duke Senior. He may not be the team’s best player — or even the third best — but his experience and wisdom, the argument goes, lend a necessary, if intangible, patina to the apprentices surrounding him.

Before the 2015 title run, Krzyzewski said “our most valuable guy” was the senior Quinn Cook, even though by objective measurements that honor belonged to one of the three freshmen who were selected in the first round of the N.B.A. draft that summer.

Last season, as Duke won the Atlantic Coast Conference title primarily through the genius of the sophomore Luke Kennard (now of the Detroit Pistons) and the freshman Jayson Tatum (the Boston Celtics’ likely rookie of the year), the Duke Seniors were Amile Jefferson and Matt Jones.

“He does valuable things for us, or else we wouldn’t be sitting here right now,” Krzyzewski said of Jones, Duke’s sixth-leading scorer, adding, “There are valuable things that only people who want to look deeper into it see.”

This year, the Duke Senior is Allen. What is surprising is the plethora of roles he has already played.

As a freshman, he was the Blue Devils’ inspirational story, a bench-warmer who came alive in the national title game to jump-start a come-from-behind victory. The next season, he was the budding star, the team’s leading scorer. Next, he was the enfant terrible, suspended and stripped of his captancy for maturity issues that included a predilection for kicking opponents.

For non-Duke fans he also filled another, time-tested role: the (white) Duke villain.

This season, Allen has been statistically peripheral. Duke’s explosive offense revolves around three freshmen: Marvin Bagley III, who averages more than 21 points and 11 rebounds a game; Duval, the point guard; and Gary Trent Jr., the team’s best shooter. (Duke’s defense? The less said about that the better.)

But by several accounts, Allen is genuinely his team’s leader.

“G is usually the one who gets us together, tells us what we need to do,” Duval said. “He’s been through it. This is his fourth year. He’s been doing it for three years. He’s seen it all, he knows the situations we’re in, how we need to be.”

Allen has accepted this role. He said on Saturday that he saw his job as to “keep us together as a team, talk to all the guys, make sure we’re all on the same page — the same page as Coach.”

As for Krzyzewski, his frustration with his team’s youth was explicit after the St. John’s defeat. “We’re really young,” he said. “Young is more susceptible to inconsistency.”

But those who wish Krzyzewski would stop recruiting one-and-dones — or believe he is sick of it — might want to take a look at next year’s class. After Zion Williamson’s commitment last month, Duke will have the top three players in the class of 2019. It is very unlikely any of them will stick around long enough to be the next Duke Senior.

With Bagley out, Grayson Allen surging in new role as Duke's offensive leader

Chip Patterson, CBSSports.com

February 18, 2018

Duke won its third straight game with Marvin Bagley out of the lineup, squeaking past Clemson 66-57 in Littlejohn Coliseum on Sunday. But the quality of the Blue Devils' play as of late has little to do with the absence of their freshman sensation and much more to do with Grayson Allen's response to a new (old) role in the offense.

Mike Krzyzewski had an interesting take earlier this week, noting that Allen, the lone senior in the rotation, is expected to be the leader of this young team but it's been tough to lead on the floor with him playing off the ball. Allen is averaging 22.3 points, 5.3 assists and 2.3 steals in this three-game run, leading the team in scoring in all three wins and seeing a lot more of the ball on the offensive end.

"Since Marvin's been out, we've switched his role. We kind of flip-flopped it today based on matchups, but for the most part he's bringing the ball up and he can be in control of the team," Krzyzewski said on Sunday after the win. "As our leader, that puts him in a more prominent spot and the kids respond a little bit better."

It is absolutely ludicrous to suggest that Duke is anywhere closer to its ceiling without Bagley than it would be with him on the floor. He is a walking double-double in terms of production and likely going to be the ACC Player of the Year. But having its best player sidelined has allowed Duke to figure out new ways to be successful on offense and given a platform not only for Allen but other key rotation players to step up.

For example, Javin DeLaurier was certainly never expected to be starting and playing 30 minutes on the road in mid-February, yet he and Marques Bolden have done a good job of stepping up in Bagley's absence. Confidence gained from tough minutes in hard-fought ACC wins is going to only make Duke a more well-rounded and difficult opponent to bounce next month in the NCAA Tournament.

While Krzyzewski has Allen in a new role for 2017-18, leading the offense isn't a new role for him as a player. It was only two years ago that Grayson Allen was a First Team All-ACC selection and leading the team in scoring averaging more than 20 points per game. He's shown flashes of that form in the last three games, and it's hard to imagine that the return of Marvin Bagley is going to reverse the improved play that has helped carry Duke to three straight wins.

Prior to the Clemson game, Krzyzewski mentioned that the injury has presented the opportunity to look at some new things with his team in hopes of being even better when Bagley returns. If Sunday's win and the last couple games are any indication, Allen getting his groove back late in the year is not going to be a storyline that's going away any time soon.

Grayson Allen's resurgence coming at perfect time for No. 5 Duke

February 22, 2018

David M. Hale, ESPN.com

Remember Grayson Allen? He garnered a few headlines in the past, became something of a household name. Then, after three years in the spotlight ... poof! He slid into the shadows of four talented freshmen, including big man Marvin Bagley III. Three weeks ago, Allen's senior campaign at Duke was shaping up as a sideshow.

Then Bagley went down, and Allen came roaring back.

The senior guard scorched Louisville's defense Wednesday, putting up 28 points on 10-of-20 shooting, including six 3-pointers, while the Blue Devils romped to an easy 82-56 win, their fourth straight victory without Bagley in the lineup. And all four of those wins have been keyed, in no small part, by a guy who admitted that he was struggling with his confidence a few weeks ago.

"It wasn't there all the time," Allen said of his confidence at midseason. "We have an extremely talented offensive group. For me, it was to keep hunting my shot, keep being aggressive. That aggressive mindset -- coaches have talked to me about that."

Allen hasn't been shy about putting up his shots with Bagley sidelined. In the four games without Bagley, Allen has tallied 95 points. He managed just 98 in the previous 10 games alongside the talented freshman.

It was a balancing act, Allen said. With so much talent around him, why shoot when the shots aren't falling? Bagley's injury -- an ongoing mystery coach Mike Krzyzewski did little to unravel Wednesday -- simply opened the door for a more aggressive approach.

There's a lot of different looks I'm coming up with," Allen said. "Getting stuff off the ball, ball screens, getting some stuff in transition where I can attack."

Everyone has been forced into a slightly different role with Bagley sidelined, and Krzyzewski thinks it's been a good lesson for his team. It's not all Allen's influence, but he's certainly been the point man on both ends of the court.

"You've seen him the last four games, sort of orchestrating things," Krzyzewski said. "Grayson's our leader, and by having him up on top [of the zone] and offense, we have his leadership have a positive influence on us."

Allen makes a point that these same improvements -- the aggressiveness, the confidence -- could happen with Bagley full go, and no one on the Duke roster is eager to see their star freshman miss more time.

But the reality of the situation remains, at best, murky.

"I don't know when it'll happen," Krzyzewski said of Bagley's return. "I'm not going to push him."

The injury, which Krzyzewski described Wednesday as "not structural," has been shrouded in vagaries. Bagley warmed up before Wednesday's game in a hoodie and basketball shorts and showed no obvious signs of pain. But Krzyzewski certainly illustrated little confidence Bagley would be ready for Saturday's game against Syracuse, and suggested there remained reasons for concern.

"Marvin has a problem or else he would play," Krzyzewski said. "If we weren't concerned about him having more injury, he'd play. He's not ready."

That means Allen remains at the forefront, with a cast quickly finding its role around him in Bagley's absence. Things have been so good without Bagley, in fact, that the inevitable question was posed to Krzyzewski after Wednesday's game: Wouldn't Bagley's return risk upsetting a unit playing with precision?

Krzyzewski shrugged off the concept.

"Just like I wouldn't if Elton Brand or J.J. Redick came back," he said. "We'll try to figure it out. But thank goodness our team is playing so well."

Joel Berry II and Grayson Allen Are Entering Their Final Act

March 2, 2018

Shaker Samman, The Ringer

Joel Berry II had to score.

After North Carolina had pulled ahead by as many as 10 points in the second half of its February 8 matchup with Duke, the Blue Devils refused to go away. When Luke Maye made a jumper, Marvin Bagley III answered with one of his own. When Berry sunk a layup, Wendell Carter Jr. came through with a response. With under nine minutes left and the Tar Heels up 72-65, Berry brought the ball up the floor to meet Grayson Allen—Duke’s 6-foot-5 Energizer Bunny, as rabid as he is skilled.

Berry swung the ball to his teammate, Kenny Williams, who sent it back seconds later. As Berry received the pass, he pumped, sending Allen flying out of position. With his defender flailing, Berry drove to the left, crossed the 3-point line, and released. Allen sprang back in an attempt to recover, but was too late. By the time he could’ve jumped to try to disrupt the shot, the ball was already out of Berry’s hands, on its way through the twine.

It was the kind of moment fans and teammates have come to expect from Berry, and a shot he was confident would fall. “Any shot that I take ... I do it 100 percent and I’m very confident with it,” Berry says. “We had them on their heels and so I just wanted to continue to attack.”

Allen had a number of chances to capitalize on micro-runs and reclaim the lead for Duke, but clanked a handful of deep balls in the game’s waning minutes. Those misses sealed an 82-78 victory for North Carolina and left the Blue Devils’ standing as one of the country’s top teams this season in question. Now, with Duke’s 11-0 start to the campaign in the rearview and UNC having recently emerged as a contender, Saturday’s rematch should set the tone for both squads heading into the postseason.

Berry and Allen have played eight times over the past four years, a span during which Duke holds a 5-3 edge. Their ninth meeting, and possibly last as part of this rivalry, will take place in Cameron Indoor Stadium—an arena Berry says can get so raucous that the floor shakes and the noise drowns out everything else. “You can be standing right by Coach and you still can’t hear anything,” Berry says. It should serve as a fitting atmosphere to once again display the talents of two senior stars who have led their programs to championships, and will look to do so again this March.

With only a handful of contests left before Berry and Allen’s respective college careers come to an end, every game matters, and few matter more than this. But their intersecting paths stretch far beyond a packed gym in Durham, North Carolina. They begin farther south, in Florida.

Allen and Berry weren’t always opponents. There was a time, back in 2013, when the players donned the same jersey. The way Berry tells it, he and Allen were both on struggling AAU teams. Berry was ESPN’s top-rated high school recruit in Florida and played for Each 1 Teach 1, whose alumni include Nets guard D’Angelo Russell and 76ers forward Ben Simmons. Allen played for the Southern Stampede who, despite having ESPN’s second-ranked player in the state, weren’t finding success. The two lived close—Berry just outside Orlando and Allen in Jacksonville—and so a plan was hatched: A representative of E1T1 called Allen, and soon the future Blue Devil shared a backcourt with the Tar Heel-to-be.

“It was a great move for us,” Berry says. “And then over the years, he just got explosive and was dunking on people. He got on our team and he just made us that much better.”

They didn’t practice together often, but Berry says the pair grew close both on the court and in hotels the nights before games. With Berry running the show and Allen coming off the bench, E1T1 won the 2013 Nike Peach Jam, the nation’s most renowned AAU tournament. Edward “Boobie” Francis, E1T1’s coach, told ESPN that he used his players’ future college plans to the team’s advantage. If Francis yelled out “Duke,” Allen would get the shot. If Francis said “Carolina,” the ball would go to Berry. And if the coach called for “Ohio State,” the shot would go to Russell, the group’s elder statesman. Berry and Allen teamed up again that summer in the 2013 Nike Global Challenge, and the next spring in the McDonald’s All American Game before heading their separate ways.

When Allen arrived at Duke in 2014, he was overshadowed by what was the biggest package deal in college basketball history. Jahlil Okafor, Tyus Jones, and Justise Winslow had all committed to the school together, and were seen as the chosen ones who would lead Duke back to the Final Four for the first time since 2010. Allen, who’d committed to the Blue Devils months before that trio, was the forgotten member of a star-studded recruiting class.

He spent the early part of his freshman season in obscurity, playing only in spurts leading into breaks in the action. But when sophomore wing Semi Ojeleye transferred to SMU in December and junior guard Rasheed Sulaimon was dismissed from the program in January, head coach Mike Krzyzewski trimmed his rotation to eight, Allen included. Though his minutes increased, Allen remained an afterthought to fans. To coaches and teammates, however, he was a storm waiting to make landfall.

“[Allen] was sick before the tournament and he missed a couple of practices,” former Duke point guard Quinn Cook says. “He came back and Coach was like, ‘Happy to have you back, Grayson. You’re going to be a big reason why we win this national championship.’”

That statement proved prophetic. Allen’s run of eight straight points in the national title game against Wisconsin propelled Duke to a 68-63 win, and the Blue Devils credited their second-half dominance to his spark off the bench. The next season Allen was even better, averaging 21.6 points per game en route to third-team All-American honors. Yet during that time he also developed a reputation as college basketball’s public enemy. Blowback from three separate tripping incidents during his sophomore year, as well as a fourth from his junior season, turned casual fans against him. College basketball needed a real villain; it found one in Allen.

While Allen’s intensity earned him plenty of detractors, his coaches claim it’s the trait that makes him irreplaceable. “In order to be really good, you do have to have your edge, and so everyone is saying, ‘He needs to stop doing this and stop doing that,’” Duke assistant coach Jon Scheyer says. “Well yes, in a way, but you also need to have it. If you watched him last year, he turned himself off a lot of times instead of turning himself on.”

People close to Allen say he feels unnatural in the spotlight. As he struggled through his junior campaign in 2016-17, it became clear that playing under a microscope had impacted his game. “I think there’s no question [the media pressure] had a big hand in [his performance],” Scheyer says. “I think it also was knowing he couldn’t do it anymore. And so instead of balancing it out, he was more conservative towards, ‘I better not screw anything up.’” Allen looked lost for much of the winter, and Duke got upset by no. 7 seed South Carolina in the second round of the NCAA tournament.

Allen's roller-coaster senior season—which has included a show-stopping 37-point performance against Michigan State, a listless start to ACC play, and an impressive mid-February resurgence—has raised questions as to whether he can carry Duke to heights it hopes to reach in the coming weeks. He can answer some of them on Saturday, and cement himself as one of the defining recent figures in this rivalry. While younger, more touted Duke players have come and gone, Allen has stayed in Durham. With another win over Carolina, he'll add to his Blue Devils legacy.

Of course, to secure that victory he'll have to get the best of Berry, his favorite opposing player and the only person who's matched him from the start. "I still enjoy watching Joel play even though he plays for UNC," Allen told reporters in December. "I like watching him play just because it makes me feel like I'm back in high school."

he jumper that Berry hit over Allen in February may have looked familiar. About a year earlier, the Tar Heels guard turned in one of the best outings of his career, icing Allen and his then-teammate Amile Jefferson to seal a 90-83 Carolina win at home. The first basket, a driving layup past Jefferson, showcased Berry's quickness. The second, a pull-up jumper that flew over Allen's outstretched arms, showed his toughness. Moments later, Berry connected again to seal the game.

At the time, Berry's performance was considered surprising. He'd had big nights before, but not like that, and certainly not against Duke. His 28 points were three shy of his career high, and his run of seven consecutive points in the second half amounted to as electric a stretch as any he'd ever had. Still, his teammates knew he had this in him. "He shoots some gutsy shots," former Carolina center Kennedy Meeks says. "He shoots those shots in practice all the time."

Much as was the case with Allen, Berry was overlooked when he first got to campus. He was was a top recruit nationally, but only the third-most touted member of UNC's 2014 class. Justin Jackson and Theo Pinson were the centerpieces. Berry was expected to spell the starting point guard, Marcus Paige, and his backup, Nate Britt Jr., but not make an immediate impact.

Things were initially quiet. Berry didn't play more than 16 minutes in any game until a Valentine's Day loss to Pittsburgh. However, after J.P. Tokoto declared for the NBA draft in the summer before Berry's sophomore year, the point guard was suddenly thrust into the starting lineup. Given more than triple the minutes he'd played the year before, he averaged 13.4 points and nearly four assists per game as the Tar Heels claimed the top spot in the ACC. Like rival Duke in 2015, North Carolina headed into the NCAA tournament as a no. 1 seed and marched through every foe it faced en route to the national title game, seemingly destined to hang a banner. If not for a miracle, it could have.

Following Villanova's buzzer-beater, Carolina entered last season haunted by demons. Memories of that loss hung heavy, and talk of Duke's projected greatness dominated most early-season conversations. Another loaded recruiting class and Allen's return to campus meant it was championship or bust in Durham. But Duke crumbled as the year went on, finishing fifth in the regular-season ACC standings before fortuitous conference tournament victories over North Carolina and Notre Dame lifted it to a no. 2 seed in the Big Dance. The Tar Heels, meanwhile, claimed the top seed in their region. Just as it did the previous March, Carolina pushed through its bracket, and for the second time in as many years, stood 40 minutes from a national championship, this time with only Gonzaga to beat. That game featured a dozen lead changes until Berry—the Heels' leading scorer—stepped to the free throw line with seven seconds

left and the chance to seal the win. In minutes, he'd cut down the nets, finishing on top for the first time since the Peach Jam. He cradled the ball in his hands, overwhelmed by the enormity of the moment. Carolina coach Roy Williams, sensing his struggle, asked the referee to see if Berry wanted a timeout. He did.

"I just thought about last year how it was the opposite way, and the confetti was falling for the other team," Berry says. "To finally be in that moment, and knowing that we were going to win the national championship, had got to me."

After that triumph, Berry thought about going pro. On April 24, he declared for the draft. A day later, he withdrew. "I think about the NBA all the time," he says. "But being able to have eligibility to play college basketball and be here in college, those are times that you don't get back. I do want to get to the next level, but it'll be there."

Berry adds: "I've won a national championship. I'm part of the greatest rivalry that will ever be. And to be able to experience all this, you couldn't ask for anything more."

Berry and Allen don't text much these days, save for a few check-ins each offseason. Their parents have stayed close, though, keeping in constant contact. And while the two may not speak often, the impact they've had on each other is clear. "It's just an honor to be affiliated with someone like Grayson, and to have someone that is a part of my life like that," Berry told [Inside Carolina](#) in February. "No too many people get these opportunities."

As this season winds to a close, the duo looks toward a reality that goes beyond the ACC. One NBA scout, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told me that he expects Allen to be a late first-round or early second-round pick in the 2018 draft, and Berry to be a late second-rounder or undrafted free-agent pickup. Allen boasts higher upside, according to the scout, but Berry has the advantage of having a set position and the quickness needed to defend NBA point guards. Though the scout said that certain teams take behavioral patterns into account when evaluating players, any potential hang-ups front offices may have about Allen's professional prospects would be mollified by a strong showing on the court.

In the lead-up to Saturday's game, Berry talked about legacy. He was hesitant to say he'd accomplished all that he'd hoped to when he got to Chapel Hill four years ago—a national championship, a pair of conference titles, and an NCAA tournament Most Outstanding Player award—but said he wanted to finish his career on a high note. If that means cutting down another net in a few weeks, well, that's above and beyond even his wildest expectations.

Whatever awaits, the titans of Tobacco Road first must take part in at least one more duel. And they'll have to go through each other to win it.

MARVIN BAGLEY III

Bag Talk

Adam Figman, SLAM Magazine

October 3, 2017

On Marvin Bagley III's first day of first grade, his father, Marvin Bagley Jr, was dropping his eldest son off at school when he came to a realization: His boy was taller than all the other kids. A lot taller.

"Head and shoulders above everyone else," Bagley Jr says. "It was like, Wow, he might be really tall."

That's when Bagley Jr decided that Bagley III should probably get involved with sports—Junior had played college football at North Carolina A&T and then in the Arena Football League—and basketball made sense, for obvious reasons. "It takes height, sometimes," Bagley Jr says. "It's a good first step."

The second step tends to be talent, and Bagley III had plenty of that, too. He kept growing—he never stopped being the tallest kid in his class—and he quickly accumulated skills to match the height. Those skills eventually earned him a scholarship to Duke University, where he'll be the star of the most stacked NCAA roster in the nation this fall. The team also features top recruits Trevon Duval, Wendell Carter Jr and Gary Trent Jr, along with senior Grayson Allen. Bagley III is set to be either the best or second best player in the country, depending on your opinion of Missouri's Michael Porter Jr, and is a lock to be a top 5 NBA draft pick in June of 2018.

"There's a lot of eyes on me now," Bagley III says minutes after wrapping up his first SLAM cover shoot at Duke's Cameron Indoor Stadium the morning of his freshman move-in day. "It's exciting. It's something I've always dreamed of—going to college and playing college basketball, being able to do what I love to do."

Growing up, Bagley III never struggled to control the post, grab rebounds and generally just toss around smaller opponents. But Bagley Jr wanted his son to learn the entirety of the game, be it dribbling the ball up the floor or making the right pass. This became a bit of a source of contention for those who dealt with the family over the years, with countless coaches wanting to ride Bagley III to tournament wins by throwing him under the basket and dominating the competition, while Bagley Jr preferred his son develop a well-rounded style of play. "Some teams held me back, and that's when my parents came in and we moved to a lot of different teams," Bagley III says. "I can't count how many teams I've been on."

"In the beginning, we played for a lot of programs that played for trophies," Bagley Jr says. "At a young age, you have to be aware about developing the kid. We left a lot of teams because that development wasn't there."

(Bagley Jr has always been his son's guiding force. Even over the past year, at most of his son's AAU and Drew League games, he was often spotted somewhere on the baseline holding a camcorder, documenting the action alongside members of the media who were credentialed to capture footage.)

When MBIII was in fifth grade, his pops founded Phoenix Phamily, and on his own AAU team he let his son learn the ins and outs of handling the rock. "I could have 50 turnovers, but my dad still trusted me to go out and play and push," Bagley III says. "I'm thankful for that—that's why I'm where I am today."

It helped that Bagley Jr had some foresight on the evolution of the sport. With the traditional back-to-the-basket center fading away and “unicorns” like Karl-Anthony Towns, Joel Embiid and Kristaps Porzingis—athletic 7-footers who can play inside and out—taking over the center position over the past couple of years, Bagley III is next in line to carry that big man torch. But Bagley III’s inevitable ascension was put in motion before the aforementioned superstars exploded onto the scene. The soft-spoken Arizona native has been ranked top three (and usually No. 1) in his class since he was a freshman at Corona del Sol HS in Tempe, AZ.

That year at Corona del Sol, he averaged 19.6 points and 10.3 rebounds per game, leading the school to its fourth consecutive state championship. The following season, Bagley III left Corona del Sol for Hillcrest Prep, a basketball program where students take classes at Starshine Academy in Phoenix and spend hours upon hours honing their on-court craft. But mere months after the transfer, amidst a mild controversy in which Hillcrest’s academic status was in question and one of the team’s important games was pulled off ESPN, the family left Arizona for California, where they settled in Chatsworth, CA, so Bagley III and his younger brother Marcus could attend Sierra Canyon HS.

Sure, there’s a little bit of a theme of inconsistency here—with the many AAU programs Bagley III played in as a young child, and the multiple high schools he attended as a teen—but what remained consistent was, if we’re being honest, the only thing that truly mattered: a real commitment to the game of basketball. Over the years Bagley III kept getting better, and at no point did he come close to falling out of the HS prospect rankings. In fact, his grip on the top got tighter.

In 2016-17 at Sierra Canyon, a fully grown, 6-11 Bagley III averaged 24.9 points, 10.1 boards and 2.0 blocks per game, leading the school to the CIF Southern Section Open Division semifinals before the team was defeated by eventual state champions Bishop Montgomery. (Bagley III had 28 and 12 in the loss.) Chris Paul, Paul Pierce and Lamar Odom all attended Sierra Canyon games at some point during his tenure there, and he was named Gatorade State Player of the Year at the end of the ’16-17 season.

“He’s a freak,” says Andre Chevalier, who was an assistant coach at Sierra Canyon while Bagley III played there and will be the team’s head coach this coming season. “I don’t know what to say other than that. The combination of who he is doesn’t come along very often. He’s able to rebound it and dribble it, and he shoots it pretty good. There’s obviously things he needs to improve upon, but on the high school level, he was unstoppable.”

Chevalier also coached Bagley III on the AAU circuit a little bit, which is where he experienced the moment he realized this kid was playing on a different level than anyone else in his age group. In one tournament, Marvin caught a pass while running the baseline, rose up, spun for a complete 360, then soared toward the front of the rim and dunked it. “I was like, Did I just see what I just saw?” Chevalier says. “The freakishness of it—he couldn’t have thought about it. His instincts were just like, How do I get myself to the front of the rim? And he just caught it, did a 360 and dunked it. “I was like, *Good Lord Almighty.*”

On that Tuesday in late August, minutes after he arrives on campus for move-in day, Marvin Bagley III and his family walk through Cameron en route to our cover shoot. Seemingly every person who bumps into Bagley III says the same thing, something like, “So *you’re* the guy we keep hearing about!” Kids ask for selfies and parents offer handshakes. Duke’s next superstar is officially present.

Just months ago, most in the college basketball scene couldn't have guessed things were going to play out like this. Until August 14, Bagley III had technically only completed his junior year, with a full year of eligibility remaining before he could take off to college. But that night on *SportsCenter*, with a national audience watching, Bagley III announced that he was reclassifying and committing to Duke University.

It was yet another recruiting win for Coach Mike Krzyzewski, who has pivoted his strategy to accept—and, well, *pursue*—the one-and-dones that Duke previously stayed away from. It helped that Bagley Jr grew up in the Durham area (though the fact that the family had been living in sunny California should've also given an edge to local USC and UCLA), and it doubly helped that Coach K told Bagley III he could wear his preferred No. 35, despite it being retired as Duke legend Danny Ferry's former number.

"Hearing the coaches talk to me about how I play and how I could get on the court and fit in with the team, I feel like it was a great fit for me," Bagley III says. He visited the school for the first time as a ninth grader, and had been back a couple times since then. "I just love the environment here—it's a calm place, and I feel like I'm going to be around people who want to accomplish high goals like me, so there probably won't be any distractions. Just a perfect fit for me.

"I want to win the National Championship," he adds. "That's the only reason I play—to win. That's my main goal."

It'll be plenty interesting to see how Duke squeezes Bagley III into what was already an exciting roster—he'll likely play a lot of minutes alongside Carter Jr, another talented big man with a very similar skillset. But there isn't much reason to worry. Over the summer, Bagley III hooped in the Drew League, facing up against grown men such as current and former NBAers DeMar DeRozan, JaVale McGee, Julius Randle and Baron Davis. He dropped 32 points and grabbed 11 rebounds in a contest against DeRozan, and put up an 18 and 20 performance in the league's all-star game.

Of course one or two impressive performances during a summer league doesn't exactly guarantee a long, fruitful career, but it's hard to doubt Bagley III is on the right path, a path that began sometime around first grade and doesn't appear to be coming to a halt anytime soon. NBA teams are eagerly waiting for his name to be available in 2018, and whichever team selects him next June will have a legion of fans eagerly waiting for him to hit the court. In the meantime, he's got a season at Duke to show and prove to the few who might not be sold just yet.

"Every time I'm on the court, that's on my mind: Be the best player you can be," he says. "I put so much into this game that it's hard for me to not want to do that. I work hard every day, and I just feel that I want to be the best at it. If you don't want to be the best, then there's no need to play."

The reason Duke should be No. 1 is Marvin Bagley

John Gasaway, ESPN Insider

October 23, 2017

We know how this works. Marvin Bagley III will be a first-team All-American, and he'll lead his team to the national title. That's how it played out over the past six years with every recruit ranked No. 1 in the ESPN 100 who was 6-foot-10 or taller and who stayed healthy for, effectively, his entire freshman season.

Fine, replace "every" with "both." If the 6-foot-11 Bagley plays a full season, he'll be following in the footsteps of Anthony Davis and Jahlil Okafor.

Speaking of those footsteps, Bagley has indeed been called the best player to come out of high school since Davis. If he lives up to that praise, there's a good chance the freshman will be showcasing his game at the Final Four in San Antonio come April.

In fact, at the risk of putting undue pressure on the young man, Bagley is the key variable. Assuming he turns out to be another Davis-slash-Okafor, that spells trouble for the rest of Division I. We know what we're likely to get in performance terms from teammates such as Grayson Allen and from an elite (if young) group that includes Marques Bolden, Wendell Carter, Trevon Duval and Gary Trent, Jr.

Once Mike Krzyzewski fully embraced the one-and-done model following his 2010 national title, his team came to display some consistent traits that belied the roster's fast-changing cast of characters. For starters, Duke's likely to be strong on offense again this season.

The Blue Devils will, if recent history's any guide, record an effective field goal percentage in ACC play somewhere between 52 and 56. Meanwhile, the offense will give the ball away on 15 to 17 percent of its trips down the floor.

At the same time, a Duke defense that respects precedent and tradition would be expected to finish conference play allowing points at a per-possession rate that's quite close to the league average. (Last season, Coach K's defense hit that bull's-eye more or less dead-center.)

Throw a dart at the past five years, a span that has included everything from a national title to a humiliating first-round exit, and you're guaranteed to hit a season in which all three of the above statements were correct. Conversely, what has changed from season to season over that time has been simply *how many* shots Duke takes.

That's where Bagley comes in. Offensive rebounding isn't the end-all, be-all for every team, of course (ask Baylor about last season), but for recent-vintage Duke, it has proven to be one useful, though not infallible, predictive tool.

The Blue Devils' best showing on the offensive boards over the past five years, relative to each season's ACC average, occurred in 2014-15. That team of course won it all, but if you're Coach K, the intriguing thing is that the title came from a group showing in-conference numbers in defense, shooting and

turnovers that were close to those later recorded by a less decorated 2016-17 team. Most of the difference between the two seasons came down to offensive rebounding.

Bagley doesn't have to be the best offensive rebounder in the country. Nor does he have to single-handedly carry that responsibility for Duke. (The best shot-generating model Durham has seen in recent times was the one supplied by Okafor and Amile Jefferson working in tandem three seasons ago.) But it isn't a stretch to say a 6-foot-11 freshman ranked No. 1 in the country might add value in the area of second chances even if, as will likely be the case with Bagley, said freshman tries an occasional 3.

True, you might hear this season that the Blue Devils' defense is "terrible" or that "everything's riding" on how well Duval or someone else plays point guard. Defense and point guard play really are crucially important, and anyway, I dare say this D will look terrible at times. (Most defenses look terrible on occasion, but somehow, when Duke does it, we elevate it to a national crisis.)

It's just that I've come to expect a certain level of performance from this program during the regular season in both defense and point guard play. Those levels of performance can be characterized as "meh" and "quite good," respectively (though Coach K's team famously came on strong defensively in the 2015 postseason).

If either of those levels change, I'll do my best to shoot the first flare and let you know. It would be a new wrinkle, certainly. In the meantime, both tendencies have been rather stubborn.

That is why there's a case to be made that Duke is the No. 1 team in the nation. We've seen this movie before -- in 2014-15. I can envision the same old, same old Blue Devil team -- one with above-average shooting, good point guard play and so-so regular-season defense -- being lifted by Bagley and, more specifically, by an increase in shot volume thanks to offensive rebounds. Also, don't be surprised if Allen veers closer to his performance mean and reprises a sophomore season in which he made first-team All-ACC.

In short, the case for Duke hinges in large part on Bagley. If the freshman performs to the level many expect of him, the Blue Devils could well be the best team in the nation.

Duke's Marvin Bagley III explains his dueling views on the one-and-done debate

Reid Forgrave, CBSSports.com

November 6, 2017

DURHAM, N.C. -- I had just watched the potential No. 1 overall pick in the 2018 NBA Draft, Duke's versatile and explosive freshman forward Marvin Bagley III, get after it in practice for two hours straight. He didn't even let up in post-practice sprinting; he beat his teammates in all their court-length sprints. I'd watched him, flat-footed, jump up from directly under the hoop and throw down a lob. I'd watched him grab a rebound off the defensive glass, both of his elbows above the rim, then run the break and lay it in, Giannis-like. I'd watched him spot up pretty lefty 15-footers with a range that extends to the 3-point line.

And as he did all this remarkable stuff for his remarkably talented, No. 1-ranked college basketball team, the 18-year-old phenom knew that he represented the conundrum of college hoops in 2017. Bagley knew that in an alternate universe, one in which the universally hated (and patently unfair) one-and-done rule didn't exist, he wouldn't even be here.

Yet here he was. And enjoying every second of it.

"I think if you're good at something and you're able to take your talent to the next level, you should be able to do that," Bagley told me after Duke wrapped up practice. "I don't know what everybody else thinks about it or what the NBA is thinking about it. But in my opinion if you're really good at something, if you can help your family out and make a living off it, you should be able to do that just like any other sport that can do that."

An extended version of my interview with Bagley can be found in CBS Sports' *Flagrant 2* podcast, where we talked about his influences on and off the court and more.

But a big part of the conversation centered on where Bagley is now. And despite knowing that in a more just sporting world he would never have set foot on Duke's campus, Bagley told me that his one year playing for Mike Krzyzewski was the absolute best move he could have made for his basketball development.

"It's amazing," Bagley said. "It's the best decision I've made in my whole life, to come here and to play for Coach K and the coaching staff here at Duke. Every day I'm learning something new that I didn't know before. Coach K has been really honest with me in film, telling me when I'm messing up, telling me when I'm doing something good. Just teaching every single day about different defensive stuff, offensive stuff. I'm having fun, man."

The NBA's age limit is one of the most divisive rules in sports. College coaches, even the ones who take advantage of the rule, don't like it because it turns college hoops into a minor league for the NBA, and it forces them to re-recruit every year. Young basketball players don't like it because it limits their options; a talented basketball player who doesn't love school is basically forced to attend college because, let's be honest, playing overseas or spending a year in the

NBA's developmental league are far worse (and far more difficult) options. Free-market economists don't like it because it's a socialistic tweak to our capitalistic economy.

Pretty much the only people on earth who like it are the owners and front-office executives of NBA teams, who get a risk-free one-year look at top prospects to see if they're worth investing millions of dollars in with a draft pick.

And yet, here's the thing: Despite being patently unfair to force these young men to play as amateurs for a year, the one year in college often becomes a good thing for their maturity and their development. Kentucky coach John Calipari has described the one-and-done season as a "gap year" for these uber-talented young men. Instead of going straight from having their mom rouse them from bed every morning to being a millionaire professional athlete striking out on his own, the one-and-done player can be eased into becoming a professional in a more nurturing, forgiving environment.

As a philosophical question, the one-and-done rule is bunk. In practice, though, these players can benefit greatly. Despite these seeming to be two conflicting ideas, it is possible for both of these thoughts to coexist in Bagley's mind – and in our minds as college basketball fans, too. Just because the one-and-done rule is crap doesn't mean certain young men can't benefit from it. The fact that these players are all but forced into this choice is what the real issue is here.

Look at Bagley. He likely would've been the No. 1 overall pick in the 2017 NBA Draft, if he'd been eligible. And yet he still has so much to learn. You watch him in practice, and you can see the awe-inspiring potential despite still struggling with the subtleties of defense. You see a player who will be a world better in March than he is in November. You see a willing learner who is eager to soak in the knowledge of the greatest college coach of all time and his staff.

"He's been gifted with size, elite athleticism, a tremendous work ethic, and he really loves to learn," Duke associate head coach Jeff Capel told me. "The thing that's been most impressive to me, and this is from the first time I saw him, I have never seen – whether it's a workout, a practice, whatever – I've never seen him not play hard. And that is very rare for any player, but especially for an elite player. Every time I've seen him he has played his ass off. That's a gift. And that's something that's very rare, especially now."

One of the early knocks on Bagley was that the fact he played on so many different youth teams and high school teams indicated some sort of red flag, as if it was a byproduct of the no-loyalty AAU culture. Not so, Bagley told me. Bagley remembers when he was first ranked as the No. 1 recruit in the country – way back in middle school. It was heady stuff, and also the type of stuff that can ruin an aspiring NBA player by inflating his ego and hindering his development.

Even in middle school, the leeches of youth basketball tried to attach themselves to this up-and-coming prospect. "People just coming out of nowhere, people I hadn't talked to in years," Bagley said. His father put a wall up around the family to protect his son. When a coach hindered Bagley's development by, say, trying to turn him into a pure post player, his father put Bagley on another team or into another school.

"I didn't understand it when he was doing it back at the time," Bagley told me. "But now that I'm getting older, I'm learning a lot, and I'm very thankful he put me away from all the craziness. I can see it, and I understand why."

In a basketball sense, that has meant Bagley hasn't been put into the box so many near-7-footers are put into, the box of making him play like a traditional big because he's bigger and stronger than everyone else. Instead, he's progressing in the mold of the new age big man, a versatile player that's hard to label. Dirk Nowitzki revolutionized the power forward position. Then Kevin Durant became an unstoppable giant wing player. Today, Giannis Antetokounmpo is a near-7-footer like nothing the league has seen, a point guard who dominates the paint, a shot-blocker who guards the perimeter. That's the goal for Bagley, someone who can break out of the historic box that seven-footers have been put into.

"We saw a little bit of that immediately, that he does everything on the court," said Andre Chevalier, who coached Bagley in high school at Sierra Canyon School in Los Angeles as well as in summer ball. "His game evolved, and he started to explore putting the ball on the floor, shooting a three. One of the things about Marvin, when he decides he wants to do something, he works on that continuously until he's good at it. He sees a move on TV, and the next day in practice you see him doing that 60 times to perfect it and put it in his game." That's what you'll see in Marvin Bagley in what will almost certainly be his only season at Duke: Not anywhere near a finished product but instead a series of glimpses and foreshadowings of the unique and transcendent player he may someday become.

You'll also see a thoughtful, gentle and polite young man off the court. He's someone who listens to poetic and powerful rap music (current favorites: J. Cole, Drake, Logic; his pick for G.O.A.T.: 2Pac), but he also makes his own poetic and powerful rap music. Go listen to the track he released last week. It's really, really good.

He's someone who has been told since he was in middle school that he's going to be a millionaire NBA player, yet he's someone who tried to never pay attention to recruiting rankings. He's someone who wears his Christian faith on his sleeve without being overbearing about it, someone who grew up listening to gospel music and going to church every Sunday. "If it wasn't for Him, I wouldn't be here," Bagley told me. "I still can't believe I'm playing basketball, doing this here at Duke -- it's kind of a dream come true."

And in a roundabout way, that brings us back to the current conundrum of college basketball. Marvin Bagley III knows that in a more just world, he would not be here. He would already be in the NBA. But he also believes that playing for Duke is a dream come true, and that this presumed one-and-done season will be of great benefit to him when he does go to the NBA. It is possible to believe these two seemingly contradictory thoughts, that the NBA's age limit is not a good thing, but good things can still come out of the one-and-done system.

This rule won't be around forever. Adam Silver is already considering changing it. When the next rule is considered, I hope that the views of people like Marvin Bagley III, people who see both sides of it -- the unfairness of the rule, but also the benefits of the rule -- are the most prominent voices in the debate.

In outdueling Bamba, Marvin Bagley shows he has the skills, and the vision, to lead Duke to victory

Seth Davis, TheAthletic

November 24, 2017

As Marvin Bagley III flew back home following Duke's 88-81 win over Michigan State in Chicago on Nov. 14, he was consumed by worry. The much-ballyhooed, 6-foot-11, 234-pound freshman forward had only played 10 minutes after getting poked in his right eye midway through the first half. It was nearly an hour before he could see out of it again. His eye was bloodied and scratched. A trainer gave him eyedrops and a contact lens, but his vision was still badly blurred. He had an awful headache. It hurt to look at anyone.

Bagley tried his best to sleep on the team plane, but he feared the worst. "To be honest with you, I thought that was it. Like, that was my last time playing," he said. "That was the most scary thing I've experienced in my whole life."

He felt better when he awoke the next morning. An early appointment with an eye doctor confirmed that, indeed, he would play basketball again. He has not missed any more playing time. Ten days later, he still had a red mark in the corner of his right eye, but for the most part, he is completely healed. The only lingering pain was his regret at not being able to play more in a much-anticipated game.

When Bagley got another opportunity on Friday at the PK80 Invitational, he took full advantage. This time, the opponent was Texas, but the pre-game hype didn't concern the unranked Longhorns so much as the *mano-a-mano* battle between Bagley and Mohamed Bamba, Texas's 6-foot-11 freshman center who, like Bagley, is projected to be a top-five pick in next year's NBA draft. The result was easy to see: Bagley was the more dominant player, putting up 34 points and 15 rebounds to Bamba's 9 and 10. The Blue Devils won 85-78 in overtime after overcoming a 16-point deficit with 10:25 to play.

Bagley had 24 points and 12 rebounds after halftime. The later the game got, the more his team relied on him. When it was over, he had no compunction admitting that he was amped by the chance to prove himself against Bamba. "Oh, yeah. I want to compete and be in big-time games like that," Bagley said. "It's just an amazing feeling to go out and play hard for my coaches and everybody on my team."

The win put Duke into the championship game of the Motion bracket. The Blue Devils will face No. 7 Florida in the final. The game tips off on at 10:30 p.m. ET on Sunday.

This is a much different Duke team than the ones we've grown accustomed to watching. The Blue Devils of recent vintage have tended to be perimeter-oriented, heavily reliant on the 3-point shot and spearheaded by dogged man-to-man defense. This, however, is one of the biggest teams Mike Krzyzewski has ever coached. Aside from 6-foot-5 senior Grayson Allen, the Blue Devils are a suspect outside shooting team, but they are undefeated and ranked No. 1 largely because of their dominance on the boards. (The Blue Devils shot 3 for 18 from 3-point

range on Friday but out-rebounded the Longhorns by 11.) And through the first seven games, Duke has played zone on about half of its possessions. Against Michigan State, the Blue Devils played zone the entire game.

On Friday, Duke played zone for the first half, but after his team fell behind by 12, Krzyzewski switched to man-to-man. “We don’t play zone because we can’t stop somebody,” he said. “We play zone because we think we can be good at it. And we weren’t good at anything in the first half.”

Duke scored five quick points to start the second half, but after Texas coach Shaka Smart called time out to settle his young squad, the teams played evenly. About midway through the second half, Krzyzewski made another adjustment. He replaced freshman point guard Trevon Duval, who was having an awful shooting game, with 6-6 freshman guard Alex O’Connell. Then he moved Allen to the point. For the next several minutes, Allen formed an offensive triangle with Bagley and 6-10 freshman forward Wendell Carter. With Bagley setting a high ball screen, Allen found Carter for three easy buckets and threw an alley-oop to Bagley. That brought the Blue Devils all the way back to tie the game, but with two minutes remaining, Allen picked up his fifth foul. Duval replaced him, and Duke played five freshmen for the rest of the game.

Bagley had a chance to win it in regulation, but despite being isolated on the perimeter against Texas’s 6-9 junior forward Dylan Osetkowski, Bagley settled for a fadeaway 3-pointer and missed. When Bagley came back to the huddle, he asked Krzyzewski if it was a bad shot. “Just keep playing,” the coach replied. Krzyzewski later pointed out that the Blue Devils still had two chances at offensive putbacks before the buzzer sounded. Bagley conceded that the next time he has that chance he will probably drive the ball, but he was not fazed by the mistake. “I’m still learning, man,” he said. “This is all a part of the game. I have a long way to go, and I understand that.”

When that chance comes again, Krzyzewski undoubtedly will feel confident letting Bagley make the deciding play. “I believe ultimately in this kid,” Krzyzewski said. “He’s a treasure, really, because he wants to be really good and he comes to work every day. All of his teammates love him because he’s as hard a worker as we have.”

Bagley’s teammates are just beginning to comprehend his ability to maintain composure in high-pressure situations. “Before you actually see him in games, you don’t know how he will respond to pressure,” Allen said. “It’s amazing how he lets the game come to him and makes simple plays. He doesn’t do anything out of character.”

Bagley’s excellence is surpassed only by his consistency. Aside from the Michigan State game, heading into Friday he had scored 18 to 25 points in every game. Only once did he fail to reach double figures in rebounding. The Texas game marked his second straight outing with 15 boards. His only weakness was his 50 percent clip from the free-throw line, but he was 9 for 13 against the Longhorns. He also had a pair of assists and a steal.

That is somewhat surprising given that, when Bagley was dominating the high school ranks, he developed a reputation as someone who didn’t always play hard. At times, his even-keeled, West Coast comportment still gives the impression he is not fully exerting himself – but only to

the untrained eye. "He keeps his motor going," Allen said. "He sprints to the rim every single time, and he's in incredible shape. The way he moves, the way he jumps is so effortless. Sometimes it looks like he's not playing hard, but then he's effortlessly jumping and getting his head at the rim."

There was nothing effortless about Duke's great escape on Friday. For all the joy in the Blue Devils' locker room, there was also much consternation they had let themselves fall so far behind. The good news is that Bagley and his young teammates will get another test in a couple of days. He may have a long road ahead, but he has reason to like what he sees.

Duke freshman Marvin Bagley III is already the most dominant player in college basketball

Ricky O'Donnell, SB Nation
November 27, 2017

Marvin Bagley III should still be in high school right now. Bagley spent his entire prep career as the top-ranked recruit in the class of 2018 before making a last minute decision to reclassify up a grade when he committed to Duke in August.

Only eight games into his college career, it's already evident that Bagley is one of the best players in the country.

Duke won the Victory Bracket at the PK80 in Portland this weekend behind a pair of brilliant performances from Bagley. He dropped 34 points and 15 rebounds against Texas and fellow top freshman Mohamed Bamba on Friday as Duke rallied from a 16-point second half deficit to beat the Longhorns. He followed it up with 30 points and 15 rebounds against Florida in the championship game. No Duke player has ever matched that level of production in back-to-back games:

Bagley's combination of athleticism, agility, scoring touch and aggression has made him an unstoppable force so far. This is what's making him special.

Bagley's scoring touch around the rim is remarkable

The hallmark of Bagley's early production has been his dominance scoring inside. He's taking 52 percent of his shots at the rim so far, and he's making 78.7 percent of them, per Hoop-Math.

Bagley has scored on a variety of lefty hook shots, runners and dunks. When he establishes position, he's become automatic on the block.

This is an impressive seal against Bamba, and the quick finish is just as good:

If Bamba and his 7'9 wingspan couldn't contain Bagley, there simply won't be many college big men who have a prayer of stopping him inside.

He's an elite rebounder on both ends of the floor

Bagley doesn't wait for the ball to find him as a rebounder. He can grab the ball at rim-level, he's tough to box out and he's incredibly quick off the floor.

Florida had two players in position to grab this board but Bagley still beat them for it.

He's been tenacious on the offensive glass as well. He's able to jump twice faster than most players are able to jump once:

Bagley has hit double-digit rebounds in six of his eight games so far. It looks like that's something Duke will be able to count on all season.

His agility allows him to make plays all over the court

This might be Bagley's most impressive sequence of the year so far. He sticks with Florida guard [Chris Chiozza](#) (a great offensive player) on the perimeter before swatting his shot, then runs down the court, and finishes with a Eurostep layup:

The skill aspect of Bagley's game is obviously still developing. He's only made 4-of-13 attempts from three-point range and he's shooting just 61 percent from the foul line. That makes the fact that he's still arguably the most dominant player in college basketball right now even more impressive.

Duke didn't know it would have Bagley until just days before the school year began, but they've already made him the focal point of the team. After seeing the tear he went on this weekend against great competition at the PK80, you can expect Bagley to be one of the most productive players in the country all season long.

The Education of Marvin Bagley III

Elizabeth Merrill, ESPN.com

January 15, 2018

Marvin Bagley III raps like he plays basketball, smooth and fast. Dressed in Duke sweats, Bagley wedges his 6-foot-11, 234-pound body into a recording booth just outside of downtown Raleigh, North Carolina. On the other side of the glass are teammates Grayson Allen and Brennan Besser, who have come not only to listen but to bust his chops.

It's a Thursday in the dead weeks of Christmas break, and as always, Bagley has drawn a crowd. His parents, Marvin Jr. and Tracy, are standing in a narrow hallway outside the booth along with Marvin's younger brothers Marcus and Martay, the little one sinking to the floor to sit. Bagley is so good at basketball that this past summer, USC offered all three brothers scholarships, even though Martay is all of 7 years old. But it was sort of fitting. When Bagley arrived for his freshman year at Duke a few months ago, the family came from California to Durham with him. Where one Bagley goes, all of them go.

Today, Bagley is going to rap for Grammy Award-winning producer 9th Wonder, who is from the Carolinas and has worked with Jay-Z, Kendrick Lamar and Drake, among others. Bagley and some teammates are taking a history of hip-hop class, which 9th, whose name is Patrick Douthit, is teaching this spring semester. Before Bagley arrives, 9th says he has never met the 18-year-old, but he listened to a recording on SoundCloud and was intrigued by Bagley's voice and the fact that he has something to say.

Bagley pulls a set of headphones over his ears and launches into the lyrics he has written in the private time of a nomadic life that has included bouncing from three high schools in three years, reclassifying up so that he could graduate and leave high school early, and now this freshman season at Duke that will undoubtedly end in a few months when he is expected to declare for the NBA draft.

You should get to know me, I'll be around for good.

I've seen a lot of stuff and I ain't even from the 'hood. My dad told me just keep on burning and keep your head up.

And if you take an L, keep moving and pick your chin up ...

9th mixes up the beats, but it doesn't trip Bagley. His voice just gets stronger.

"I think he's a natural at doing this, man," the producer says to Marvin Jr. and Tracy. "I've seen some people get in there and just forget everything, lay an egg take after take. For him to do that from a generation that people swear can't rap, and he's 18?

"He might have two careers."

Marvin Jr., coach of his AAU team called "Nike Phamily," leader of Team Bagley, takes in the effusive praise, but only for a moment.

"You just gotta keep getting better," he says to his son.

WE ARE RIDING from Raleigh back to the Duke campus, a roughly 30-minute jaunt during rush-hour traffic, and Allen and Besser are reflecting on their new teammate, a kid they expect to play with for a total of about five months before he becomes an NBA lottery pick, makes millions, possibly cuts a record and becomes so global that maybe he starts hanging out with Jay-Z. Bagley isn't in the SUV; he has left with his family. Allen is the one who picked up on the line from Bagley's dad, and he thought it was interesting.

"He's always hanging around his brothers, his mom and his dad," Allen says. "He's always hanging around people who are going to treat him like him and not like he's Marvin Bagley the superstar. I'm sure his little brothers are messing with him and making fun of him, too. So I think that keeps him really grounded."

Bagley has plenty of reasons to feel good about himself. In the first two months of the NCAA basketball season, no player, with the possible exception of Oklahoma freshman Trae Young, has been more dominant. Heading into Monday night's game against No. 18 Miami on ESPN, Bagley has 14 double-doubles. Duke has played 17 games. On the way to the PK80 championship in November, Bagley rallied the Blue Devils from 16 points down with 11 minutes to go against Texas, recording 34 points, 15 rebounds, two assists and a steal.

The left-handed power forward can push the ball down the floor like a guard, dunk like a Globetrotter and look, at 18 and with just two years of high school basketball under his belt, as if he's been doing this for decades. In a recent win at Pittsburgh, Bagley stripped the ball, led a fast break, dished it off, corralled an errant pass, then slammed home a dunk. After the game, Pitt coach Kevin Stallings told reporters that Bagley was as good of a player as he's ever watched in preparation on film. He became the first Duke player since the 1960s to post a 30-20 game when he scored 32 points and grabbed 21 rebounds in a win against Florida State last month, and he leads the ACC in scoring (22.5) and rebounds (11.7).

"He's the most unique player we've had here at Duke during my 38 years," says Blue Devils coach Mike Krzyzewski. "He has everything. In some respects, Kyrie [Irving] was like that. But Kyrie got hurt after eight games.

"Marvin, at 6-11, is an incredible athlete. I've coached the NBA guys for 11 years for USA Basketball, and he runs like the top two or three guys that I've coached. He is not a good runner; he's an amazing

runner. And then he's an amazing repeated jumper. In other words, he doesn't really take time to even land, he just pops right back up. He wants to learn, he has no demons, he's a great kid, he's smart, and has an incredible motor. He never has a bad day. He's a treasure, really. He's going to be one of the great players in the NBA during his time."

But the 2017-18 season has been far from easy. Duke started the ACC season 1-2, and easily could have been 0-3 if not for Bagley's record game against Florida State. Bagley swung the momentum when he hit a circus shot that bounced off the top of the backboard while he was fouled.

Duke has been abysmal on defense at times, something that eventually could haunt the Blue Devils in Bagley's one-year tour through college basketball. When Bagley announced that he was reclassifying this summer, then declared live on ESPN's SportsCenter that he was going to Duke, it rocked the college basketball landscape. It vaulted Duke to preseason No. 1, and the Westgate Las Vegas SuperBook's odds of the Blue Devils winning a national championship zoomed from 7-1 to 3-1.

News that Bagley was trying to reclassify didn't come until midsummer, when most rosters were set. The last time a player announced such a move so late was when Andre Drummond reclassified in 2011 and went to UConn. Bagley had to finish his high school coursework early, then wait for NCAA approval, which came in early September.

Duke initially offered him a scholarship when he was in ninth grade, and he was familiar with Durham because his father grew up there. Bagley made his official recruiting visit in July. Duke's coaches usually don't do on-campus visits that time of year because they're out recruiting. But when Marvin Bagley III is planning a visit, you make exceptions.

The team went out to eat at Dame's Chicken & Waffles, and Allen was struck by how seamlessly Bagley fit in with the group, how there was no small talk because the conversation flowed, how fun it was. For Bagley, it was a nice break from a summer of studying nonstop so he could reclassify.

"We were sitting at a different table," Duke assistant Jeff Capel says, "and they're there laughing.

"That's one of the things I remember, his dad saying, 'I haven't seen Marvin smile like this in a long time.' And he was just with the guys."

BAGLEY'S STORY STARTS in his home state of Arizona, on a football field. He's very tall, much bigger than the rest of the kids in school. By this time, Bagley is about 6-5.

He's the quarterback of his team, and he's playing against older boys in a game in the rain. He's getting ready to throw, and a large boy with a No. 99 on his jersey body-slams him from behind. "That was the

day," Bagley says, "that I was like, 'Ahh, I don't think football is for me.' I was just going to play basketball."

Marvin Jr. played football, at North Carolina AT&T and in the AFL. Bagley's maternal grandfather, Joe Caldwell, was a legendary basketball player. In 1964, the Detroit Pistons selected him as the No. 2 overall pick in the NBA draft. Caldwell was such a tough defender that Hall of Famer Julius Erving once said that he guarded him better than anyone else in the American Basketball Association.

"I don't know if he got the grandpa's DNA or he got his dad's," Caldwell says, "but he got both of them so maybe that's the key. His daddy is probably -- had he been focused like he is with his son and [did] the right things, he could've been one heck of a football player."

Caldwell says the Bagleys lived with him for about the first 10 years of Marvin III's life, and at some point, he was so impressed with what the kid was doing in the backyard that he told then-Arizona State coach Herb Sendek that if he could hold out a few years, that help was on the way.

Though Bagley was big, Marvin Jr. refused to let coaches pigeonhole him by making him strictly a post player. He taught his son to dribble and pass and shoot 3-pointers, knowing that monsters under the basket are nice, but a big man who can play like a guard is special. If a coach just wanted him to fill the paint and swat away shots, Marvin Jr. would take his kid to another team. Bagley played on so many different teams.

He played his freshman year of high school at Corona del Sol, a powerhouse in Tempe, Arizona, won a state title and was named the Arizona Republic's player of the year. He appeared to be settled and happy.

The next season, Bagley was gone.

He transferred to Hillcrest Prep, which is more like a basketball club than a school. It was modeled after Findlay Prep in Nevada, a program whose participants train year-round and barnstorm the country playing in high-profile tournaments. Hillcrest was affiliated with Starshine Academy, which would provide the academic part of the players' experience.

The move was supposed to give Bagley exposure, and land Marvin Jr. a job as an assistant coach. Marvin Jr. declined interview requests for this story. In an initial phone conversation, he said he wanted the story to be about his son, not him. According to a 2016 Sports Illustrated piece, Marvin Jr. worked as a union plumber and pipefitter for UA Local 469 before becoming an assistant coach at Hillcrest.

Things quickly deteriorated for the Bagleys at Hillcrest. The NCAA visited Starshine Academy and ruled that its coursework didn't meet NCAA standards. Hillcrest, a new program, also wasn't receiving the exposure that Marvin Jr. had hoped.

So the Bagleys left, this time to Sierra Canyon High School in Southern California. Although Bagley says leaving his friends in Arizona was the most challenging moment of his life, he is quick to defend his father.

"[Leaving] Arizona was my decision," Bagley says. "A lot of people blame it on my dad. But it wasn't like a situation where he told me, 'All right, we're doing this, you're going there.' It was never that. We would sit down and have conversations, my whole family, and talk about what would be best. And they would always ask me what I was feeling, how I felt about anything that was going on, and I told them and they told me how they felt.

"At the end of the day, it was my decision to do the things that I've been through and the places I've been."

Bagley says his parents missed just one game in his entire life. It was when both he and Marcus had AAU games at the same time. Tracy went to Marcus' game; Marvin Jr. was in the stands for Bagley. The family keeps a tight circle, a protective circle, and Bagley finds comfort in it. While some parents bask in their child's athletic fame, a la LaVar Ball, Marvin Jr. has shied away from the media, for the most part, especially since Bagley came to Duke.

When asked about Marvin Jr.'s involvement in his son's career, and whether it bears any resemblance to the Ball family, Krzyzewski said, "It's nothing like that. I don't even want to make that comparison.

"I think more and more for the top players, you're going to see the parents or a parent being close because there's so much invested in them. If it all works out, you're talking about an amazing career, financially, publicity -- just everything. So they want to make sure that everything is going the right way. The fact that they're close, that's good."

STILL, THE LIFESTYLE has no doubt created sort of an insular world. On a recent night after a Duke workout, Bagley is asked who his best friend is. He pauses to think about it.

He eventually says it's Holland "Boo Boo" Woods, a freshman guard at Portland State who's known him from AAU ball since they were kids. Woods is a guy he can trust, he says.

His first answer, though, is his family.

"Me, as a person, I don't really open myself up to people a lot," Bagley says.

People who know Bagley say it's more of a product of not only who he is, but who he's destined to be. Here's a guy who's lived his life towering over everyone else, who took a bus on his first road trip in high school, to Yuma, Arizona, and was swarmed by little kids asking for autographs. Bagley hadn't even played a game yet.

He is supposed to be successful and famous. Despite his limited high school experience, and the fact that he didn't play with USA Basketball like most athletes of his caliber, Bagley is projected by many to be the No. 1 overall NBA pick come June. It doesn't seem like such a giant leap for people who know him, people like former Sierra Canyon coach Ty Nichols, who recently told an NBA scout that he could check any possible questions about Bagley off his list, from maturity to intelligence (Bagley had a 3.3 GPA in his first semester at Duke) to his readiness for yet another stage.

"I don't know what your childhood was like, but mine wasn't like his, and I'm highly doubting yours was like his," Nichols says. "Neither one of us was 6-8 in eighth grade, right? Neither of us was gifted enough to be the fastest player on the team at 6-11. So I don't think we can quantify normal in the sense of Marvin's normal. Marvin's never been normal. He's always been abnormal. So for him I would imagine that abnormal is normal."

MARVIN JR., AT TIMES, becomes animated when listening to his son rap. He bobs his head and puts his hands in the air. He's the one who got the kid involved in rap. Bagley fell in love with it when he was about 6 years old, listening to his dad play Nas and Jay-Z.

Bagley loved the rappers who told stories. And today, writing music about his own life helps him clear his mind.

"I just want people to see another side of me," he says. "People only see basketball because I'm on the court all the time. But they don't see where I grew up, what I've seen in my life, different things I've experienced that I don't share with people.

"I can make music and try to connect with people across the world. That's really my goal."

The plan, right now, is for Bagley and possibly a couple of former Duke players to put together some songs for an extended-play recording that would be released sometime around the NCAA tournament. (Duke, which is still trying to figure out details of the project, declined to allow ESPN to shoot video of Bagley's rap session.)

In the meantime, the Blue Devils will try to find their rhythm on the court. They hope to be together through the first week of April, when a national champion is decided in San Antonio. Bagley is trying to savor this time, of college and stability and being a kid. Krzyzewski laughs when he thinks about how

excited Bagley was to carry his backpack around campus. Soon, the kid with so many detours will make so much money that he'll never have to lift a bag again.

In what may have been his last shot, Marvin Bagley leaves his mark on the rivalry

March 3, 2018

Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer

The crowd chanted Grayson Allen's name and applauded his parents and the students handed down a poster that he took with him and he stood at center court and savored his final moments at Cameron.

His Duke teammates stood behind him, Marvin Bagley III among them, a towel over his shoulder, savoring their final moments at Cameron in a less visible way, without the fanfare Allen earned over four years but with similar wistfulness.

Bagley, at least, will exit imminently having left an indelible mark on the Duke-North Carolina rivalry in what might have been his last shot. This will be his chapter. This was The Bagley Game. After scoring a tame 15 points in Duke's loss in Chapel Hill, Bagley took over in the second half Saturday, scoring 18 of his game-high 21 in the second half as Duke came back from 13 points down for a 74-64 win.

"It just comes out, man," Bagley said. "You just get in that zone where you feel like nobody can stop you."

Five days after a broadcaster known for Twitter spats and milking one game's defense of Michael Jordan for three-plus decades blasted Bagley for being selfish and said Duke was better off without the star freshman, Bagley demonstrated how essential his raw talent really is, how explosive he can be, and why his preternatural ability may be the wild card for Duke over the next month.

This may not be his team. But this was his night, even if Allen collected the accolades at the end. Duke trailed by 10 at the half and 13 after that, only for Bagley to become an unstoppable force under the basket, dunking not only his own misses *but his own blocked shots*, bouncing back off the floor with such elasticity he appeared to be levitating.

In one seven-minute stretch, Bagley scored 12 points and grabbed seven rebounds as an 11-point deficit turned into a two-point Duke lead. Cameron, which had been stupefied into somnolence as the Tar Heels built their lead by playing slightly less ugly basketball than Duke, burst into cacophony.

"Marvin, during that stretch, some of the best plays of any player in the country occurred during those few minutes by that kid," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "He got angry. He didn't want to lose. The will he showed was phenomenal."

Bagley has been, from the moment he walked on campus a year ahead of schedule, a boy among men and a man among boys. During the four games he missed with a knee injury, Duke seemed to play with more fluidity, Allen in particular, as if Bagley's talent had been a powerful gravitational force pulling things out of joint.

That may have been what led ESPN analyst Dan Dakich, on Monday during Duke's loss to Virginia Tech, to go way out on a limb with his criticism of Bagley, sounding more like a message-board conspiracy theorist than a network commentator. Honesty, in any broadcaster, is appreciated, but the tone of Dakich's criticism would have felt stark on an NBA broadcast.

“Bagley is all about Bagley,” Dakich said. “Honest to goodness, I can see in 18 minutes why Duke was able to go on a run when he was hurt. You hate to say that about a kid, but he is about himself.”

Bagley, who listened to the entire diatribe while rewatching the game, shot back on Twitter immediately and answered any further concerns with his performance Saturday.

“It was a silly statement to even say, to go on for that long about me,” Bagley said. “I heard what he said. It was dumb.”

Bagley shrugged off any connection between Dakich's criticism and his second-half outburst, and the foundation for it appeared to be Krzyzewski's decision, down 35-25, to abandon any structure on offense, let Trevon Duval penetrate and set Bagley and Wendell Carter loose under the basket.

In one sequence, Bagley hit a 3 and, after a Kenny Williams miss at the other end, had his layup attempt blocked by Theo Pinson. Bagley collected the ball in midair, bounced off the floor with even more height than his initial jump and drew a foul as he laid it in. North Carolina's lead had evaporated.

“He looked like a different animal,” Allen said. “For five or six minutes, he was unstoppable.”

A Duval lob for Bagley with 86 seconds to go made it 72-64, essentially clinching at that point the No. 2 seed in Brooklyn for Duke and relegating North Carolina to the sixth seed behind N.C. State, a state of affairs sure to rile Roy Williams as much as it will delight Wolfpack fans.

The common theme among Duke's players was that they are not done, that they expect this game to serve as a springboard for bigger things, in Brooklyn and beyond. Bagley is the Blue Devils' wild card. They were lost at the half, only to be saved by the kind of exceptional individual performance he is capable of providing.

Allen had four years to have an impact on a rivalry that underpins the entire season of both of these teams, and he exited victorious. One-and-done players like Bagley have to make the most of limited opportunities. Bagley didn't do much with his first. He did all he could with his second. Whether there's a third meeting or not, he left his mark Saturday.

**GARY
TRENT, JR.**

Duke's Gary Trent Jr. knows the score: Adjust, practice, improve

March 2, 2018

CL Brown, The Athletic

Gary Trent Sr. knew he had a problem early on while coaching the oldest of his four sons in youth basketball. Gary Jr., now a freshman shooting guard at Duke, dominated every game.

Of course, Gary Sr. took some pride in seeing that. The man affectionately referred to as the “Shaq of the MAC” during his playing days at Ohio University had run roughshod through the Mid-American Conference from 1992-95. At 6-8 and about 250 pounds, Gary Sr. won the league’s Player of the Year award three consecutive seasons, was the 11th pick in the 1995 NBA draft by the Milwaukee Bucks and played nine seasons in the league.

But his concern was that Gary Jr. wasn’t being challenged and wouldn’t have a complete game if he continually crushed the competition. Gary Sr. initially played his son at point guard, until it became “an Allen Iverson type of situation.” He scored so easily, nobody else saw the ball. Gary Jr. was not only bigger, stronger and faster than the kids his age; he was smarter, sharper and more skilled.

“We started training so young that he was far ahead of other kids,” says Gary Sr. “If our team scored 40 points, he’d have 33 to 35 of those points. I had to put him at the 2-guard so he could understand basketball and execution, because he could just score all the time.”

Trent has at times excelled in a Duke starting lineup with so many scorers that everybody sees the ball. His 14.3 points per game is tied for third-best on the team — he’s second if you only count ACC games (16.2 ppg). With 79 made 3-pointers, he’s tied with senior Grayson Allen for most on the Blue Devils (24-6, 12-5), who close the regular season Saturday night against North Carolina (22-8, 11-6). His 42.9 percent from behind the arc is fourth in the ACC among players with at least 100 attempts.

That early adjustment proved to be helpful for Trent at Duke too, where he again is modifying his game in ways that will make him better when he moves on to the pros.

First came the physical change. Trent arrived on campus chiseled in a 6-foot-6, 209-pound frame. He previously never had problems getting his shot off, but coach Mike Krzyzewski noticed Trent was a bit too casual in his motion. It wouldn’t work against elite competition, and he told Trent he needed a quicker release.

“If you want to do something at this level and the next level, you better get quicker, because the athletes are quicker and they’re bigger,” Krzyzewski says. “Speed and length are the two things that you have to adjust to as you move forward, whether it be at whatever level of collegiate competition, non-conference into conference. Length and speed are important. He’s done that, but he’s practiced it too.”

Practice. That’s one thing Trent is accustomed to doing.

Gary Sr. put a basketball in his son's hands at the age of 5 and he officially began his training. Monday through Thursday, from about the first grade to the fourth, Gary Jr. practiced. Then there were two games on Saturday and two more on Sunday.

His father says he replaced a day of team practice for 90 minutes of individual skill work when Gary Jr. reached middle school. There were times when he would have rather been attending a friend’s birthday

party or at a sleepover, but his dad says his son understood early on that he had to put in the work to separate himself from other players. It wasn't spoon-fed either.

"I gave him everything; we did all the NBA drills, all the NBA-combine type stuff with cone drills," Gary Sr. says. "My job was to set the bar and introduce it to him, and it's his job to reach the bar. It's not my job to lower the bar for him to succeed."

Gary Sr. was not known for his shooting, but he made sure his son had the right tools. While splicing in his own stories from his playing days and who he dunked or dropped 30-plus points on, Gary Sr. would show clips of how NBA greats shot the ball and instructed his son to carefully watch the footwork, because that was just as important as the shot itself.

"I used to heave it a little bit from my shoulders," Gary Jr. says. "Then he told me follow through, put your two fingers (pointer and middle) in the air. He showed me how high Dirk [Nowitzki] shot the ball, and how high Kobe [Bryant] had his hands up, and always had his fingers and his wrist flip."

It was about the sixth grade when his dad could tell everything had kicked in, and Gary Jr. was on autopilot. Dad no longer had to prompt him. Gary Jr. was studying players such as Bryant, James Harden, Devin Booker and Bradley Beal. "The model 2-guards," he says. He couldn't wait for his dad to take him to the gym to practice what he had witnessed. He seemingly always had a clip handy on his phone or on his laptop, "always watching videos" to make sure he was doing it right.

"I was just watching it so much trying to model after (them), looking at how they just got it up," Gary Jr. says. "The arch, the flick of the wrist. I'd be just watching it so many times (that) you just figure out how they do it."

Even when Trent wasn't on the court, with basketball in hand, he'd pantomime his shooting motion when sitting around at home.

When it came time to work on getting faster, Trent says he didn't need to change any of the mechanics of his shot. He says it took him a little more than a week for it to feel normal, nonchalantly adding, "It wasn't that hard, really. Just muscle memory." Krzyzewski adds that the tweak in Trent's shot also had to do with him being ready before he even touched the ball.

"It's not just the release, it's the preparation," Krzyzewski says. "Because sometimes if you're prepared, then it goes. If you catch it and have to prepare it and then shoot, the defense has a chance to recover. He's done a real good job of it."

That was the one bad habit Prolific Prep coach Billy McKnight tried to break Trent out of during his lone year at the school. McKnight says he didn't have to spend time tweaking the mechanics of Trent's shot. But they would revisit how he positioned himself before receiving a pass.

"Sometimes guys would be driving, he'd kind of relax and stand up a little bit more rather than move into an open spot and have his feet ready to shoot it," McKnight says.

Trent says he was always confident the adjustment wouldn't throw his shot off. He frequently uses the word *craft* when describing his game and the work it takes to be successful.

Duke freshman forward Wendell Carter Jr. might know Trent the best on the team. The two were roommates at Nike Academy and they won gold with the Team USA U17 squad at the 2016 FIBA World Championship in Spain.

“He’s a very funny person, he keeps us laughing,” says the 6-foot-10 Carter. “But at the same time, when he steps on the court, he becomes a new person where it’s all business. And that’s why we all have respect for that.”

They respect the way Trent has accepted a role he never envisioned, becoming a bit of a 3-point specialist, a title he wasn’t necessarily looking for. While at Prolific Prep last season, he was featured in an offense similar to the one run by the San Antonio Spurs. McKnight says Trent shot 3s, but he also created off the dribble more and even was used in the post.

“In high school, I just considered myself a scorer that can shoot,” Trent says. “Like I’ve never shot this many 3s in a season. But I’m just trying to still grow, still learning, and it’s working for me, so I’m going to continue to run with it.”

It was a source of frustration for Trent early on this season. Gary Sr. says many postgame conversations they had dealt with his son trying to figure out how he best fit in on a team that was full of talented scorers; Gary Jr. still has the lowest usage rate among Duke’s starters. According to KenPom.com, it’s at just 17.3 percent of possessions, which fits the category of “role players.”

The Blue Devils don’t call a lot of plays to begin with, and when they did early in the season, most of the time they weren’t going to Trent as a first option. Through their first 10 games, he shot 34.9 percent from the floor and just 29.6 percent from 3-point range as he averaged 11.7 points per game.

“All of that is why he got off to a slow start, in a sense,” Gary Sr. says. “As of late, he’s really finding his rhythm, getting a lot more comfortable and getting a lot more decisive.”

Over the last 19 games, Trent has shot 46.7 percent from the floor and 50.4 percent from the 3-point line. He has also averaged 16.2 points per game.

“Catch and shoot, he’s been automatic,” says Duke senior guard Grayson Allen. “He’s a big, strong guard, and that was kind of secondary to him when he first came. But now that is such a weapon for him that guys have to guard him.”

Trent says his freshman season at Duke in some ways reminds him of his first season at Apple Valley High School. Trent made varsity as an eighth-grader, but coach Zach Goring says he played sparingly while adjusting to the size and speed of the game. Former Duke point guard Tyus Jones was a junior on that Apple Valley team, which won a 2013 Minnesota state championship. Trent would join Jones in the starting lineup at the beginning of his ninth-grade season.

“When I first played my eighth-grade year, I was mostly catch and shoot,” Trent says. “Here (at Duke) it translated to me having to use that phase of my game again so it ended up coming back full circle for me.”

Trent is ranked 45th on the Fieldhouse’s NBA Big Board of 100 players and was unexpectedly the subject of Kevin Garnett’s “Area 21” segment, which included Garnett’s former Minnesota Timberwolves teammates Trenton Hassell, Troy Hudson and Gary Sr. *The NBA on TNT* show took questions submitted

through social media, and Garnett said, “I see (Trent) being a more effective NBA player than actually college. It’ll be because of the freedom.”

One NBA scout says Trent is at his best as a catch-and-shoot guard, but there is concern that he’s a bit one-dimensional and a belief that he should return to school for a sophomore year to work on his ball-handling and to add another dimension to his game. A second NBA scout says Trent would be valuable as a shot-maker who could space the floor, but asking him to do any more than that would hurt his game. That same scout says Trent ranked highly as a prospect before the season but plummeted during the early stretches before returning the middle of their rankings with his play of late.

Gary Sr. says the NBA talk is premature right now, adding that he’ll sit down with his son and discuss his next move with input from Krzyzewski and NBA scouts once the season is over.

“It’s not about getting to the league, it’s about staying in the league, making a career out of the league and being respected by your peers within the league,” Gary Sr. says. “So there’s a whole lot of work left ahead, and there’s a whole lot of opportunity ahead of you. But you have to capitalize on those moments. Getting to the league is not the hard part. The hard part is working to stay there.”

Gary Sr. may not know when that day will come, but he’s quite confident Gary Trent Jr. won’t shy away from putting in the work.

WENDELL CARTER, JR.

Wendell Carter Jr.'s steady presence stands out for Duke men's basketball at Wake Forest

Ben Leonard, The Duke Chronicle

It's not often that Marvin Bagley III looks human.

And a terrestrial being he appeared Tuesday against Wake Forest, having the show stolen from him in the first half by a lanky 7-foot-1 center.

Doral Moore, who more closely resembles a stretched-out video game character than an ACC basketball player, was better than Bagley on Tuesday in the early going, throwing down dunk after dunk with a dazed Bagley watching in the vicinity. But in Bagley's worst collegiate half, Duke, as usual, had one underappreciated and steady force in the post—Wendell Carter Jr.

For the third straight game, Carter avoided the perils of foul trouble, his Achilles' heel for much of the season, and he smoothly put up a double-double to help offset Moore's first-half explosion. He was there again to pick up the Blue Devils when the Demon Deacons made a frantic push late, breaking a nearly five-minute scoreless streak with a jumper to give No. 4 Duke a decisive double-digit lead in an eventual 84-70 win.

This is not the same Carter that teetered in and out of foul trouble—and in and out of the game—early in the season, forced to watch long stretches of big games from the bench.

"He was making silly mistakes," Duke head coach Mike Krzyzewski said after Saturday's game against Pittsburgh. "He and Marvin are such good students of the game...so many of these kids, when they come from high school, they haven't watched tape. They've watched tape of when they dunk or do something spectacular...but they don't watch when they commit a silly foul. When they come here—and we're not the only program—they have an opportunity to be educated about the game."

Even 10 days ago, when Duke took on the Demon Deacons at home, Carter fouled out, then his fourth straight game with four or more fouls. Now, he has five fouls in his last three games combined.

On the flip side, Carter, Bagley and Duke silenced Moore in the second half, holding him to just four more points and forcing him to foul out after he scored 14 in the first.

"We didn't do anything to him except we went to our bigs, and our bigs can play, so you're going to foul them unless you double them," Krzyzewski said Tuesday.

It certainly worked for Duke in the end—Carter had 23 points and 12 rebounds to go along with Bagley's eventual strong scoring effort with 12 points in the second half and 16 for the game.

"In the first half, they were winning the rebound margin and [Carter] was on Moore, who was getting a few offensive rebounds and putbacks," Allen told reporters. "I told him to rebound and if he's boxing him out, I'll come down and get those long rebounds over his head, he just needs to get a body on him. Just certain stuff like that, and then it's fixed in an instant."

Although free-throw shooting was once a concern for both of Duke's twin towers, it wasn't on Wednesday—Carter and Bagley combined to finish 18-of-24 from the charity stripe.

Carter was able to stay on the floor to take those free throws and be more of a threat on defense because of a newfound commitment to verticality on defense. It got him two blocks Tuesday and helped

him swat four shots against Miami Jan. 15, including a late block of Hurricane big man Dewan Huell that gave Duke a key stop late.

“At Miami, they only said he blocked four shots, but it’s hard for me to believe. I thought he blocked four in the last 10 minutes,” Krzyzewski said Saturday. “He’s protected our rim very well. He and Marvin have learned to be in the restricted area and not to take charges, but to use the principle of verticality and go straight up. A lot of players never learn that. But as a freshman, Wendell has got it down.”

Carter says he was worked hard on his defense, in particular on his lateral quickness.

“I guess it’s something that our coaches have been preaching to us, so I’ve definitely been more jumpity or excited on the defensive end,” Carter said after Saturday’s game.

Another change that has helped Carter’s quickness: he’s 12 to 15 pounds lighter than when he arrived at Duke, Krzyzewski said. He was never out of shape or too big, Krzyzewski said, but Carter now has better endurance and is more confident facing the basket.

“He’s always been good, so improvement means that he’s gotten real good, but he’s always been good. He’s been one of the better players in the league, and in the country,” Krzyzewski said. “He’s going to play basketball for a long time and be a very good player because he can shoot, he can handle, he’s smart, and he’s 6-10, 245. Other than that, he stinks, you know?”

Wendell Carter Jr. is Duke's forgotten star

David M. Hale, Espn.com

January 31, 2018

DURHAM, N.C. -- The part didn't have many lines, but Wendell Carter Jr. was onstage for most of the play, and that's what mattered. He'd caught the acting bug a few years into high school, and he was finally a part of a performance, an adaptation of the 1930s hit "You Can't Take It With You." Besides, Carter was 6-10, a superstar on the basketball court and one of the country's top recruits. Of course he'd stand out.

Still, Carter's spotlight came in a supporting role, as a member of an eccentric family whose job was to help the lead actress end up with her rich beau. And it may be stretching the analogy a bit, but it served as something of a precursor to the role he's landed at Duke. Carter is a star, to be sure. He was the No. 5 recruit in the nation, according to ESPN's rankings, a physical presence with a deft shooting touch that made him the jewel of the Blue Devils' already impressive signing class -- right up until the moment he was upstaged by an even bigger star.

When Marvin Bagley III reclassified to join the current crop of Duke freshmen on the court for the 2017-18 season, he instantly stole the show. In the months since, he's lived up to the hype, too, averaging 21.5 points and 11.4 rebounds a game. And then there's Carter, a big man who, on any other team, would be surrounded by shooters, as the centerpiece of the action, now working on his Oscar for best supporting actor.

But lest you think Carter's time onstage prepared him for this moment, he's happy to explain it was actually the opposite.

"I thought of it as basketball," he said of his acting experience. "On a big stage, crowd facing you, and you've just got to perform, make sure the crowd likes it."

Carter would love to be chewing up scenery, mugging for the roaring crowd, starring in his own masterpiece. That's just not the role he was cast in this season, so he's finding his niche in an ensemble. His freshman campaign has been a learning experience, a chance to turn his limited dialogue into a star turn of his own. And for the past few weeks, that's exactly what's happened.

A few weeks shy of the ACC tournament, Carter ranks fourth in plus-minus among big men nationally, ranks in the ACC's top 10 in blocks per game, rebounds per game, field goal percentage and win shares, and he's arguably one of the three or four best freshman in the country. It's just that he happens to be sharing the stage with another of those elite rookies.

"I'm learning to establish my role," he said. "I get isolations in the post and within the offense we run. Me and Marvin are always looking for each other. A lot of teams, they'll double us, so if they double me, I'm looking for him and vice versa. We can play off each other."

CARTER WAS 8 OR 9 when his family visited Universal Studios in Florida, where his nemesis awaited.

Truth be told, Carter was intrigued by the roller coaster, a whirling, towering contraption inspired by the movie "The Mummy." His father, Wendell Sr., urged him to ride, but the boy was small, and it was big, and the whole thing terrified him.

"He stood there and pouted and fussed and cried," Carter's mother, Kyla, said.

Dad insisted. The way Carter Sr. saw it, the ride was safe, and the fear was irrational. These were lessons his boy needed to learn. The instructions were simple. Carter Jr. was going to ride it. His father would ride with him. The argument ended there.

"He rode it, and he loved it," Kyla said. "He rode it three more times."

Carter Jr. still tells the story as a prelude to the lessons his dad taught him on the court.

The first hoop he owned came as a Christmas gift, and Carter Jr. sunk the first basket he tried. Carter Sr. took it as a sign. Big things were in store for his son, and he refused to let fear derail the opportunity. Years later, shooting around in the driveway, Carter Sr. reminded the boy of that roller-coaster ride, of how fear had melted into excitement, and that he should take that same approach to the court.

Again and again, Dad reminded him.

"Never be afraid when you're on the floor," Carter Sr. said. "Never fear anybody."

After a trashing of Notre Dame this week, a reporter asked Wendell Jr. if the message was meant as a reminder to himself or a message to the opposition, but Carter sees it as something bigger than that. It's a mantra -- no stage, no opponent, and certainly not a supporting role on his own team would shake his determination.

A few weeks ago, Carter Jr. was on Mike Krzyzewski's radio show and was asked about the tattoos on his arms. Along the inside of his right biceps is the word "Fear." On the left, "None."

"I got that from my dad," he said.

IT'S NOT THAT CARTER SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED **ALTERNATIVES** to Duke after Bagley reclassified to join this season's recruiting class in September, but it certainly shifted his approach to his new team. Carter had been a monster in high school, the clear star at Pace Academy in Atlanta. Even his turns in AAU ball rarely put him on the court with a player like Bagley, another tall scorer who thrived with his back to the basket. Add in Duke senior Grayson Allen and two more elite freshmen, and Carter risked being lost in the shuffle.

"Growing up, I never had so much firepower on my team, where everyone can get their own, can score," Carter said. "That's one thing I had to adjust to is learning how to play with other great players."

To be sure, Bagley is great. He's been lauded as a potential No. 1 overall pick in the NBA draft. He's an acrobat on the court, pounding the boards, shooting from outside, scoring with ease. Then there's Carter. He's got the same frame as his teammate -- an inch shorter, a few pounds heavier, hair that

looks like the abridged version of Bagley's auspicious locks. He does a lot of the same things as Bagley, too. Carter scores, he rebounds, he works as a physical presence in the paint.

When he's on, Carter is fluid and physical and, at times, dominant. When Bagley is on, he's magic. It's tough to upstage a magic act.

"Marvin is definitely much more athletic than I am," Carter said.

Carter needed time to learn to play facing the basket, a job he rarely filled in high school. He needed to understand how to find the best shot on each possession -- not just for him, but for anyone. At Pace, he'd been the primary scorer and rebounder, and so the other jobs were left for the supporting cast. Now, that's exactly the role he'd been cast to play.

The funny thing is, Carter wasn't intimidated. He embraced the role.

"I wouldn't say I wasn't the one diving on the floor for balls [in high school], but I wouldn't say it was a big part of my game," Carter said. "But now, it's one of the biggest parts, doing the dirty work."

He's on the floor, diving for loose balls. He's on the boards, averaging nearly 10 rebounds a game. He's third on the team in assists, first in blocks, first in field goal percentage. He leads the Blue Devils in hitting 46 percent from 3.

Since ACC play began, Carter has scored in double figures every game. He's had five double-doubles. He's taken over games at times, putting up nine points and corralling three rebounds in a three-minute stretch against Virginia last week that erased a big Blue Devils deficit and posting a scorching first half against Wake Forest while Bagley suffered through one of the worst stretches of his young career.

Not that Carter is checking the stats after each game. He's never done that. He just wants his place on the stage, and he figures the rest will work itself out.

"We always believed he was the No. 1 player in the country," Kyla said. "We believe he's the No. 1 draft pick. We don't care what everyone else believes. That's just how we move."

CARTER HAS ANOTHER TATTOO ACROSS HIS CHEST, a pair of wings with a cross and the word "Blessed" inscribed in the middle. He'd had the idea for the tattoo rattling around in his head for a while, but it never quite clicked. His parents had a strict rule that he couldn't get any ink until he was 18, so Carter was in no rush. Then, on a trip to New Zealand last year, he found inspiration from a stranger.

"Just some dude in New Zealand," Carter said.

No, seriously. Carter was on a tour of a village in New Zealand, and along the way he bumped into an artist. Just some dude. They started talking. Carter opened up about his life story, told the man about his family and his career and his faith. In New Zealand, Carter said, every facet of a tattoo is supposed to reflect something personal, and the man simply took Carter's story and turned it into art.

When he got home, Carter showed his mom the image on paper. She actually liked it. He turned 18 on a Saturday this past summer. That Sunday, they headed to the tattoo parlor and put ink to skin. The cross represents his faith. The words, his outlook. The small rings that adorn the cross represent family. And the wings that poke out from his jersey serve as a fitting tribute to a career about to take flight.

More than anything, though, the tattoo underscores a reality for Carter that things have a way of working out in time. He had plans, but they needed refinement. Then a stranger in a strange country offered an unexpected answer.

So, too, goes his basketball career. In three months alongside Bagley, Carter has blossomed into a versatile weapon, flexing muscles he'd never been asked to use and showcasing skills that might've gone overlooked elsewhere.

"At the beginning of the year, I wasn't doing as much, scoring as much, getting as many rebounds," Carter said. "Teams are adjusting their game plans. It's just a common-sense thing."

Was this the plan when he signed with Duke, to play a supporting role alongside a major star who consumes so much of the spotlight? The way Carter sees it, that's the wrong question. The point is that there's a stage, and he's in the cast. Now it's his job to wow the audience, even if he doesn't have the best lines.

Carter knows who he is on the court, a monster with a bright future. But he can also slip into a role, play a part. That's what's great about acting, after all.

"It allows you to get outside yourself," he said. "Play a different character. I don't have to be Wendell. I can be someone else."

There's a future where Carter can play a much different role, where he'll be front and center on the stage. At Duke, he's working on something outside himself, and he's finding the fit feels right.

"I've never been one to be big on ego," Carter said. "I just want to win."

Freshman forward Wendell Carter Jr. keeps it all in the family at Duke

C.L. Brown, The Athletic

February 1, 2018

Wendell Carter Sr. would often kill the time pacing outside before the pull to enter and survey the scene became too great. Kyla Carter would bring along a book to read in the car.

This routine would play out nearly every time that Wendell Carter Jr., now a 6-foot-10 freshman forward at Duke, brought a flier home advertising a party during his high school days in Atlanta. His parents had no problem with him going. But they insisted on tagging along. And when they got there, the Carters did more than just drop him off; they would stay until it was time to leave.

"I would go in the corner and just watch everybody," Wendell Sr. says. "One time Wendell said, 'Dad you're embarrassing me. Why don't you leave us alone?' I'm like, nah, I've got to figure out what's going on in here."

Those times when his father caught a whiff of marijuana, the Carters would bolt before the aroma had dissipated. In one instance they left because they believed there were too many scantily clad girls and his dad witnessed a couple having sex.

"These parties that these kids go to, they get wild," Kyla says. "They rent a big old building, and then security is like an older brother or cousin. It just didn't feel good. (Wendell Jr.) wasn't even tripping because he knew. He knew it wasn't appropriate."

So it should come as no surprise that the Carters moved to Durham to be closer to their only child for his freshman year at Duke. It could be merely a pit stop for Wendell Jr. before he heads to the NBA. He's considered a potential 2018 lottery pick by most draft prognosticators. He is shooting a team-high 61 percent from the field, and although he doesn't attempt many 3-pointers, he's the rare true post player who can make them. He's shooting 46 percent from behind the arc. Wendell Jr. is living up to the expectations in every metric the Blue Devils had when they pursued him as the centerpiece of their 2017 recruiting class. His performance is even more impressive considering he's not the featured player in the post he thought he would be. Wendell Jr. has racked up 10 double-doubles, which is the third-most in the ACC behind only teammate Marvin Bagley III, who has 17, and North Carolina's Luke Maye, who has 12.

The Carters are easy to spot in Cameron Indoor Stadium. She's the 6-foot-5 woman with the blue lipstick and blue pom-poms sitting behind the Blue Devils' bench. Though 6-foot-6, Wendell Sr. is a bit more inconspicuous, usually wearing a cap pulled close over his eyes. They're at every Duke game home and away. They maintain a delicate balance of being ever-present without being overbearing.

"I wouldn't necessarily say I was sheltered and kept back where I couldn't go out and couldn't do anything," Wendell Jr. says. "But they always made sure I was in the best situations."

It's been that way since the third grade, when Wendell Jr. brought home a poster board from a class assignment. Scrolling past his favorite movie and television show, his parents fixated on what the youngster said he wanted to be when he grew up: a professional basketball player. From that moment on, his parents have been dedicated to helping get him there.

The basketball was the easy part. Wendell Sr. played at Delta State; Kyla at Ole Miss. They instructed him on his shooting form, footwork, rebounding, box-outs and everything else they could think of from

their own playing days. But they knew that alone would not be enough. They were more concerned about the potential pitfalls off the floor.

They found another way to protect him on the social scene. Kyla tapped her oldest nephew, Denzel Morrison, who is a few years older than Wendell Jr. Morrison blended in the high school crowd much better than Wendell Sr. did. Their parents made it clear to their son that he understood it wasn't him they didn't trust.

"We do trust him," Kyla says, "but we don't trust other people. At all."

Trust works both ways in the Carter household. He had to trust their judgment when they wouldn't allow him to transfer from an all-boys charter school to the neighborhood public school all of his friends attended. Wendell Jr. wasn't excited about enrolling in Atlanta's Pace Academy. But his parents knew the school would better prepare him academically for college.

Kyla is all about the books. She has bachelor's degrees in banking and finance and managerial finance, and she has a master's in higher education. "He was making A's at the little charter school and it was too easy," she says. "We weren't seeing enough sweat and tears. We needed to see some pressure."

While Wendell Jr. no longer maintained a perfect GPA at Pace (he skidded to about an A-minus), he was exposed to many things culturally that validated his parents' decision to send him there. He enrolled in a drama course that got him hooked on acting. It's something he says he wants to pursue once he's done playing basketball. The genesis for the tattoo on his chest was a drawing he did while on the school's global-education trip to New Zealand.

In retrospect, Wendell Jr. admits Pace was the best place for him. Just like his parents had to trust his decision and acknowledge that Duke was the best college choice. "We really wanted him to go to Harvard," Kyla says. "But once he made this decision and we came here, this is where he was supposed to be. No question about it. And I'm really glad because, to be honest with you, we were going to force his hand. Something told us, we believe it was God, to back down and be patient, and that's what we did."

Wendell Jr. had talked with Gary Trent Jr. about attending the same school, and the Blue Devils were assembling an elite class. Once he visited the campus he was certain that's where he needed to be, even though he knew it was going to disappoint his mother. "My mom thought it was a unique opportunity to change the face of basketball in a way," Wendell Jr. says of why she pushed for Harvard. "I just try to put in perspective where I put myself in the best situation to better myself and get me more prepared for the next level. I thought Duke would be the perfect opportunity, especially with all the talent we had coming in."

Carter and Trent signed on, and then came the bombshell. Bagley, the No. 1 recruit in the Class of 2018, announced last August he was reclassifying and would attend Duke. Carter committed with the impression he would have a chance to be the centerpiece post player for the Blue Devils. Everything changed when the 6-foot-11 Bagley came on board. Carter had to make a bigger adjustment than anyone else. He first had to check his ego.

"I'm human so there are days where I'm thinking, Man, he gets so much love and blah, blah, blah," Carter says. "Then I come back to my senses and realize the situation where Marvin's a really great player and I'm a great player also. Us playing side by side is just phenomenal."

It's not an act. Senior guard Grayson Allen calls Carter "extremely mature" and someone who plays "beyond his years." That's why Bagley says Carter made his transition easy. "It starts off the court," Bagley says. "He and I laugh and joke, as does everybody on the team. That helps us when we go on the

court. It's fun to be a part of a team like this with a big to play alongside of like him, somebody of that caliber."

If not for Bagley — a favorite for ACC Player of the Year and a contender for National Player of the Year — Carter might be one of the most talked-about freshmen in the nation. His accomplishments are overshadowed by his more explosive teammate, whose averages of 21.6 points and 11.4 rebounds lead the ACC.

No slouch himself, Carter averages 14.5 points and 9.3 rebounds and leads the Blue Devils with 2.0 blocks per game. Coach Mike Krzyzewski says Carter has been good all year, but he has improved his conditioning and play facing the basket as the season has progressed. In high school and even while playing for USA Basketball, Krzyzewski says Carter never had the chance to show his face-up skills. "He's a terrific player, he's going to play basketball a long time and be a really good player," Krzyzewski says. "Because he can shoot, he can handle, he's smart and he's 6-10, 245 [pounds]. Other than that, he stinks."

Naturally, there are areas of his game that still need improvement. One NBA scout, speaking on the condition of anonymity, says he'd like to see Carter make quicker decisions with the ball. Too many times he gets the ball and has to think about what he's going to do with it. But that wouldn't stop a team from selecting him should he decide to declare for this year's NBA draft. The Fieldhouse has Carter ranked 11th on Sam Vecenie's 2018 NBA Draft Big Board.

"I'm definitely not promising myself that I'm going to be a one-and-done," says Carter. "I'm just taking it day-by-day, game-by-game. I really want to win this national championship, so I'm just riding it out."

No doubt about it, Kyla and Wendell Carter Sr. will be along for the ride.

Fewer fouls. More playing time. How Duke's Wendell Carter is making a bigger impact.

Jonathan Alexander, Raleigh News & Observer

February 2, 2018

In the beginning of the basketball season, it was difficult for Duke's Wendell Carter Jr. to reach his potential.

Carter, a freshman forward starter, was struggling with early foul trouble or mistakes, and the Duke coaching staff would have to take him out of games.

The earlier in a game he fouled, the less he would play. Through his first 17 games, he had played 30 minutes or more in only three of those games. He averaged three fouls per game during that 17-game stretch and would often have to sit early to keep from fouling out. He averaged 24.7 minutes per game. In a few of those games, Duke had beat its opponents by large margins, so the starters sat earlier than normal.

But to get more playing time, Carter had to foul less earlier in games. Carter is averaging 2.8 fouls per game over the last five games since Duke's 83-75 win over Miami on Jan. 15. While the difference in Carter's fouls per game average is not much different, Carter isn't fouling as early as he was in previous games, and he is averaging less fouls in more minutes played. He is averaging 32.2 minutes per game in Duke's last five games.

To get that increase in minutes, Carter has watched film and worked with his coaches. And eventually he was able to reduce those fouls.

"I watched a lot of film with the coaches," Carter said. "Plays where I was reaching in. A lot of unnecessary fouls that I was getting. Like 40 or 50 feet away from the bucket, so I eliminated a lot of those fouls so that's what getting me away from being in foul trouble."

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski has said Carter is playing smarter.

Over the last five games, Carter has played 30 minutes or more in four of those games. Since then, he's had everybody on notice.

When Carter is in the game, good things happen, especially when he is coupled with freshman forward Marvin Bagley III. The two freshman are among the best rebounders in the country.

Carter is averaging 14.5 points per game, 2 blocks and 9.2 rebounds this season. He's ranked 37th in the country in rebounds, and an underrated part of his game is his defense. Carter is averaging 18 points per game, 11.2 rebounds per game and 2.8 blocks over the last five games.

But Carter thinks he can still do better and make an impact in other places.

"Not so much as scoring and getting rebounds, but I can do more for my team, doing more of the dirty work for my team so we can come out on top of these close games that we've been having," he said.

What is the dirty work?

Carter says getting rebounds that go long, diving on the floor for loose balls and taking charges.

“I want to capitalize on those opportunities,” he said. “I’ve done it in the past, but I want to do it to show I can do it night in and night out.”

“For instance, against (Virginia),” Carter added. “I think in my opinion we should have won. We made a lot of young mistakes and we’re cleaning them up each practice.”

That game, a 65-63 loss to No. 2 Virginia on Jan. 27, Carter had 14 points, 15 rebounds and 4 blocks.

On Saturday, Duke will play St. John’s at Madison Square Garden – the place where Krzyzewski got his 1,000th career win on Jan. 25, 2015, in a 77-68 win over St. John’s.

“St. John’s is a very talented team,” Carter said. “They have a lot of great guards if you watch film. It’s going to be a great defensive game for us where we’re going to communicate a lot, stop ball screens and do all the little things and be more than victorious.”

And for Carter, as arguably Duke’s most valuable defensive player, he knows that starts with him.

TREVON DUVAL

His world once a blur, Duke point guard Trevon Duval can at long last see a bright future

January 19, 2018

C.L. Brown, The Athletic

Trevon Duval could no longer fake that the vision in his left eye was perfectly fine. Oh, he'd become adept at disguising it. Downright skilled, actually. During a high school physical, he says he peeked through the crevice of his fingers with his right hand supposedly covering his eye. When he was trying to get his driver's license, he says he got a doctor's note that excused him from the eye exam.

But here he was at Duke, undergoing all of the rigorous medical testing that all incoming athletes are subjected to, and the 6-foot-3 freshman was about to be exposed. Duval climbed the Class of 2017 rankings, becoming the No. 1 point guard in the nation according to many recruiting websites, all while having clear vision in only his right eye. Duval got used to operating in a world that was only half clear.

"In high school, I went to a doctor who told me it's pretty much not fixable," he says. "That's when I gave up on it. Luckily, I came here and found out I could see out of it."

Terry Kim, an ophthalmologist who specializes in the cornea, has helped conduct initial exams for Duke basketball over the years. He spotted the problem with Duval's left eye as soon as he arrived on campus last summer. Coach Mike Krzyzewski was understandably concerned.

Duke hadn't had a point guard of Duval's caliber since Tyus Jones, who played a big role on the 2015 national title team but turned pro after his lone season on campus. Krzyzewski's first reaction was that eye ailment might delay Duval's debut with the Blue Devils. "He can't really see out of that eye," Krzyzewski says. "And as soon as we heard it, I said, 'Look he can't play even when he's doing individual work (or in) goggles.'"

Duval underwent a battery of tests. Because the eye wasn't structurally damaged, doctors believed they could help improve his vision. Duval was fitted for a powerful contact lens, but before he could be unleashed onto the court, he had to undergo rehabilitation to get his brain used to processing vision from both eyes. "There's vision there, but if you've learned not to use it, your body will turn it off," says Nick Potter, Duke's assistant director of athletic rehabilitation. "So the whole idea is, can we get this thing to turn back on? Some of it is getting the muscles in his eyes to work, the nerves that connect to the eyes and even in the brain where he interprets it — all this stuff has to change."

Potter has worked with Duke football and men's basketball since 2005. He says every couple of years he'll get a unique case, and Duval certainly fell into that category. The challenge for Potter and Duval is that there wasn't a medical precedent to follow. Duval couldn't be sure of when he would notice any progress or how fast he would adapt to his newfound vision. Potter says his plan was guided by experience and scientific principles.

"It's not like an ankle sprain, where you see it 50 times and you have an idea what's going to happen," Potter says. "You go into it with great hopes, but you're not sure what the expectations are going to be."

Potter and assistant athletic trainer Jose Fonseca have worked closely with Duval during the process. Every drill is designed to address the vision needed to play basketball. Duval is often put in situations he might encounter on the court. Instead of standing straight up in a controlled eye exercise, he's being trained in a more active way.

The focus has been on helping Duval in two areas of vision: identifying and acquiring. To that end he's placed in drills where he has to see and react. In one basic drill, Duval looks over one shoulder and gets a ball thrown over the opposite shoulder. The first step is recognizing the ball has been thrown. The second is swiveling his head around and again locating the ball. The third is to see the ball into his hands, although the purpose of the drill isn't necessarily to catch the ball. It's about the process of identifying it and seeing it through. Sometimes the ball will have a letter or a number on it, providing an additional identifying mark Duval can focus in on.

Duval is also using a FitLight trainer, which Golden State star Stephen Curry has been known to use and the rest of the Blue Devils do too. While dribbling, Duval has to use his alternate hand to hit one of eight blue lights that randomly flashes. An observer might compare it to playing Whack-a-mole, but it has helped calm Duval's fears. "When I got fitted [for the lens], I didn't know how it was going to work," Duval says. "I got nervous. But after doing some eye exercises and getting accustomed to it, it definitely helps."

What surprised Krzyzewski most about Duval is that he had accepted his vision could not be corrected and adjusted accordingly. "He lived with this for almost 12 years," Krzyzewski says. "Like a lot of people, they just live with things and then they compensate. So he's done a lot in terms of learning how to see with both eyes."

The work will continue. Because Duval went so long without using his left eye, Potter says if he stops doing maintenance drills his eyes could revert to old habits, where he's depending on his right eye.

Duval says he sees the world a lot brighter now. And it has helped make his depth perception on the court a clearer as well. Duval has by and large been the playmaker the Blue Devils have been missing the past few seasons. He's had three games with 10 or more assists, and he leads the ACC with 6.3 assists per game. He doesn't believe that would be possible had he not been fitted with the corrective lens. "On the court, it helps me with my peripheral [vision] because I was missing guys," says Duval, who also averages 12.5 points per game. "Sometimes in the left corner on drive and kicks, I wouldn't really see them. I'm hitting them now."

Duval, of late, is also hitting more of his 3-point attempts. Perimeter shooting has long been listed as his biggest weak spot, but ACC coaches may have to tweak their scouting reports. Duval is shooting 40 percent from 3-point range in conference play. It's not enough of a sample size to tell if that can be attributed to his improved vision or if he's just on a hot streak. But Duval was 5 of 30 from behind the arc in non-conference games, so whatever the reason for the surge is a welcome sight for the Blue Devils.

Senior Grayson Allen had no idea about Duval's vision problems. He says running the fast break with Duval is as simple as finding an open spot because he's going to deliver the ball to the right spot. "No one's going to stop him or prevent him from getting in the paint because he's so fast, and he has the vision and the passing ability to just dish it wherever," Allen says. "It makes everyone's job a lot easier. We don't have to do as much with the ball. We can let Tre do a lot of the work himself."

Duval has always put in work believing it will ultimately pay dividends. He and his friends from New Jersey coined the motto, "Grinding for that day off," imagining the time when they can "sit back and relax and not worry about too much stuff, not only for us but for everybody we care about."

That's why he never mentioned the blurred vision. He didn't want to use it as an excuse and didn't want his coaches to think it would limit what he was capable of doing. Duval didn't volunteer the information

to Duke before the testing started. He'd gotten so used to living with it that he didn't think much about it. And his play was good enough to mask it.

Vince Walden coached Duval during his senior season at IMG Academy — the only season he played there. Duval hadn't been with the team long when Walden recalls that a hard pass ricocheted off of a teammate's hands and popped Duval in the face. "It got him really good," says Walden, who is now an assistant coach at Arkansas State. "He jumped back up, his eyes were a little watery, and he ended up catching the ball and dunking on the assistant coach running the drill."

Toughness helped Duval hide any shortcomings. Walden noticed Duval's strong tendency to go right, but that's not uncommon with the players he has coached. Duval still found a way to make plays. So the only time Walden even thought about Duval's vision was in relation to a shooting slump. "When you're in player development, you observe guys so much you often wonder if there's something with his vision especially as it relates to his shooting," Walden says. "But he never even wore goggles."

Duval went through a stage of wearing glasses away from basketball and even experimented with goggles on the court. But his dad couldn't get him to keep them on his face. Duval just didn't like wearing them.

Trevor Duval taught his son everything he could about basketball. He coached him from the days he was 6 and playing with the 9-year-olds. He took his son to watch elite high school all-star games, and players such as point guard Brandon Jennings made an impression on a young Trevon Duval. He dreamed of being one of those elite players.

If there was a discernible vision problem, Trevor Duval would have made sure his son got the help he needed. But Trevon didn't make a big deal out of it, so his father didn't either. "He wore goggles when he was younger; I think he stopped wearing them about the seventh or eighth grade," Trevor says. "He started marking up his nose. One time he got fouled, and it put a little bruise on his nose. I know one time they hurt the bridge of his nose really bad. He got cut."

Trevon Duval wears a lot these days. He has a pair of virtual-reality glasses and a pair of strobe glasses, both of which are used in his rehab. The strobes essentially work like a shutter, going from black to testing how fast he can identify an object when they are clear. The virtual-reality glasses especially help during his downtime traveling with the team. He plays a game in those glasses in which he follows the blinking red ball as 20 others shuffle around on the screen. When the program stops, his head serves as a cursor that moves and identifies where the red ball has stopped.

Duval can't peek his way through and cheat that game, which is one reason why he knows the rehab is working. "He's really done a lot of work, and thank goodness we have so many great people here to help him with this," Krzyzewski says. "He's been accustomed, trained, to see things within a certain field of vision, so to broaden that vision is an on-going process. But he's getting better and better at it."

Point taken, Duval finds his way at the right time for Duke

March 9, 2018

C.L. Brown, The Athletic

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski didn't make a dramatic speech after inserting freshman guard Trevon Duval back into the starting lineup in the ACC tournament quarterfinals Thursday after consecutive games of bringing him off the bench.

Duval's second-half performance in the Blue Devils' 74-64 regular-season finale win over North Carolina was compelling enough on its own. His 11 assists in their 88-70 win over Notre Dame to advance to the tournament semifinals spoke volumes, too.

It's the Duval the Duke coaching staff always felt he had could become, rather than the one that's been slow to mature into what this team needs him to be. Duval was entrusted with the ball as point guard, but he hadn't always proved trustworthy with his decision-making.

His turnover rate of 22.0 percent is higher than any ACC point guard in the top half of the conference with the exception of N.C. State's Markell Johnson, who is at 29.3 percent. It's why Krzyzewski moved Grayson Allen to the primary ball handler. Duval says he can live with his "aggressive turnovers" when he's trying to make a play, but he's tried to stop forcing plays as much.

"He's working harder, he's becoming a little bit more disciplined — that's been a big thing with him: changing habits," Duke associate head coach Jeff Capel says. "He's done a heck of a job — this last game, and especially against North Carolina."

The Blue Devils will face the Tar Heels for a third time this season on Friday. The winner advances to Saturday's ACC championship game to play the winner of Virginia and Clemson.

Those two games coming off the bench did some good for Duval, who says he's now making more of an effort to be a facilitator and not as much of a shot-taker. It's come from how he saw the game when watching clips as well as what he saw from the bench. Through the first 28 games, he's averaged 9.6 shots per game; in the last four, about six.

"I've been looking for guys and trying to get guys going," Duval says. "When I see film, there are guys open and our post is really good, so getting it into them is a really high-percentage (play)."

Duval had six assists and no turnovers in the win over the Tar Heels and helped power a 49-point second half for the Blue Devils. Three of his assists came from breaking down the defense with dribble penetration, leading to Marvin Bagley III dunks. It made North Carolina coach Roy Williams blame his drives as a reason for their defensive breakdowns.

"He really hurt us driving the ball to the basket, because we don't have a guy to protect the rim," Williams says. "Twice in a row he dribbles, and we'd come help flying up the lane, and he just bounce it to a guy who dunks the sucker."

That decision-making is what led Krzyzewski to tell him, "You're starting Tre," in their next practice. Duval validated the move with 11 assists against the Irish, which was one short of tying his career-high and the most he's had against an ACC opponent.

Duval adds another dimension, especially playing off the ball with Allen handling more point guard duties.

“It also puts Trevon in the side where we can get side penetration,” Krzyzewski says. “We haven’t had side penetration the whole year. The defense has to come out on Grayson, so it gives you a side.”

Duval had raised eyebrows on Twitter after the Blue Devils lost their first meeting against the Tar Heels earlier this season. He retweeted a video clip of his first-half dunk because, he says, “it was a top-10 moment” he was “trying to get on ESPN.”

“It wasn’t smart, but it just shows some of these young guys, it takes them a little bit longer,” Capel says. “It was a heck of a play, but we lost and he didn’t play particularly well in that game. It shows sometimes you’re worried about what other people think instead of what we think.”

Even Thursday when fielding questions about the decision, Duval didn’t voice any regrets about it.

“I like when I receive any type of negative feedback,” Duval says. “I feel like I’m fueled by that. I’m just trying to play my game.”

It’s taken a while for him to find out just what his game needs to be for the Blue Devils to thrive. When he had one of his worst performances in a win over the Orange, shooting 1 for 8 shooting from the field with three assists and two turnovers, Krzyzewski had him come off the bench against Virginia Tech and Carolina. It was the second time this season – he also came off the bench in their win at Georgia Tech — that Krzyzewski chose to use Allen at point guard.

“It’s tough for point guards, especially young point guards, and especially when you’re handed such a talented team,” Allen says. “You’re supposed to just run, and it’s not an easy task. For him, it’s keeping his confidence, because he is really good.”

Duval isn’t lacking in confidence and there’s good reason why. One scout watching the Blue Devils’ win says Duval clearly has to develop a better jumper – he’s shooting just 43 percent from the field and 27 percent from 3-point range. But his explosiveness and athleticism is why he’d likely be a first-round pick if he chose to turn pro after the season.

Right now, the Blue Devils are just hopeful he can show the consistency they need as they chase another national championship.

“It goes in different stages for each young guy, and it’s taken him a little bit longer,” Capel says. “But he’s on the upward trend right now. He’s doing a really good job for us.”

Duke's Trevon Duval was raised to be an X factor with streetball tapes and tough love

Reid Forgrave, CBSSports.com

March 8, 2018

Trevon Duval was mad. Really mad. Huff-and-puff, tears-streaming-down-his-cheeks mad. His mother, Chaka Campbell, was in the kitchen making dinner. The kitchen window overlooked the backyard of the family's home in New Castle, Del., a suburb 30 miles outside Philadelphia. The family had moved here for a better, calmer life for their children, a different world from where Trevon's parents had met in New York City. It was their dream house: A big yard, a pool, a basketball hoop in the driveway and, in the backyard, a concrete basketball court. From her perch in the kitchen, the boy's mother watched the drama unfold.

Her then-husband, Trevor Duval, had poured the concrete and built the basketball court for their oldest son. And every day, those two were on that court, doing basketball drills. Layups with either hand. Dribbling drills. Free throws. Some days, young Trevon didn't want to do the work. And on those days, his dad jawed with him. Got in his head. Made him do pushups.

This was one of those days.

Trevon, eight or nine years old at the time, walked in the back door, furious at his father. Chaka was concerned. Was her husband being too hard on the boy? Was he forcing him into a basketball life that he didn't want?

"I said, 'Son, listen: If you don't want to do this no more, just tell me so,' " Duval's mother recalled years later. "He looked at me, took a few breaths. And he said, 'Mommy, it's OK. I want to do it.' And once he said that, whenever they bumped heads, I'd just let them be."

These days, Duval is starting as the freshman point guard for a Duke team that is the nation's most talented squad. Duke is 25-6 and ranked fifth in the country going into this weekend's ACC Tournament. If Duke isn't on your short list for potential national champions, you haven't been paying attention.

And Duval, a flashy player whose game is inspired by his father taking him to New York City streetball courts and watching AND1 mixtapes together, may be the key to how deep Duke can make it in March. Duval's season has been up and down. His 3-point shooting has been subpar, at 28 percent, and there have been games where he tries to do too much and ends up having too many turnovers. Yet Duval, when he plays within himself, can become Duke's X factor, dishing assists to his talented teammates and driving down the lane like a madman. In Duke's final regular-season game, a home win over North Carolina, it was Duval who keyed Duke's comeback with six assists, two steals, a key three-pointer and, crucially, zero turnovers.

"There is the flash, and that's kind of his reputation coming in, the whole 'Tricky Tre' thing," Duke associate head coach Jeff Capel said. "The things he can do with the ball, the things he can do with his

passing, his vision – you don't want to completely tone it down, but you have to steer it in the right way. He has gifts and tools, but his dad used to say this when we were recruiting him: He's raw. He's being taught certain things about the point guard position. But he can make plays that you can't teach."

Yet they were taught. CBS SPORTS HQ sat down with Duval, his parents and coaches to discuss the path that brought this young man to one of college basketball's premier programs with a game built on asphalt ideology as much as hardwood engineering.

His father was his first teacher. When Trevon, the oldest of four, was a baby, his dad would slip a Nerf basketball in the crib. At age 2, he was playing in a YMCA league;

Trevon would come to games wearing headbands and Jordans, shooting jumpers over 4-year-old fools. In their old apartment, his dad would drill him on their Little Tikes hoop. Father and son would watch "Come Fly With Me," the old 1989 Michael Jordan documentary, on VHS. They also watched AND1 mixtapes, studying streetball legends like Rafer "Skip 2 My Lou" Alston and Ed "Booger" Smith, a Brooklyn streetball legend.

As Trevon grew older, his father kept pushing him. Other parents saw it. They wondered if the dad pushing the son so hard was healthy. James Johns, who coached Duval in AAU ball since sixth grade, wondered at first if the dad was crazy. Soon, he learned Trevor Duval wasn't crazy; he was driven toward a goal, and Trevon was driven toward the same goal.

"His dad's a mad scientist," Johns said. "The kid wanted it from an early age. You just saw the desire he had to be great. The family made so many sacrifices get him to be great. His dad's just a basketball junkie. He just pushes him. And anybody who has any involvement with him is required to push him at that same level."

Trevor Duval always taught his son to be a fun player – "fundamentally creative" is how he terms it. As Trevon grew older, his father pushed him to study NBA guards. Steve Nash. Derrick Rose. Kyrie Irving. James Harden. The flashy player he became melded well with Duval's Caribbean roots: His father's family is from Trinidad, and his mother grew up in Jamaica before moving to New York in elementary school.

"I always tell him, where I'm from, the era I'm from, you want to be entertaining," his father said. "You want to get fundamentals right, but you want to be exciting. You gotta add some flash to your game."

Anyway, his mother was convinced even before he was born that he was going to be an entertainer.

"It's crazy – when I was pregnant with Trevon, I was living in New York, and I was out and this Jamaican guy came over to me and touched my stomach," Trevon's mother recalled.

"He said, 'I'm telling you, you're having a little boy, and he's go to be some kind of entertainer. I don't know what kind of entertainer he's go to be, but he's go to entertain people.' "

His dad pushed him to steer that entertaining nature toward basketball. Sometimes he pushed him too hard. When he was 4, the Harlem Globetrotters put on a camp in Delaware. The camp was for age 7 and up, so Trevon's dad told him to lie about his age.

It wasn't like he couldn't compete; at that age, Trevon was already playing in a league for ages 8 and under.

"We'd go to the YMCA in New Castle to work out," Trevon Duval said. "My dad used to go there and play sometimes, and I'd play on the side with younger kids, but when we went there to work out, it'd be an empty gym, just me and him. I wouldn't like whatever he was saying. He'd just get on me. If I didn't want to play, if I acted like a baby, he'd say, 'Run laps.' Or, 'Do pushups.' "

"There were times when I'd be in a game and he'd talk to me too much, and I'd just say, 'Shut up, leave me alone,' " he continued. "But it all helped me come to where I am now."

There was another moment, too, when the son realized how much his father's basketball obsession was actually expressing a tough sort of love through basketball.

It was winter of Trevon's eighth-grade year. Trevon scored an invitation to a prestigious John Lucas basketball camp in Chicago. The situation seemed to call for the family cancelling the trip: A blizzard was coming. His dad's car wasn't working. And his dad was supposed to start a new job in Delaware on Monday, the day after the camp ended.

Trevon Duval didn't care. He knew his son needed this camp, the coaching it would give him and the exposure it would provide. He rented a compact car at the last minute. Starting on Friday night, the father first drove to the King of Prussia Mall in Philadelphia to buy Trevon a new pair of sneakers, red, white and blue Under Armour Spines. Then they drove down the Pennsylvania Turnpike as the blizzard came down. Trevon slept in the back seat. Through the whole night, the father drove, 13 hours straight. When Trevon woke up, they talked basketball, and they planned on how he could best showcase his skills during the weekend.

"Dad," Trevon said, "they're going to remember my name at this camp. Everyone's going to know who I am by the time we leave here."

When they got to Chicago, they didn't even check in at the hotel. They drove straight to the camp. Trevon brushed his teeth in the bathroom, washed up and got dressed.

It did become Trevon Duval's breakout weekend. It was the first time he dunked on someone. It was that weekend that rocketed him up in recruiting rankings, an ascendance that eventually led him to Duke. On the drive back, the father and the son were euphoric.

They knew they were heading to something big. They knew the hard work and the butting of heads was going to pay off.

"My dad had really good interests for me in whatever I did," Duval said. "There were tough times. And it took a while to realize that. But I definitely do now."

JACK WHITE

Aussie Jack White living his dream with Duke Blue Devils and Coach K

January 16, 2018

Chris Taylor, ESPN.com

It may have a capacity of only 9,314, but Cameron Indoor Stadium, home of the Duke Blue Devils, is a magical place. There's something about the Gothic architecture, the brass railings and decorative wood paneling, as well as the university's maniacal courtside student section -- nicknamed the 'Cameron Crazies' - that seems to be packed regardless of the opponents, that makes watching basketball in Durham, North Carolina, an experience like no other.

The intimate atmosphere is the antithesis of most modern-day stadiums, which are designed, before anything else, to make money; Australian sophomore Jack White, who is living his basketball dream at Duke University, is emphatic when asked about his experience with the program.

"It's awesome!"

Hailing from Traralgon in Gippsland, Victoria, White grew up loving basketball. For years, it had been his dream to play in college, but he never expected that he'd get the opportunity to do so in one of the most magnificent stadiums in all of the U.S., for one of the greatest college basketball coaches in history in Mike Krzyzewski, alongside some of the best young players in the nation.

Coming out of the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra, White was recruited by a number of schools, including Boise State, Hawaii and Temple. Boise State already had developed an Australian pipeline that had seen Anthony Drmic, Nick Duncan and Igor Hadziomerovic suit up, and White was certainly considering them given his relationship with former National Basketball League player and then Broncos assistant coach John Rillie.

"[They play in] a strong conference. Their program is building up and heading in a good direction. I was feeling really good about it," White told ESPN of his thoughts about Boise State.

Just as White was ready to make his decision, however, he got called up to play for Cairns Taipans in the NBL after one of their players went down with an injury. He decided to put all college talk on hold.

"While I was at Cairns, Duke came, a few other schools came -- really good schools -- and I was still considering staying home and playing pro in Australia," he said.

"Once my time at Cairns ended, I was clueless. I was on the phone to my coach at the [AIS] every day just trying to work out what I wanted to do.

"It was hard to say no to Boise [but] I knew that if I want to go to college [Duke] is the place to be."

White loves to challenge himself. He is not someone who will ever look for the easy way out, and this was one of the deciding factors in why he chose Duke.

"[I wanted to] really challenge myself to get better, and playing against future NBA players every day [helps me do that]."

"[Having the opportunity to] play in front of great home crowds, playing for arguably the greatest coach of all time -- the greatest in my opinion -- and just being around a program that has great tradition and great culture, it wasn't really a hard decision."

The opportunity to play for one of the greatest programs in college basketball history comes with some sacrifices, of course; namely in the amount of minutes available to White. As a 6-foot-7 wing, he has had to compete with players such as five-star recruits Jayson Tatum and Gary Trent Jr. as well as four-star recruit Alex O'Connell for playing time. He's averaging just over five minutes per game this season, and that is unlikely to increase unless the Blue Devils suffer a couple of injuries.

"Where I was at, development wise, I was a bit of a late bloomer," White said when asked if he had considered, when choosing Duke over Boise State, the likely reduced playing time.

"I just wanted to be a part of a program where I could be challenged every day. Against the best guys around the country here in the U.S., playing against the best teams in the Atlantic Coast Conference, which is, in my opinion, the best conference in the country."

"It was definitely something that was in my head, something that I understood coming in, but for me I just wanted to challenge myself. I know it's not going to be all sweet and I'm not going to be playing 35 minutes a game, so I wanted to go through some adversity and work out how to handle it and just come out better on the other end."

That's exactly the type of person that White is: He's hardworking, egoless and, above all, a fantastic teammate. You will never see him sitting on the sidelines sulking. Instead, he is always encouraging his teammates and cheering them on during every made 3-pointer or defensive stop.

White actively tries to bring this mentality to the team on an everyday basis. Besides being a good long-range shooter and defender, he prides himself on his leadership. He has one of the strongest voices on the team, and he strives always to make sure everything is running smoothly. This leadership is invaluable in a team with seven freshmen, and it's one of the reasons why Coach K, a five-time NCAA tournament-winning coach and three-time Olympic gold medalist, loves having him around and why the two have such a strong relationship.

White was full of praise when asked what Coach K means to him and the Duke program as a whole.

"It's an absolute honour [playing for him], especially at this stage of his career when no one really knows how much time he has left coaching. For me, I'm just hoping he's around for my time here.

"For the most part, he just keeps things simple. He trusts his players a lot, he believes in us a lot, gives us a lot of freedom to just play. It's crazy.

"When it comes down to it, he just wants to win and he just wants to find a way to win. He's going to put guys in a position to be successful. He knows all of our games. He knows which guys work well

together. He studies the game day in, day out. Everything he says is about us winning. That's pretty much what he's all about and that's why it's so great to be here."

Away from the basketball court, White is enjoying the academic component of college.

"You're getting a world-class education," he says. "That's really something that I'm trying to take advantage of. It's a great bonus. It's a successful university all around. It's great to be a part of."

White hasn't declared just yet, but he is interested in sports science and plans to major in evolutionary anthropology and minor in sociology. "If I'm here at this university, why not try and get two degrees out of it," he says.

By the time his career at Duke is all said and done, White will no doubt have left nothing on the table athletically or academically. He will also have had the opportunity to play alongside -- and grow friendships with -- some of the best basketball players in the world, including the NBA's Eastern Conference Rookie of the Month for December and the league leader in 3-point percentage, Jayson Tatum, whose career White has been following closely.

"He's been doing awesome. It's great to see him translate what he did last year into the pros and doing just as well. It's been awesome to see him play like he's been in the league for 10 years."

Tatum went to the Celtics as the No. 3 pick in the 2017 NBA draft, after the 76ers had selected Markelle Fultz at No. 1 and the Lakers had selected Lonzo Ball at No. 2. This year the Blue Devils have another player who will most likely be a top-three selection in Marvin Bagley III, a powerful 6-foot-11 forward who has been dominant in the NCAA this season (including a 32-point, 21-rebound performance against Florida State in December), and White has been enjoying every moment of the show.

"Marvin is crazy," White says. "The great thing is that he's all about winning. He couldn't care less about those individual numbers. He's just playing hard trying to win. That's the great thing about him and the team as a whole. We just have guys who just want to win and, come March, hopefully he'll be a difference-maker for us."

White is one of many Australians that are well in contention to see success come March, along with Gorjok Gak (Florida), Dejan Vasiljevic (Miami) and others.

Every year it seems like more Australians are landing scholarships at big time programs, which is great for those younger Australians who aspire to play college in the future. We've seen a number of pipelines pop up across the States including, most noticeably, the pipeline at St. Mary's, as well as the pipelines at Eastern Washington, Albany and the aforementioned Boise State. White believes that the latest pipeline could come through Durham.

"I believe it could happen, especially with the direction Australian basketball is going in right now. I don't see any reason why not. We have a lot of great players in the institute now, guys coming over to U.S. high school and going through that."

"That was a thing for me, I wanted to be able to challenge myself and show that Australian basketball can really compete at this level and be successful and if I can help guys make that decision where they can feel comfortable and confident going into bigger schools like this and being themselves and being tough every day then why not. "

It's clear that although Jack may not be getting the publicity that other Australians are -- notably 2018 draft hopefuls Deng Adel (Louisville) and Jo Lual-Acuil Jr. (Baylor) -- he is one of the most impressive all-round Australian student-athletes. He still has plenty of time to prove himself on the court, but until then, he will continue to cheer on his teammate more than anyone else and enjoy being a part of one of the greatest programs in the nation.

TEAM CLIPS

Crowded post a new problem for Duke

Shawn Krest, North State Journal

October 25, 2017

DURHAM — Wendell Carter isn't used to having so much company.

"We've just got to learn to play together," he said after Duke's Blue-White scrimmage. "Both of us ..."

Carter caught himself and corrected his statement.

"All three of us ... all FOUR of us want the ball."

The paint could be a crowded place for Duke this season. In addition to the five-star Carter, the Blue Devils have Marvin Bagley, another five-star freshman. The pair of newcomers join Marques Bolden, a five-star center from last season who returns for his sophomore year, and sophomore Javin DeLaurier.

"We have good bigs," said coach Mike Krzyzewski. "We're big and athletic. It's a different team for us."

Indeed, it's a new look for Duke. Krzyzewski's teams have generally depended heavily on outside shooting and perimeter play. Before Jahlil Okafor led the Blue Devils to the 2015 national title, the last dominant Duke big man was Shelden Williams in 2006. Before that, it was Carlos Boozer and Elton Brand.

Having four high-quality post players is going to take a bit of adjustment for everyone.

"The court is smaller with all those big guys," Krzyzewski said. "If you had a car, you'd rather have a van with them. That's what we hope our opponents feel — it's a smaller court when we have all that length out there."

Bolden returned to Duke after a disappointing freshman season that was derailed by a series of injuries. He considered leaving for the NBA and transferring to another school before choosing to return to the Blue Devils. DeLaurier played sparingly last season. By all accounts, both players have improved significantly in the offseason. Bolden has taken on a leadership role, and Carter refers to him as "my mentor."

They'll still likely begin games on the bench, with the two dominant freshmen getting the starts.

"They're going to play together," Krzyzewski said. "But if we started a team tonight, Marvin and Wendell would start at the two bigs. But I would want Javin and Marques to play like starters when they can. You might start five, but you want eight or nine thinking like it, believing that's who they are, playing with the consistency that a starter would play with."

Carter is used to a twin-towers attack. He said this year's Duke team is the biggest one he's been a part of since the 2015 Georgia Stars team that won the Peach Jam. He was teamed with Kansas 7-footer Udoka Azubuike. "But we weren't this talented," Carter said.

“We’ve just got to learn how to play together,” he added. “All of us want the ball. We want to go to the ball-side post. We’ve got to learn how to cover without going to the same side, how to play out of the high-post short corner. We’ve got to learn how to play different positions when we’re all on the court together.”

With only one ball and five positions on the floor, there’s always the risk of frustration cropping up. As the season opens, however, everyone is ready to work together.

“I don’t see anything wrong at all,” Carter said. “We’ve got two very phenomenal big men who can stretch the floor. Then Marques is very dominant on the inside. I don’t see how that can steer in the wrong direction.”

Why Duke players decided to wear “Equality” on their warmup shirts

Jonathan M. Alexander, Raleigh News & Observer

October 27, 2017

DURHAM - Duke's Grayson Allen said his team knew that everyone would be watching their actions during national anthem. So this week, the team wanted to make a statement. When the Duke players ran out onto the court for warmups, they donned black shirts, that read “Equality,” across their chests. And as the national anthem played, they stood side-by-side with their shirts on.

“We wanted to make sure what we did, we were doing together, and at the same time not ignoring what is going on,” Allen said.

Over the past year, athletes across the country, particularly football players, have either knelt, locked arms, sat, or raised fists during the national anthem, to protest police brutality and racial inequality. The movement was started by former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick.

But it has also been controversial, with some people questioning whether the protests are disrespectful to the flag. President Donald Trump has been the most notable critic, after he sent multiple tweets criticizing the players' protests last month.

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said there are a lot of mixed messages about standing, and where hands should be placed during the national anthem. He said his team wanted to stand, and they wanted to show the world what Duke stands for.

“We wanted to make sure that basically the equality shirt, stood for ‘one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,’” Krzyzewski said. “Does that sound familiar? It's part of the Pledge of Allegiance and it's basically what our program and our school is about. That's what we want our country to be.

“That's why we stand in reverence to the men and women who have served our country, who protected those rights, but also for every race, every gender, every religion. That's what our country is about.”

Krzyzewski said he was proud of his players for the statement they made.

Then he turned to nearly dozen military men and women standing in the press conference room.

“And God bless you guys. I hope you took it that way,” he told them. They smiled and nodded.

The players said the decision to wear the shirts was finalized on Thursday, but it had been a part of a two weeks-long discussion of the things that were going on around the country.

“It's tough seeing the stuff that's going on around the world, but we just gotta keep living and keep fighting,” freshman forward Marvin Bagley III, said. “At the end of the day, God got us all... so we can't worry about it a lot.”

Bagley said the team plans to continue to do what's right, and try to spread love.

“And I think that’s all we need. A little bit more love around the world,” he said. “For sure, speaking for me, I’m going to do whatever I can in my abilities to spread that.”

Freshman point guard Trevon Duval agreed. He said he thought the team, executed the message well.

“I think we got our message out the right way, without stepping on any toes really,” Duval said, “and I think that it’s a positive message. You can’t really go against what we’re trying to say.”

Is Duke the most talented college basketball team in the country? Here's one way to find out.

Ron Morris, News & Observer

November 7, 2017

When play begins this weekend, Duke will field the most talented men's basketball team in the country for a second consecutive season. At least that is what my 2017-18 talent evaluator formula concluded, and this season no team in the country is a close second to the Blue Devils.

A star-studded freshman class that features four of the top eight incoming players in the country easily led Duke's charge to the top of the talent ratings. Marvin Bagley, Wendell Carter, Trevon Duval and Gary Trent all are certain to see quality minutes this season along with returning senior All-American Grayson Allen.

It adds up to a talent total of 108, based on rankings that appear in the Lindy's Sports College Basketball preview issue. The next closest team in terms of talent is Arizona with 68 points. To give you an idea of how much disparity exists between Duke and the rest of the field, consider that the widest margin in talent value in the previous three seasons of rankings was Kentucky's 106-101 edge over North Carolina in 2014-15.

Understand, these rankings are not an indicator of the projected best team this season. None of my three previous most-talented teams won national championships. Kentucky went 38-1 after losing to Wisconsin in the 2015 national semifinals; Kansas, which went 33-5 in 2016, lost to eventual national-champion Villanova in the Elite Eight; and Duke bowed out a season ago in the second round of the NCAA tournament to South Carolina.

Duke had the eighth-most talent when it won the 2015 national title, Villanova was 17th in talent in capturing the 2016 crown, and UNC was fifth in talent a season ago in winning the title.

Lindy's annually uses professional scouts and college coaches to evaluate and rank the top 25 players at each of five positions, as well as ranking the top incoming junior college and freshmen players.

In my ratings, a point value is given to each player. The top-rated player at each position receives 25 points and the totals diminish to the 25th-rated player receiving one point. The same point system applies to the top 25 incoming freshmen, but only the top 10 junior-college players are assessed values on a 10-to-1 scale because they rarely have a great impact on a team's fortunes.

One could argue that too much weight is given to incoming freshmen, but the age of one-and-done players has proven that first-year players are easily among the nation's most talented and often have immediate impact. Look no further than Duke and Kentucky, which are both considered national championship contenders despite relying mostly on freshmen.

Add Allen's 21 points for being the fifth-best shooting guard in the country to the freshmen totals of Bagley (25 points), Carter (23), Duval (20) and Trent (19) and it is easy to see why many believe Duke will win the national title.

UNC falls into sixth place in the rankings with 50 points coming from Joel Berry (25) being rated the nation's best point guard, Theo Pinson (15) ranking 11th among small forwards and Pittsburgh graduate transfer Cameron Johnson (10) ranking 16th among small forwards.

The ACC landed six teams among the top 25 most talented with Duke and UNC followed by No. 7 Notre Dame (47 points), No. 11 Louisville (40), No. 20 Georgia Tech (32) and No. 25 Miami (27).

If you are looking for a sleeper in the preseason, consider that Texas A&M is ranked 25th in The Associated Press preseason poll, but the Aggies have the third-most talent (66 points) in these ratings.

Duke's comeback win shows how good it is now -- and how good it can be

Myron Medcalf, ESPN.com

November 27, 2017

Right now, Duke basketball is beautiful, captivating chaos.

It's all they know.

The Blue Devils' 87-84, come-from-behind -- and then come-from-behind again -- win over Florida on Sunday in the championship game of the PK80's Motion Bracket highlighted everything worth admiring and fixing in Durham during the coming months.

Their unsteady defense put them in a hole early.

Their collection of future NBA draft picks helped them emerge from it.

Their youthful lapses and errors sent them into another double-digit ditch late in the second half.

And then, the tenacity of a crew too naive and fresh to know when a game should be over, turned that challenge into its most compelling statement and victory of the season.

"We have a special group," Mike Krzyzewski said after the game. "They're so young. ... To be in these experiences and not give up. Our guys made a lot of plays."

If this is Duke now, what will it become by March?

What will happen once it all works for Marvin Bagley III & Co.?

This group of Blue Devils could help Krzyzewski capture his sixth national title. In a four-day stretch, they squeezed past Portland State, topped Texas in overtime and slid past Florida, the hottest team in America.

Florida and Duke never cracked 100, but they came close.

The teams traded offensive jabs in a scrap that fit the theme of a tournament with multiple overtime games and thrilling comeback wins.

Florida, which entered the game averaging 109.5 points per game in the tourney after scoring 108 in a win over Stanford on Thursday and 111 in a double-overtime victory over Gonzaga on Friday, amassed a 21-6 lead over Duke, the favorite to win the national title, in the first 5 minutes, 56 seconds of the game.

The Gators made five of their first eight 3-point attempts. Jalen Hudson had 24 points and finished 10-for-20 from the field overall.

But the overwhelming presence of Bagley (30 points, 15 rebounds) helped Duke tighten its zone and contain the Gators during a 38-16 rally. The Blue Devils led 44-37 with 3:48 to go in the first half.

And that would send most teams into the quicksand against Duke.

Not Florida, which responded and led by 14 with 9:14 to play.

Midway through the second half, both teams had made nearly 45 percent of their 3-point attempts. They were tied with 30 points apiece in the paint with 6:26 remaining in the game, when Florida led by 10, 78-68.

Given the flow of the game and Duke's early-season knack for late surges, nothing felt settled at Portland's Moda Center in the final minutes.

It seemed as if the teams were setting the stage for a final flurry.

They both had it in them. And, hell, the tournament had produced similar efforts throughout the week.

So the PK80 had conditioned those in the building to expect something miraculous.

Butler was down by 15 with nearly six minutes to go against Ohio State in one of Sunday's fifth-place games, but a late Kelan Martin shot capped a run that gave the Bulldogs a win over the Buckeyes and their former coach, Chris Holtmann.

Texas had bounced back against Gonzaga, only to fall in overtime on Sunday. Friday's double-overtime battle between Gonzaga and Florida felt like a Final Four game.

Duke needed the extra period to squeeze past Texas the same day.

And now, Duke and Florida had come to close the show.

Would the PK80 deliver another surprise?

Yes. Because it had to.

Grayson Allen's late 3-pointer cut Florida's lead to three points.

You could hear the footsteps.

Then KeVaughn Allen for 2. Bagley in the paint. Bucket. Bagley again. One-point lead for Florida. Destiny dangled.

Two Gary Trent Jr. free throws.

A 1-point lead for Duke.

Florida missed the front end of a one-and-one.

With only 22.7 seconds to play, the Gators still were down by one.

Then Trent's steal and foul led to free throws. He made both.

Florida was down by three.

Egor Koulechov missed a 3-pointer at the buzzer and Duke left the building with the PK80 Motion title. That's not unnecessary play-by-play in the digital age, when anyone can see the box scores on their phones and tablets.

That's a description of the mess Duke made again -- and somehow cleaned up by the final buzzer.

These imperfect Blue Devils are the best team in America.

Just imagine when they figure it all out.

Duke shows once again that it can flip a switch -- and overcome its flaws

Jeff Borzello, ESPN.com
November 30, 2017

If there were ever a time for Duke to take an upset loss, Wednesday had all the ingredients.

It was Duke's fourth game in seven days and its first true road game of the season, at a raucous Assembly Hall in Archie Miller's first huge home game at Indiana.

The Blue Devils got five total points from their bench and shot 18 percent from 3-point range, Wendell Carter Jr. fouled out, and they looked worn down late in the second half. It didn't matter.

Duke dominated the final five minutes like it did against Texas and Florida at the PK80 last weekend, pulling away for a 91-81 win over Indiana. Against Texas, Duke went down 69-62 with 5:24 left. The Blue Devils ended up sending the game into overtime and outscoring the Longhorns 12-5 in the extra period. Against Florida, Duke went down 82-72 with 4:38 remaining. The Blue Devils finished the game on a 15-2 run to win by three.

On Wednesday against Indiana, the game was tied 76-76 with 5:09 remaining. Indiana didn't make another field goal, and Duke finished on a 16-6 run.

In the past three games, Duke's opponents have shot a combined 5-for-25 from the field in the last five minutes of games and overtime. In that span, the Blue Devils have outscored their opponents 56-19.

"The last three or four games, that's what it came down to," Marvin Bagley III told ESPN. "We've just gotta figure out a way to do that in the beginning instead of waiting all the way to the end, where it could be a chance we might not come back. You've gotta start playing defense like that in the beginning of the games to get stops, to make sure we get out ahead."

Two things are true right now: Duke is the best team in the country, and Duke is far from a finished product. The Blue Devils have plenty of flaws.

Their man-to-man defense has been carved up consistently throughout the opening month, forcing Mike Krzyzewski to switch to zone defenses for long stretches, as he did Wednesday night. Opponents are getting easy scoring chances at the rim, with a severe lack of rim protection from Duke's bigs defensively.

Duke isn't a very good perimeter-shooting team, and that might not change. Grayson Allen is a very good 3-point shooter, and Gary Trent Jr. showed the ability to make shots in high school even if that hasn't translated yet. But Trevon Duval is a non-shooter from 3-point range, and Alex O'Connell isn't playing enough in big games to make an impact.

The bench is giving Krzyzewski very little right now, and the starting five was completely exhausted in the second half Wednesday. They survived an injury scare when Duval went to the bench in the first half and had trainers looking at his right foot. He wasn't able to sub back into the game late in the first half and didn't put his sneaker back on while on the bench.

Duval came back out for the second half, though, and shook off some early discomfort to finish with 15 points and six assists in 38 minutes. But what if Duval went down? Duke doesn't have a true backup point guard.

"There's a lot of things. We need time to fix it," Krzyzewski said after the game. "Especially with a young group, you have to expect slippage. Their habits are not well-defined yet. The only way to develop a habit is to practice. The main habit we've developed over these nine games is how to win. Which is a great habit."

Could all this hurt Duke at some point? Of course, but the Blue Devils have already beaten Michigan State with Bagley sidelined for much of the game, come back to beat Texas and Florida and held off an upset bid at Indiana.

The perfect storm for the Blue Devils to lose has happened a few times already -- and we're still waiting for it to fully trip them up. Maybe this is just what Duke is this season: a supremely talented team that can flip a switch whenever it wants to turn a deficit into a lead or a close game into a blowout.

"We have four freshmen out there all the time," Krzyzewski said. "They're just learning how to manage a game as far as the effort, the intensity. When they learn how to play in four-minute stretches, we'll improve. We kind of pace because they know they're going to play minutes, and they've played a lot of games. At the end, they know there's not another four minutes. We've been the better team in the last four minutes of games. It's a good four minutes to be the better team in."

Here's the scary thing: Over the next few weeks, Duke will have some time to work out its issues. The Blue Devils have another three games in seven days beginning Saturday at home against South Dakota, but then they have only one game from Dec. 10 to Dec. 29. Their starters can rest, their depth can develop, and Krzyzewski can hope to instill more consistent defensive effort.

The best team in the country -- with plenty of room to grow. That's a dangerous thought for the rest of the country.

"This is a work in progress," Krzyzewski said. "But it's a good work in progress."

Improvisation the secret behind Duke's No. 1 offense

C.L. Brown, TheAthletic

December 7, 2017

Duke's ascension to being the No. 1 team in adjusted offensive efficiency according to Kenpom.com starts with a simple concept.

Read and react.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski isn't calling a bunch of set plays to micromanage how the Blue Devils manufacture points. Despite starting four freshmen, he has already given his players the same freedom he affords his most-veteran teams.

"We put in sets, we put in our motion stuff, but you just learn to play together and make reads," senior guard Grayson Allen says. "If we need to back it out and call sets we will, but we really just want to come down and move and play. This team does a really good job of passing right now. I think that's something that usually comes later in teams that are so new. But it's actually come pretty quickly for us with our chemistry."

Freshman point guard Trevon Duval estimates that about 70 percent of the offense — one ranked fourth nationally in scoring, at 94.2 points per game — is generated "just from playing." That's why Allen says the Blue Devils will make plays in games that they never attempted in practice.

"You really don't want to say you stand here and do this and do that," Allen says. "You don't want to lock them into a play, you want to teach guys to make reads. It's actually a pretty awesome thing that the freshmen have been able to do a really good job of that so far."

And they've been really unselfish. With 34 assists in its 124-67 win over St. Francis on Tuesday, Duke broke a program record that had stood for more than 30 years. The Blue Devils are averaging an assist on 59.3 percent of their made field goals. Should they maintain that pace, it would be higher than all of their national championship teams: 1991 (56.1), 1992 (58.9), 2001 (57.6), 2010 (52.8) and 2015 (53.5).

It's not always perfect. The downside of giving freshmen such freedom is sometimes they revert to high school habits, such as going 1-on-1 without regard to spacing or an offensive flow. That's typically when Krzyzewski will step in and call a play, just as a reminder of what his players need to do.

"Usually when you let them go, they're unified and kind of flowing together, and then they'll make decisions, make reads, based on how all of them are interacting," says Krzyzewski, pointing to a 78-61 win over Southern on Nov. 17. "I thought a number of things they did were based on how they were reacting individually, so you saw some not-so-smart plays. That's why they're human beings, young human beings."

The majority of time the Blue Devils have played like machines. Opponents have found it difficult to get them out of a rhythm because they have too many weapons. Held to a season-low 39 percent shooting from the floor by Michigan State on Nov. 14, Duke grabbed 25 offensive rebounds, or 54 percent of its missed shots.

Despite having so many new faces, new personalities and new egos to blend into the starting unit, the Blue Devils identified their strength on offense quickly. Not unlike when the 2015 national title team would throw the ball to Jahlil Okafor and make its reads from there, this team can go through Marvin Bagley III. And Allen believes the fact that Krzyzewski isn't micromanaging will be a big benefit near the end of the season.

“It really creates more of a chemistry when you’re not just running through a set,” Allen says. “When you’re kind of figuring out what guys are going to do, and that opens up a lot of stuff.”

Running on instinct helps having big men like Bagley and fellow freshman Wendell Carter Jr., who can rescue a busted set in more than one way. Krzyzewski has the tandem working high-low drills every day in practice when the team breaks into position drills.

“The big throws to the other big,” says Bagley, who leads the ACC with a 21.9 scoring average. “We practice sealing and making sure we get the ball over the defense so it’s not stolen.”

The repetition has gotten to the point that Carter says “it does get boring at times,” but it’s also made operating in a high-low with Bagley “almost second nature.” Six of Carter’s 17 assists have led to Bagley baskets. Six of Bagley’s 19 assists have led to Carter buckets.

Krzyzewski says Bagley and Carter aren’t typical big men, calling them “basketball players who are big.” A key to Duke’s offensive success is that both are so versatile.

“They possess not just a low-post skill, they have a great feel for the game and they can shoot,” Krzyzewski says. “They have good hands, and it doesn’t happen very often — big guys who can pass. Both of them can really pass, and they like it. So they’re going to keep growing together. Those two guys with Grayson from the outside and Trevon just being that point guard and Gary [Trent Jr.] playing off those guys is a really good starting five.”

A strong argument could be made that Duke has the best starting five in the nation. All five average in double figures. The starters account for 81 percent of the team’s scoring while having seemingly 100 percent of the freedom to do so.

Duval says Krzyzewski always envisioned it would be this way.

“He said when he was recruiting me that he was going to hand me the keys to the car, and he did,” says Duval, who adds he’s not at the wheel of just any old sedan. “I’m driving a Ferrari. We’re running and gunning.”

Freshman talent has Duke at the head of the basketball class

Julian Benbow, The Boston Globe
December 7, 2017

As the numbers on the scoreboard at Cameron Indoor Stadium escalated from staggering to eye-popping to incomprehensible Tuesday night against an overwhelmed St. Francis (Pa.) team, the only people in the building who weren't in awe of Duke's offensive onslaught were the Blue Devils themselves.

Duke threw an astounding 124 points at St. Francis, the most the program has poured on any opponent since 1997. The Blue Devils' 34 assists were a school record. The 71 points they scored in the first half were 1 shy of the school record for a half. Five players finished in double figures, and all but one of the 14 players who touched the floor got a bucket.

But for freshman shooting guard Gary Trent Jr., it wasn't a matter of the top-ranked Blue Devils being in peak early-season form; it was simply business as usual.

"No matter what the score is, we continue to play hard at all times," Trent said.

Even when he woke up the next morning and realized that those 124 points were indeed real and not some form of college hoops nirvana, his outlook didn't change. His mind was on the next task.

"After the game was over, I didn't really worry about it too much," Trent said. "After that game, we just put that aside and we're just really worried about Boston College."

With a top-ranked and undefeated team coming to Conte Forum on Saturday for its first Atlantic Coast Conference matchup, it makes more sense for BC to be the one worrying.

But for a team built on the talent of eight freshmen who make up the nation's top recruiting class, every game — especially an ACC opener — is a new test.

"We start ACC play, I heard it was like a whole other league within itself," Trent said. "It's crazy talent. So we're really just trying to lock on that now."

A ceiling that was already high coming into the season has only risen since the Blue Devils ripped off 11 wins to start.

Duke hauled in the No. 1 player in the country in Marvin Bagley III as part of its star-studded recruiting class and sealed the top spot in the AP preseason poll for a second straight season.

But they were flush with inexperience all over the floor, from Trent (the top shooting guard prospect) to Wendell Carter Jr. (the No. 1 power forward) to Trevon Duval (the No. 1 point guard).

If there was a question, it was how quickly the core of young players could get their performance to match the expectations.

“We think we can go pretty far as a team,” Carter said. “We talk about it every day. We have something special. We’ve just got to keep working.

“The biggest challenge is just, having so much talent, we’ve got to be able to jell together and we should be good.”

What may have been overlooked is how much familiarity they had among themselves long before stepping foot on campus.

Trent, an Ohio native, knew Duval, who came from Delaware, since they were in the second grade, crossing paths on the AAU circuit. He first met Carter in middle school.

“So I’ve known these guys for a while now,” Trent said. “I know their games and they know mine as well. We know everything we can do, we know everything we can’t do, and we’re slowly but surely figuring out that about the whole team.

“It’s coming together quick for us. Everything’s clicking, in a sense, and we’re just going to continue to run with that.”

When Carter was narrowing his college choices, one of the surprise finalists was Harvard. The prestige of the Ivy League and the Crimson program under Tommy Amaker made it attractive to Carter. The allure of a program-changing player (and possibly a one-and-done) made Carter attractive to the Crimson.

But Duke was, well, Duke.

“It played a huge part,” Carter said. “I had a great relationship with the coaching staff here and I knew a lot of the kids that were coming here from my class also. So I just saw it as the perfect opportunity, and they’re a great academic school. They’re not Harvard, but they’re pretty close.

“I just saw it as the best of both worlds, so I just took it and ran with it.”

Whether it was the baptism at Cameron to start the season or the State Farm Champions Classic in Chicago or the PK 80 Phil Knight Invitational in Portland, Ore., Carter and the rest of the fresh faces quickly saw first-hand the weight the Duke brand carries.

“There’s definitely something special,” Carter said. “Being the No. 1 team in this country, it’s definitely fun. Going to other people’s houses, you always have a target on your back, and that’s just going to make your opponent play even harder and that just makes the game more competitive.”

Duke doesn’t have to look far back through history to find examples of teams built on super freshmen. They’ve heard the comparisons to the Kentucky teams. They know about the freshman class last year that lost in the second round of the tournament.

“I definitely do look at some of the teams that were young,” Carter said. “I don’t try to compare ourselves to them, because we have something special over here. So we’re just trying to get to the final goal.”

To them, their youth doesn't matter on the floor.

"It's crazy, we'll be playing out there and it'll be all these freshmen and they consider us young," Trent said. "But we were just talking yesterday like, 'We look older than them.' So it's really kind of hard to say we're young."

But they know they are in for a season full of firsts, in a program with so much history.

"Everything we do is a new experience," Trent said. "We're slowly but surely getting past that stage a little bit. We had a couple big stages and a couple dogfights, so we got a couple things out of the way, but there's so much more we still need to continue to learn — and that we're going to learn — but it all starts this Saturday when ACC play starts."

Opponent aside, Duke building better defensive habits

Lauren Brownlow, WRAL.com

January 20, 2018

Duke has a historically good offense. That is going to continue, no matter how many dry spells senior Grayson Allen goes through as a shooter or no matter how many turnovers they have in the first 30 minutes of a game (19 at Miami, but none in the final 11). Duke's offense is so good, in fact, and so potent that it can withstand things that normal teams can't. There are so many options.

What it does have to do, though, is play at least passable defense. Against NC State, Duke didn't do that. Against Boston College, Duke didn't do that. Even in a win over Florida State at home, Duke didn't really do that. But that was Duke's first three ACC games.

Since then, Duke has held four teams to an offensive efficiency (per statistician Ken Pomeroy) of 94.5 or worse. That was Miami's, in a game the Hurricanes got whatever they wanted early. Until Duke went into a zone that worked just well enough.

Duke knew it wouldn't need any defensive switches or anything fancy against a bad, bad Pitt team. So what they did was come out looking more like Duke teams of old -- pressing up on the ball, getting into the passing lanes and even adding in a three-quarter-court zone press for good measure, just to keep an already-rattled Pitt team even more flustered.

"I think our help defense is better, but against Miami, we didn't extend because they drive so well," Duke head coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "You have to be able to do different things defensively because you play different offenses and different talents. But the thing that this team didn't have ... was a base of defense -- the foot movements or whatever -- where you could go out a little bit more or stay in. We're in the process of developing that base.

"Miami (was) not just man but zone. Today, you saw primarily aggressive and a three-quarter-court zone press. But our base is better. Our foot movements and our talk is better."

Allen in particular fed a lot of the defensive energy from his teammates, getting two of Duke's eight steals on some of those wing overplays.

"I mean, I haven't had much offense in the last six games, so I'm having fun playing defense," Allen joked afterwards. "I like getting deflections and getting out there in the fast break."

Vintage Duke teams under Krzyzewski have always defended well. The recent one-and-done-laden groups haven't always gotten it very quickly, or sometimes at all. There's still no telling what this Duke team will end up being defensively, but they knew after the NC State game something had to change.

"Since the NC State game, we've gotten better defensively. You didn't need much to get better defensively from what we did in our first three ACC games," Krzyzewski said. "But we're working at it. I'm just trying to have our guys get better, and we're getting better."

One big reason for the improvement has been his best two players' willingness to want to get better on that end, too. Krzyzewski said that he Carter -- who had a game-high 21 points on 9-of-10 shooting -- has protected Duke's basket very well of late, and Marvin Bagley (who added 20 points of his own) is improving as well.

"(Carter) and Marvin are such good students of the game. They want to learn so much. So many of these kids when they come from high school, they haven't watched tape," Krzyzewski said. "They've watched tape of when they dunk or do something spectacular and they put mixtapes together and put all kinds of music, but they don't watch their foot movements. They don't watch when they commit a silly foul. They don't watch what they do on the help side on defense.

"And so when they come here -- and we're not the only program -- they have an opportunity to be educated about the game. And our two big men really want to learn about the game and they're very, very smart. It's on them, because they want to do it. They've been really a joy to coach, those two guys."

Carter has seven blocks and four steals in Duke's last two games and has been a noticeably disruptive defensive presence -- something Duke hasn't had much this year. Bagley has four blocks and five steals in the last three games and has been a beast on the defensive boards.

"So much of defense -- it's like learning to dance," Krzyzewski said. "Your body doesn't move naturally like that. It has to learn how to dance, just like you see all these great dancers -- you all can't do that. They can do it. But we're trying to teach them how to dance defensively.

"The music to the dance is talk, and if you get five guys talking, maybe you can dance together and maybe you can win. It's really, for me, kind of easy to understand but it's not easy to get it done. So our guys are working at it."

The caveat, of course, is a necessary one and it's that Duke has played bad offensive teams, largely, during this stretch. But NC State is 11th in ACC-only offense and the Blue Devils couldn't stop them. Pitt is obviously dead last while Miami is 12th and Wake is 13th.

The Blue Devils will get Wake again this week, this time on the road on Tuesday. Allen knows that it can be dangerous. Because any game can. If Duke lets up, they risk letting an opponent get hot and run them out of the gym. Wake has certainly proven itself capable of beating Duke over the years.

"Things are going really well for us right now and so when things are going well, that's the point we need to lock in even more because teams will be gunning for us," Allen said.

Contrasting styles of U.Va., Duke never more compelling

David Teel, The Daily Press

January 25, 2018

Duke-Virginia basketball clashes will showcase contrasting approaches for as long as Mike Krzyzewski and Tony Bennett steer the respective programs. The Blue Devils' pro-style offense often scores in the 80s, and the Cavaliers' pack-line defense routinely stifles opponents into the 50s.

The juxtaposition will be especially compelling Saturday at Cameron Indoor Stadium (2 p.m., CBS television). Virginia (19-1, 8-0 ACC) and Duke (18-2, 6-2) are the league's best teams to date, and both are among the top five in the media and coaches polls, the NCAA's Rating Percentage Index and Ken Pomeroy rankings. Moreover, this is their only regular-season meeting.

No ACC basketball rivalry ever will approach Duke-North Carolina, but Saturday may be the conference's Game of the Year.

And be your preference old-school stats or advanced metrics, the contrast between the two is striking.

Let's start with the traditional NCAA numbers.

Duke leads the nation in scoring at 91.7 points per game. Virginia leads the nation in scoring defense at 51.6 points per game.

The Cavaliers haven't allowed more than 91 points in regulation since a 93-81 setback at North Carolina five years ago. The Blue Devils haven't scored fewer than 52 since a 55-50 loss at Miami last season. They haven't scored fewer than 52 at Cameron since a 47-46 win over Georgia Tech in 1982, Krzyzewski's second year as coach.

Duke ranks fifth in field-goal percentage at 51.0. Virginia is second to Michigan State in field-goal percentage defense at 36.4.

The most recent Cavaliers opponent to make half its shots was Notre Dame (52.2 percent) in last season's ACC tournament. The Blue Devils haven't shot less than 36.5 percent since the aforementioned

defeat last year at Miami (31.8). They haven't shot less than 36.5 percent at home since a February 2014 victory over Maryland (33.3 percent).

Now let's shift to Ken Pomeroy's tempo-based stats, which measure offensive and defensive efficiency based on points per possession.

Virginia's adjusted defensive efficiency rating, which adds a schedule-strength component, is an absurdly low and national-best 81.5. Duke ranks second in adjusted offensive efficiency to Villanova at 126.2

The Cavaliers' raw defensive efficiency of 83.6, also Division I's best, translates to .836 points per possession. The Blue Devils' raw offensive efficiency of 1.245 points per possession leads Division I.

In the five-plus seasons since Pomeroy began archiving game-by-game efficiency stats, Duke's fewest points per possession at home is 0.98 versus Tennessee State last season. The Blue Devils' fewest in an ACC home game is 1.0, most recently against North Carolina in 2016, and their lowest this season in any game at Cameron is 1.13 versus Southern.

U.Va.'s worst defensive efficiency this season is 1.10 in its only defeat, at West Virginia. The last Virginia opponent to approach Duke's 1.245 average was Pittsburgh (1.28) last season, when the Panthers made 13-of-21 from beyond the arc in an overtime upset.

Finally, there's tempo. The Cavaliers average 59.9 possessions per game, the slowest pace among Division I's 351 teams. The Blue Devils are 38th in tempo at 72.1 possessions per game.

Duke's average possession lasts 15 seconds, 13th quickest. Virginia's average is 20.5 seconds, again the nation's slowest.

No ACC rival has adjusted to the Cavaliers' pace — the slower team's tempo usually prevails — as well as the Blue Devils. Duke is 5-2 against Virginia in the last six years, since Bennett's program has become a postseason staple.

Six of those seven games were played in the Cavaliers' wheelhouse, 58-61 possessions. Ironically, Virginia in 2013 won the lone contest played at Duke-like speed (68 possessions).

Krzyzewski and Bennett have started the same lineup in each of their respective games, but the similarity ends there. Virginia starts seniors Devon Hall and Isaiah Wilkins, junior Jack Salt and sophomores Ty Jerome and Kyle Guy. Duke starts senior Grayson Allen and good-as-advertised freshmen Marvin Bagley III, Gary Trent Jr., Wendell Carter Jr., and Trevon Duval.

The Blue Devils are the ACC's most gifted team. The Cavaliers are the league's most cohesive team.

Restock the Daily Press limo for Comrade Wood and me. Saturday can't get here fast enough.

Duke defense takes step in right direction in win at Wake

Brett Friedlander, The North State Journal

January 24, 2018

Even with its abundance of talent, the Duke basketball team is still very much a work in progress.

Especially on defense.

The fact that the Blue Devils have still won 18 games and are ranked fourth in the nation despite their defensive growing pains speaks to how much better they can still get if they can figure out a way to consistently keep their opponents from scoring.

They took a major step in that direction Tuesday by forcing Wake Forest into 15 first-half turnovers and 21 for the game while holding the Deacons to a 5 of 20 performance from 3-point range in an 84-70 win at Joel Coliseum.

Three Duke players recorded multiple steals as Duke won its fifth straight ACC game, three of which have come on the road.

“We’re getting better on defense,” said senior guard Grayson Allen, who finished with 17 points, six assists and three steals. “We have such good athletes and length and talent that we can really stop teams, get in passing lanes and just go. Our defense was huge tonight because it’s what allowed us to get the lead when other things weren’t going right.”

Playing Wake for the second time in just 11 days, Duke (18-2, 6-2 ACC) put a concerted effort into aggressively pressuring the Deacons’ ballhandlers on the perimeter, taking away their passing lanes and forcing them into bad decisions.

The strategy paid dividends right away by forcing six turnovers on Wake’s first eight possessions of the game. Though only three of those early miscues turned into points, the Blue Devils’ relentlessness on defense eventually translated into greater offensive productiveness.

With Allen and wing Gary Trent Jr. doing most of the damage in transition, combining for more than half of Duke’s scoring in the opening 20 minutes, the Blue Devils turned the Deacons’ 15 first-half turnovers into 26 points.

That helped them build as much as a 17-point lead, with only minimal contributions from prized freshman big men Marvin Bagley III and Wendell Carter Jr.

“Duke is obviously a very talented basketball team. We didn’t do ourselves any favors by how we handled the ball in the first half,” Manning said. “We had 15 turnovers and they led to far too many points. In the second half we did a little better, but that hole is probably too much to overcome.”

That Wake (8-12, 1-7) was even as close as 41-30 at the break was a testament to its own improving low post presence, Doral Moore. The 7-foot-1 sophomore dominated the offensive boards, scoring 10 of his 14 first-half points on second-chance opportunities.

He finished the game going 9 for 9 from the floor on his way to an 18-point, 12-rebound performance before fouling out. But his effectiveness was neutralized by Duke's defense in the second half.

It was about that time that Bagley and Carter began to assert themselves on the offensive end. Between them they went to the free-throw line 24 times, converting 18 while both finishing with double-doubles.

Carter had 23 points and 12 rebounds. Bagley added 16 points and 11 boards while Trent finished with 19 points.

"Our wings can score too, but our main thing is to get it into the post," Trent said. "It's just a matter of attacking and finding our spots. We just play our game, play hard and it works out for us."

Scoring has never been an issue for these Blue Devils. Their average of 92.1 points per game is by far the best in the ACC. The problem is that they also rank 13th in a 15-team league in scoring defense at 72.8 points per game.

Although they had had a slight hiccup midway through the second half in which Brandon Childress scored 11 of Wake's points in a 19-7 run that cut a 20-point lead down to eight, coach Mike Krzyzewski was pleased with a defensive effort he said has been building since giving up 96 points in a loss to NC State 2½ weeks ago.

Childress matched Moore's total of 17 points, but he also committed five turnovers in his career-high 32 minutes off the bench. That was still better than starting point guard Bryant Crawford, who coughed it up eight times.

"They're a young team and we didn't have all that practice before. We had games and then breaks," Krzyzewski said. "We're moving our feet really well right now. It helps us in man and zone, and we work on it every day. The guys have been enthusiastic about it and it's paying off. We're getting better. We're getting better defensively."

There's no defense for No. 4 Duke losing to St. John's, but still time to get things right

Gary Parrish, CBSSports.com

February 3, 2018

It will always be shocking when a team on an 11-game losing streak beats a team ranked fourth in the nation. That kind of thing never makes sense. But if it were ever going to happen, this is probably the time for it. Because nonsensical results in games that were mismatches on paper have been fairly common this season.

"We got what we deserved," Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski told reporters at New York's Madison Square Garden on Saturday after his Duke Blue Devils lost 81-77 to the Big East's last-place team.

Yes, Duke lost to St. John's.

Which means Duke lost to a team that's 0-11 in the Big East. To a team that's already lost twice to Georgetown. To a team that lost 91-74 at home to DePaul. To a team that's playing without its second leading scorer (Marcus LoVett). And to a team that spent last Saturday losing 70-45 at Butler.

The only thing crazier, at least from a point-spread perspective, was No. 7 Kansas losing 84-79 at home to Oklahoma State despite being a 12-point favorite. But it should be noted that Oklahoma State entered with wins over Oklahoma, Florida State and Texas. And Kansas had already lost twice inside Allen Fieldhouse this season. So with all due respect to the oddsmakers, that surprising result really didn't feel as crazy as the preseason No. 1 losing as an 11-point favorite to a team on an 11-game losing streak.

Yes, Duke lost to St. John's.

So that's now 11 times this season that a team ranked in the top 10 of the preseason AP poll has lost to a sub-75 KenPom opponent. Without context, that might mean nothing to you. But understand that it only happened three times all of last season. So this is definitely excessive. And Duke is responsible for two of those sub-75 losses.

The problem, once again, was defense.

St. John's got one easy shot after another regardless of whether Duke was playing man-to-man or zone. The Red Storm ended up shooting 46.2 percent from the field and 47.1 percent from 3-point range. On the season, St. John's effective field-goal percentage is 47.9, which ranks 289th nationally. Against Duke, it was 55.9, which is a number good enough currently to rank 25th nationally.

"It was tough for us to defend them," Krzyzewski said. "We made ourselves look bad. We did not play basketball, the first 32 minutes, worthy of our program. We had blank faces. We didn't talk. We were like five individuals out there. And it was disgusting."

It's hard to argue with that assessment, if only because it defies logic that a roster this talented could be so awesome on one end of the court and so ineffective on the other. Duke is now No. 2 in offensive efficiency and No. 69 in defensive efficiency. In other words, the Blue Devils are as good as Villanova and Purdue on the offensive end of the court, and as bad as UC Davis and UC Irvine on the other. And until that's fixed, or at least improved, Duke will remain susceptible to losses like this loss.

That said, it's not all bad.

Duke is still 19-4 overall, 7-3 in the ACC and ranked fourth in KenPom thanks to a resume featuring six top-50 wins. On this same day in 2015, Duke was 18-3 overall, 5-3 in the ACC and ranked seventh in KenPom thanks to a resume featuring six top-50 wins. And that Duke team went on to win a national title. So making any grand prisoner-of-the-moment statements about what Duke won't or can't do seems foolish right now.

The talent is still in place.

There's still time to get things right.

But, undeniably, things must get right and fast. The Blue Devils are visiting North Carolina on Thursday. And if you can lose to the Red Storm at MSG, you can certainly lose to the Tar Heels at the Dean Smith Center.

Roles reversed for North Carolina, Duke in rivalry matchup

CL Brown, TheAthletic

February 8, 2018

Roy Williams found himself saying something he'd never before stated about Duke since returning to take over as North Carolina's coach in 2003. Williams is the guy who typically fields the team built with size and a strong inside game. But the Blue Devils his Tar Heels will face on Thursday are built in an entirely different way.

Duke is the team with the talented bigs, and it's Carolina that wants to play the game on the perimeter.

"You've heard me say 100 times this year," says Williams. "I'm really concerned about defending around the rim. I've never said those things when we're getting ready to play Duke."

A pair of freshman forwards, 6-foot-11 Marvin Bagley III and 6-foot-10 Wendell Carter Jr., gives the Blue Devils more of a traditional lineup with two post players. That's the style Williams has been accustomed to playing during his tenure at Carolina. The duo combines to average 35 points and 20 rebounds per game. Led by the pair, Duke has scored 53.7 percent of its points on 2-point shots. It's the highest mark for the Blue Devils since they tallied the same percentage inside the arc during the 2006-07 season.

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski is in unfamiliar territory as well. He's usually not overly concerned with the Tar Heels' perimeter shooters because the Blue Devils have concentrated on trying to defend inside the paint. But he stops short of calling it "small ball" because he doesn't believe the Heels concede that much size with their lineup.

North Carolina still leads the ACC in rebounds per game (43.3) and in rebounding margin (11.7), the only team in the conference that tops the Blue Devils in both categories. Krzyzewski is quick to point out the Tar Heels haven't suffered on the offensive boards without having true post players, as their offensive rebounding percentage of 38.7 is third nationally. (Duke is No. 1 at 41.2 percent, according to KenPom.com.)

"They're not really that small," Krzyzewski says. "What they all have are perimeter skills, and that's the difference. I think they've adapted really well to fit their style to fit their kids, and they play it very well."

Williams's teams haven't traditionally relied on the 3-point shot, but 34 percent of the Heels' field-goal attempts have come from behind the arc. That's the first time since the 2005-06 season that Carolina has cracked 30 percent, and it's only the second time under Williams.

Carolina is shooting 37.2 percent from 3-point range, led by Luke Maye (48.7), Joel Berry (36.3), Cameron Johnson (36.2) and Kenny Williams (39.3). The Tar Heels haven't shot that high a percentage from deep since 2012-13, when they averaged 37.6 percent. The last Williams team that had four players with more than 50 attempts each shoot more than 35 percent from 3 was the 2005 national champion.

"It is different for sure," Williams says. "I hadn't considered we had swapped places. I don't know how comfortable Mike is. I'm not comfortable at all, I can tell you that."

Williams didn't start the season playing small. Garrison Brooks, a 6-9 freshman forward, started the first 16 games before being replaced by Johnson, a 6-6 graduate transfer from Pittsburgh. The Heels put their most experienced lineup on the floor but essentially eliminated a back-to-the-basket post presence.

"They have five guys who can play like guards," says Duke senior guard Grayson Allen, who adds that he sees little advantage in having played on perimeter-oriented teams because Carolina's personnel is so

different. “Roy Williams is a great coach. He’s going to adapt to what kind of players they have, what kind of talent they have, just like Coach [Krzyszewski] has done.”

Since 2001, Duke has more often than not been the team that has played that way. It was a style created out of necessity. Heading into the final game of the '01 regular season, Duke forward Carlos Boozer suffered a foot injury that would necessitate a shakeup in the starting lineup. Carolina had already won at Cameron Indoor Stadium, 85-83, and with Boozer sidelined was confident it would sweep the season series.

Instead of trying to match the Tar Heels' tandem up front of Brendan Haywood and Kris Lang, Krzyzewski played a smaller, quicker lineup with four perimeter players who could shoot.

“We were completely caught off guard,” says Jason Capel, who played for Carolina from 1998-2002 and is now an ESPN analyst. “But it was genius. Nobody had done that to us. We didn’t game-plan for it. We hadn’t prepared for it.”

Duke, which led the nation averaging 10.6 made 3-pointers per game that season, knocked down 14 against the Heels en route to a 95-81 victory. Jay Williams scored 33 points and Shane Battier, who was used at power forward, added 25 points and 11 rebounds. The win gave the Blue Devils a share of the ACC regular-season title with UNC, but more important it impacted future lineups.

“It was extremely hard to guard,” says Duke assistant coach Nate James, who played for the Blue Devils from 1997-2001. “It became a staple of what we did going down the road. We watched clips of some of those games, and there were possessions where we would pump-fake, drive, kick. Pump-fake, drive, kick. Somebody would hit the 3. Very tough to guard, especially when you have that many weapons on the floor at the same time.”

The past few years the Blue Devils have stuck with undersized power forwards – think Jabari Parker, Justise Winslow, Brandon Ingram and Jayson Tatum – against Carolina, which by and large has translated to success on the perimeter.

Duke has won seven of the past 10 meetings in the series and four of the last six games in Chapel Hill. Carolina has taken note of that success, and it’s led Berry, a senior, to utter words he’s never said about the rivalry game.

“Their size,” Berry says, “can be something that’s a disadvantage.”

Duke's Brotherhood Goes Far Beyond the Basketball Court

Peter Robert Casey, *Slam Magazine*

February 8, 2018

Duke's starting five is in a 2-3 formation at center court of Cameron Indoor Stadium. Trevon Duval and Gary Trent Jr are upfront, while Grayson Allen, Marvin Bagley III and Wendell Carter Jr hold down the rear.

It takes only a minute for Allen—Duke's captain, lone senior and only non-freshman starter—to begin ribbing the youngsters. As the jokes roll, the group breaks out in laughter and Trent Jr drapes his right arm around the fourth-year veteran in playful solidarity.

That's what brothers do. They laugh together, they compete together, they fight together—sometimes with each other, but always for each other.

Duke's brotherhood defines its program and goes back decades. The Brotherhood—yes, known as #TheBrotherhood on social media—is a relationship forged by bond, not blood, but it runs just as deep

“What The Brotherhood means to me is, simply, unity and togetherness,” Trent Jr tells SLAM. “Being part of something that's bigger than yourself, fighting for someone other than yourself, just always looking out for the next man and your brother.”

“The Brotherhood is basically the bond that is Duke Basketball,” Allen says. “It's former players from 20 years ago to guys now and to future commits. It's the whole thing. You share a common experience of playing here, playing at Duke, playing for Coach.”

“Coach” is Mike Krzyzewski, the center of it all. The HOF bench boss, now in his 38th season at Duke, has amassed over 1,000 wins, five National Championships, 12 ACC regular season titles and 14 ACC Tournament crowns.

Hundreds of players have come through Coach K's program, and this season alone there are 19 former Blue Devils on NBA rosters [20 if you include Boston's Semi Ojeleye, who finished his collegiate career at SMU—Ed.], including Allen's former teammate and roommate, Justise Winslow, a third-year forward with the Miami Heat.

Allen and Winslow remain tight until this day, forever linked by the 2015 National Championship banner hanging from Cameron's rafters. Winslow attests that The Brotherhood extends all the way to the League.

“Everyone from the coaching staff, trainers, the entire Krzyzewski clan, Sam the chef and the players make it feel like a family,” Winslow says. “But, to be honest, I started feeling more a sense of The Brotherhood once I got to the League. Seeing guys on different teams, regardless of age, you know you can go and talk about anything, whether it's Duke-related or not.”

Winslow makes it back to Durham on occasion and his presence has had an impact on Allen's current roommate, Javin DeLaurier, a 6-10 sophomore forward from Shipman, VA. DeLaurier wears Winslow's old number (12) and says the NBA forward and other former Duke players regularly give him tips on the college game and “life in general.”

“I think the thing most people don’t understand is that it’s all-inclusive and lifelong,” DeLaurier says. “Guys that played before I even picked up a basketball come back and treat me like we’ve known each other forever. I think that’s the most under-appreciated thing about it.”

On a wall behind Krzyzewski’s desk hangs a photo from February ’09 of Jon Scheyer and Gerald Henderson as they walk off the court at Maryland’s Comcast Center after a thrilling 78-67 win over the Terps.

The former Duke standouts are both smiling, Henderson’s left arm wrapped around Scheyer’s shoulder. It’s a specific time and situation, but it conjures up the image of Allen and Trent Jr’s own interaction during our photo shoot. Two guys with different stories, from contrasting backgrounds, bonding through Duke basketball.

Krzyzewski lauded the photo in a Duke Basketball video published before the season, “*Gifts of the Game: Brotherhood.*”

“The picture with Gerald Henderson and Jon Scheyer is one of my favorites because it’s really what I want every young man who plays for me to experience and that is the feeling of The Brotherhood,” Coach K says in the vid.

Scheyer, who helped Duke capture its fourth title in 2010, currently serves as an assistant coach for the Blue Devils. That’s no coincidence. All of Scheyer’s colleagues—Associate Head Coach Jeff Capel, Assistant Coach Nate James and Special Assistant Nolan Smith—have played for Krzyzewski. It’s culture by design.

This collection of former Duke players-turned-coaches help serve as connective tissue from past generations to the present. It provides a continuity that Krzyzewski’s current team is trying to learn. The 2017-18 Blue Devils are not your typical band of Duke brothers.

After losing four of his top five scorers at the end of last season—three to the NBA and one to graduation—Krzyzewski hauled in a heralded quartet of five-star freshmen, including two elite bigs in Bagley and Carter Jr, a ready-made scorer in Trent Jr, and Duval, an explosive PG to pair with Allen. All are likely one-and-done prospects.

Despite a dramatic loss in offensive production and experience, Duke and its reloaded roster entered the season No. 1 in the AP poll for the second consecutive year and ninth time overall.

The young Blue Devils matched early expectations by reeling off 11 straight wins to open the 2017-18 campaign, including notable victories over then No. 2 Michigan State at the Champions Classic and then No. 7 Florida in the championship game of the Phil Knight Invitational.

Bagley, a walking double-double who graced our SLAM 212 cover, became the first player in Duke history to register consecutive 30-point, 15-rebound outings. The 6-11 forward leads the ACC in scoring (21.4 ppg) and rebounding (11.2 rpg) and has already claimed six Conference Player of the Week honors.

Allen, the Jacksonville, FL, native and Final Four hero his freshman year, is having a solid senior season, averaging 14.5 ppg and a career-high 4.4 apg.

His backcourt mate, Duval, is chipping in 11 points per while doling out an ACC-best 6.0 dimes and has demonstrated the ability to take over games down the stretch. Fellow freshmen Trent Jr and Carter Jr have made immediate impacts, each averaging double digits on a nightly basis.

Through their first 23 contests, the Blue Devils are the only team ranked among the NCAA's top 5 in scoring, rebounds and assists per game. True to its size and spirit, Duke is third in the nation in rebounding margin and first in offensive rebounding rate, claiming nearly 40 percent of its own misses.

But with youth comes challenges.

Due to sluggish starts, the team has trailed opponents at halftime in seven of its games, and Duke is ranked 69th in defensive efficiency while allowing an average of 79 points to ACC opponents. Defense requires trust and fluency in Krzyzewski's detailed man-to-man principles. Both of those elements take time, and with four freshmen, they don't have that time.

Duke came out flat at Boston College in their ACC opener, resulting in their first blemish of the season. Eagles guard Ky Bowman probed and poked holes in the defense all afternoon, running a pick-and-roll clinic to the tune of 30 points and 10 assists, while the team shot a blistering 57 percent from beyond the arc (15 for 27) to upset Coach K's crew 89-84.

After taking care of business against Florida State at home, Duke gave up an alarming 96 points in a road loss to unranked rivals NC State, dropping the Blue Devils to 15-2 overall and 1-2 in ACC play, their second defeat in four games. Duke shot 51.7 percent from the floor but hit just 3 of 15 treys and never led in the second frame.

Following the loss, Duke went on to win six out of its next seven ACC games, but on an early February afternoon at Madison Square Garden, the Blue Devils fell 81-77 to St. John's—losers of 11 straight up until that point. Following the game, Coach K was incensed, telling reporters after the game that his young team was "very frustrating group to coach" during the game and that the level of play was, "disgusting, really."

In every loss there's a lesson. And this Duke team is still learning.

"We hate losing, and we don't want to accept it, and I feel as if all of us, we have a will to win," Duval says. "Whenever we're down, whenever we're going through adversity, we always fight back and try to figure out a way to win."

"We're learning as a team and [Coach K is] learning as a coach about us individually," Bagley says. "Everybody is still learning, and I feel like once everybody knows everyone more, we can take this to the next level."

"I want to come every day and give my all to win a National Championship with this group of guys," Bagley says.

Whether Duke cuts down nets in April depends on work, growth and some luck. What is known, however, is that no matter how far this team goes, wherever its players end up, and whenever someone is in need, they will always have Krzyzewski and The Brotherhood. That's a given.

Duke beats UNC with 'organized pick-up basketball,' combines talent, teaching to win

March 3, 2018

Marilyn Payne, WRALSportsFan

The Blue Devils played loose at the beginning of Duke's season. Marvin Bagley III was as good, if not more powerful, than advertised and he helped the preseason No. 1 team blow defenses apart with what was the most potent and efficient offense in college basketball for a while.

Mike Krzyzewski's team got back to that – "a slightly more organized version of pick-up basketball," according to senior Grayson Allen – Saturday to beat No. 9 North Carolina 74-64.

"Coach just told us to play, at halftime to take a deep breath," Bagley said. "He's not calling any set plays in the second half is what he told us. We went out there, started cutting more and were playing without thinking."

Krzyzewski felt his team was ready to play in the first half, but was rattled by the way the Tar Heels (22-9, 11-7 ACC) pushed the ball down the court. Missed free throws (Duke was 4-14 in the first half) also shook the team's mentality from the floor, Krzyzewski said.

"Our defense overall was pretty good," Krzyzewski said. "At halftime I said 'Take the pianos off your back, quit playing with all the pressures of the world. You hit, cut, everybody touch the ball. You see a play, you make a play.' You could see them do that."

Roy Williams' team drove its lead to a 13-point edge with about 17 minutes to play, but Wendell Carter Jr. and Bagley dug into that 42-29 lead with scores on back-to-back trips down the court to begin the comeback.

"We just moved the ball around," Allen said. "We just played basketball and trusted our instincts and it worked. With a team that's talented like this, sometimes thinking less helps us."

Trevon Duval, who finished seven points and six assists, sank a three before the second media timeout to pull Duke within six points, then Allen (15 points) sank one the next trip down the court to counter Garrison Brooks' short jumper and get the Blue Devils within five. From there, Krzyzewski's team worked the ball inside where Bagley jammed it in to make it a three-point game.

"The movement helped," Allen said. "When Wendell and Marvin are scoring like that, you keep going to them."

Ultimately, the free-moving and -thinking offense worked its way to the 10-point lead as the zone defense continued to force North Carolina to struggle. In a true testament to how much this team has grown since the beginning of the season, Allen said the problem was never the team's defense.

A 9-0 run sealed the deal for Duke – the team retook the lead 52-50 and never trailed by more than one again. A three-point play and three-point shot from Bagley, which he followed up with a defensive rebound and Gary Trent Jr. finished the possession with a tre created that push.

"Offensively, we figured out that we can just play," Allen said. "A lot of times in the first half, we were just looking (..) for me to call a play. Our best offense is when we just flow into things. Things work out great just because there's so much talent."

The team agrees the win was big for many reasons, they now get a double-bye in the ACC Tournament as the No. 2 seed and head to Brooklyn, NY coming off a win instead of two losses. But most importantly, this Duke team figured out to play its signature 'just play,' offense that dominated the start of the season while still working in the counter plays, defense and ball-sharing tendencies that the young group had to learn in late December and January.

This regular-season sealing win showed that the group can combine its raw talent it started with and the needed teaching it had to learn with, and that's all Krzyzewski ever wanted from the group anyway. It's an ideal start to March for the team initially picked to finish first.

Duke and North Carolina set for critical Round 3 Friday night

March 9, 2018

Jeff Borzello, ESPN.com

Duke and North Carolina.

The best rivalry in the sport, separated by less than 10 miles -- but it's a game nearly 500 miles away in Brooklyn that could give one of them a chance at a No. 1 seed on Selection Sunday.

Duke ended Notre Dame's ACC tournament run on Thursday 88-70, while North Carolina overcame an early 14-0 deficit to beat Miami 82-65.

The wins set up Round 3 between the Blue Devils and Tar Heels on Friday (9 p.m. ET, ESPN) in the ACC semifinals, after the two teams split the regular-season series, with each team winning on its home court. This one means a little bit more, though. Neither team is in line for a 1-seed, with Kansas holding the final spot on the top line in most projected brackets. But if either Duke or North Carolina can win the ACC tournament -- combined with a Kansas loss in the Big 12 tournament -- it can find itself atop a region in three days.

"It's a big-time game," North Carolina senior Theo Pinson said. "Everyone and their mama gonna be watching the game tomorrow. I'm going to be ready. My teammates are going to be ready."

The two teams met less than a week ago, with Duke erasing a 10-point halftime deficit to win by 10. North Carolina won the first game exactly a month ago -- the final game Duke played man-to-man before switching to a full-time zone defense.

The Blue Devils have fully bought into playing the zone, with Thursday's win over Notre Dame the eighth straight game Duke's opponent has scored less than one point per possession.

"One trend that I'm seeing that is a good thing for our team is our defense at the end of the year is the best that it's been all season, and that's the same thing that happened in 2015," Duke senior Grayson Allen said. "At the end of that year, by the time the tournament came around, we were playing -- we were one of the best defenses in the country."

Allen hit his first five 3-pointers on Thursday against Notre Dame, finishing with 23 points. It was his fifth 20-plus-point effort in his past eight games -- after hitting that mark just five times in the first 24 games of the season. Equally as important, Marvin Bagley III finished with 33 points and 17 rebounds, a good sign considering a common refrain over the past month was that Allen and Bagley never seemed to have big games on the same night.

With Allen and Bagley clicking at the same time, though, and the zone defense locked in, Duke is starting to hit its peak at the right time.

“We're definitely on a roll right now,” Bagley said. “Everything is -- we don't have it all figured out yet. We're still learning, one thing at a time. But I definitely think that we're getting better and we're continuing to grow as a team, and it's not a better time to grow as it is in March when we're getting into tournaments and stuff like that. It's a perfect time for us to continue to come together and play at our best.”

North Carolina hasn't done anything as drastic as switch from a man-to-man defense to a zone, but the Tar Heels aren't the same team they were when they beat Duke earlier this season, either. The biggest change has come from Pinson, who has now had six double-doubles in his past 15 games -- after doing it just once in his career prior to this recent stretch. Pinson has scored in double figures in eight straight games, going for a career-high 25 points on Thursday against Miami.

Pinson is taking on more of a playmaker role, going off the dribble and finding teammates. He was credited with only three assists on Thursday, but it felt like more.

“I have the ball in my hands a lot, so I have the choice of shooting the ball or passing to my teammates,” Pinson said. “If they're not going to play me, I've got to be aggressive. That gets my teammates going. If I'm scoring, I'm a threat, so that means they have to guard me, too, and that just gets those guys even more open shots.”

Earlier in the season, North Carolina's success came and went with the performance of Joel Berry and Luke Maye. If both those guys weren't scoring, the Tar Heels found it tough to beat good teams. But on Thursday, Berry and Maye combined to shoot 5-for-29 from the field and finished with 13 points. Pinson stepped up, as did Kenny Williams and Cameron Johnson. Roy Williams' decision midseason to switch to a smaller lineup that put his five best scorers on the court at the same time has made the Tar Heels far more dangerous offensively.

“We've always felt like we're not just one guy, not just two guys,” Williams said. “Those two guys have gotten most of the accolades, but it is a team out there, and I'm happy about that.”

While both Duke and North Carolina are still developing as teams, and are beginning to hit their stride heading into the NCAA tournament, one thing that hasn't changed is the Duke-Carolina rivalry. And it has a little more importance on Friday.

Duke is next in line after Kansas for a 1-seed, as the Blue Devils have a top-five RPI and wins over North Carolina, Michigan State and a host of others. They're also in the top three in the BPI and at KenPom, and No. 1 in Sagarin. North Carolina is a bit more of a long shot, but if the Tar Heels win the ACC tournament, they will have 14 Quadrant 1 wins -- only one other team has double-digit wins in that category.

Roy Williams tried to limit the pressure after Thursday's games.

"Last year, we lost the game that's going to be played tomorrow," he said, referring to Carolina losing to Duke in last year's ACC tournament. "And I think we kept playing. My memory is not as good as it used to be, but I think we kept playing."

Williams can try to make it appear like any other game, but the reality is it's still Duke versus North Carolina -- but this time, it's in Brooklyn.

And this time, it could be for a lot more than just regular-season bragging rights.