



**NINERTIMES**

**2023-24**

# **BASKETBALL PREVIEW**



# New Charlotte men's basketball Head Coach Aaron Fearne gives insight into the upcoming season

Mason Curtis | Staff Writer

The 2023-24 basketball season has arrived in Charlotte, and the 49ers men's basketball team has undergone many changes in the locker room and front office. The most notable difference is Aaron Fearne's promotion to head coach.

The 49ers finished No. 5 in the Conference USA (C-USA) last season, with an overall record of 22-14, and won the College Basketball Invitational (CBI) tournament. Under Fearne, the team is looking to grow upon their past success.

"Where we are right now, I am happy," said Fearne. "We are obviously going to continue to keep growing and building as the season goes on."

## Familiar face, new position

Fearne was the program's associate head coach in 2022-23 and took over as interim head coach on June 7 following the resignation of Ron Sanchez. Fearne was officially named the 49ers' men's basketball head coach on June 15, 2023.

"Aaron has the tools required to lead this program, and our basketball team believes in him," said Hill. "He has considerable experience as a head coach, and his leadership ability has been on full display during a very challenging time. He is widely respected in basketball circles, both college and professional. After conducting an accelerated search at an unconventional time of year, Aaron emerged as the right man at the right time. We are pleased to have him lead the Niners and look forward to an exciting new brand of Charlotte basketball."

Before he arrived in Charlotte, Fearne spent nine seasons as head coach and eight seasons as an assistant coach of the National Basketball League's (NBL) Cairns Taipans, a team in Australia's top professional league. As the head coach, he led the team to the NBL finals twice and was named Coach of the Year in 2015. In 2018, he served as head coach of New Zealand's U-19 National Team.

"I'm grateful to Mike, Chancellor [Sharon] Gaber and all involved in the search process," said Fearne. "I'm prepared to lead this program. We are committed to bringing a tough, competitive brand of basketball to the American Athletic Conference. We will play with pace, attack the glass and apply pressure to our opponents in all phases of the game."

## A look at last season

As the associate head coach, Fearne led Charlotte to a CBI tournament victory as the 49ers recorded a 71-68 win over the Eastern Kentucky University Colonels.

Under Sanchez and Fearne, the team finished with their best record since the 2000-2001 season while besting skilled opponents such as Davidson University and Appalachian State University.

The 49ers started slow in conference play last year with a record of 3-5 after their 62-58 loss to Middle Tennessee State University. The team turned things around, winning six of their next 12 games, and finished C-USA play 9-11.

With multiple changes from last season's roster, the team must build up their chemistry again.

"We want to have success as a group that can come together and perform on a daily basis," said Fearne. "We are going to have to do things very well together, and there will be a lot of different pieces as the year goes on."

## A change in intensity

Charlotte's offense experienced a total remodeling during the off-season. Coach Fearne has transitioned to a faster-paced game plan emphasizing transition play.

The 49ers' new offense looks to push the ball up the court and play through their big men to create open shots through penetration. There will also be constant movement through setting screens and swinging the ball.

The defensive scheme will remain the same, with Charlotte's priority limiting inside scoring opportunities.

"The intensity and urgency that is demanded of each other has been very good," said Fearne. "It takes a lot of energy and concentration to do that. But we have taken huge strides in doing so."

## Excitement for big matchups

The 49ers will face off against solid non-conference opponents such as the No. 2 Duke University Blue Devils and the Liberty University Flames.

Charlotte must also play their No. 10 ranked conference opponent, the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Owls. A team fresh off a final-four run in the NCAA tournament.

The 49ers face many tough challenges in their upcoming season, but they are hopeful they will still succeed.

"From a coaching perspective, we've got a challenging schedule ahead of us," said Fearne. "We're going to play some super-talented players, but we have really good players too."

## Upcoming season

This season marks Charlotte's first appearance in the American Athletic Conference (AAC), with key matchups against the University of

Memphis, Tulane University and FAU. According to the AAC preseason coaches poll, the 49ers are ranked No. 13 in the 14-team conference.

Despite doubts about the program's results in the upcoming season, the 49ers expect to grow from last year's success even with changes in the roster and front office.

With a new offensive game plan and a stout defensive scheme, the team looks to prove the AAC preseason polls wrong with strong performances year-round. With Coach Fearne at the helm, the future is looking hopeful in Charlotte.



Charlotte men's basketball Head Coach Aaron Fearne with guard Jackson Threadgill in the 2022-23 season | Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics



# Charlotte women's basketball adds six talented newcomers to the 2023-24 roster

Davis Cuffe | Staff Writer

Following the 2022-23 season, the Charlotte women's basketball team had four players depart due to graduation or the transfer portal. For the 2023-24 season, Charlotte welcomes six recruits to help replace players and bolster a roster that went 12-19 last season and enters the new American Athletic Conference.

With plenty of talent being brought in, these new players will be integral to carving out a successful 2023 season.

## Jewel Watkins

5'10" junior guard transfer from Coppin State University (CSU), Watkins averaged 14.5 points, 0.9 assists and 6.4 rebounds a game last year for the Bald Eagles. Starting almost every game at CSU, Watkins led the team in points, rebounds and blocks while playing over 35 minutes per game. While Watkins is a force on the defensive interior, she was more than capable of spacing the floor and led her conference in three-point field goals with 78 in 30 games. Her efforts playing for CSU earned her Second Team All-MEAC (Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference) and MEAC All-Defensive Team.

An excellent all-around player and dynamic scorer, look for Watkins to make an impact at Charlotte immediately.

## Anna Ekerstedt

Originally from Sweden, Ekerstedt is transferring from Rider University, where she averaged four points, 0.6 assists and 3.9 rebounds per game last year. Standing at 6'2," Ekerstedt plays the forward position but could spend time at center this year. Despite primarily playing in the paint, where she totaled 45 blocks last season, Ekerstedt is not scared to shoot from beyond the arc and had a career average of 33% three-point shooting in her time at Rider. Pairing with her efforts on the court, Ekerstedt has been a star in the classroom in both of her seasons at Rider and was on the MAAC (Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference) All-Academic Team both years.

## Imani Smith

Smith, the 5'8" junior college product out of Gulf Coast State College, will look to be a top shooter for the Charlotte squad.

Head Coach Cara Consuegra said that Smith is a powerhouse with the ball.

"She brings a much-needed ability to shoot the ball. However, she is much more than a shooter," said Consuegra. "She is a super athlete that can handle the ball and is a long and active defender."

In her last season at Gulf Coast State, Smith averaged 14.6 points, 2.3 assists and 5.1 rebounds per game, all while shooting 32% from three on over seven attempts per game. Smith could be a key part of Charlotte's rotation this year.

## Caroline Thiel

Freshman commit Thiel is a 6'0" guard from Rocky Mount High School in Rocky Mount, N.C. In her senior season, she was named Rocky Mount Female Athlete of the Year. Thiel averaged 19.3 points, 1.2 assists and 5.8 rebounds per game. A four-year varsity player, Thiel is their all-time leading scorer with 1,762 total points in her time at Rocky Mount. In her four years, the versatile defender made an impressive total of 163 steals and 144 blocks.

"She has a versatile game that fans will enjoy watching, and she's only touched the surface of the player she can be," said Consuegra.

With nine guards currently on the roster, Thiel may have to work for playing time, but with her

skillset, she may see court action sooner rather than later.

## Olivia Porter

Another new guard, Olivia Porter, was originally at Michigan State University during her freshman year but chose to transfer to Charlotte, closer to where she attended high school at Northwood High School in Chapel Hill. At Northwood, Porter scored 2,000 total points and led Northwood High School to the NCHSAA 3A state championship in 2022, earning the 2022 NCHSAA 3A Kay Yow State Championship Most Valuable Player award along the way. A dynamic, three-level scorer, Porter averaged 18 points per game and shot 44% from the arc in her senior season. Along with her offensive skillset, Porter was a ballhawk in her senior season, averaging a staggering 4.3 steals per game.

Considering her two-way skillset, Porter could be a valuable part of Charlotte's offensive and defensive attack this year.

"She will be our starting point guard," said Consuegra.

## Fatou Diakite

6'3" Diakite comes from the Ivory Coast in Africa and recently graduated from Niagara Prep in Ontario, Canada. While her size and broad skillset make her a raw prospect, Diakite flashed scoring upside for Niagara Prep last year, scoring in double figures multiple times.

"She has the ability to post up, shoot the three, handle the ball in transition and guard multiple positions," said Consuegra.

Though much of Diakite's game remains a mystery, she exhibited a smooth jump shot from beyond the arc and impressive finishing skills around the rim during her time at Niagara Prep. These skills hold significant potential for Charlotte as she continues to develop as a player throughout the season.



Charlotte women's basketball Head Coach Cara Consuegra with newcomers Caroline Thiel, Fatou Diakite and Olivia Porter | Courtesy of Cara Consuegra via Instagram

# Charlotte women’s basketball seeks to rebound from 2022-23 season

Joey Ellsworth | Sports Editor

Charlotte women’s basketball in 2022-23 had one of its best seasons in program history, going 22-10 and 15-3 in conference games. They went on to win the Conference USA (C-USA) Championship and earned an NCAA Tournament berth.

However, in the following year, the 49ers could not live up to the success they found in the prior season, stumbling to a 12-19 overall record and 7-13 in C-USA matches. They managed a win in the first round of the C-USA tournament, taking down No. 8 seed Florida International University 72-59. Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) brought the 49er season to an end as Charlotte fell 84-53 in the C-USA quarterfinals.

“I thought Middle played really well, and we didn’t play our best,” said Head Coach Cara Consuegra following the loss. “Our kids fought to the end, and I’m proud of them for that. Effort has never been an issue for this team.”

With the new season and the move to the American Athletic Conference, the 49ers have much to prove and need to capitalize on several facets to find the success they had in the 2022-23 season.

### Building around Dazia Lawrence

Lawrence has emerged as the face of Charlotte women’s basketball after earning C-USA First Team in 2023-23. The team in the new season has rallied around Lawrence, looking to her

In the previous season, she earned the starting role, averaging 16.9 points per game as she began to develop as a star athlete.

Over the offseason, Lawrence was part of the USA Basketball’s 3x3 World Cup Team and shot perfectly from the field, going 7/7 with 11 points in their victory over Austria.

Her experience with Charlotte and overseas helped develop her into a true leader, passing on the knowledge she gathered to her 49er teammates.

“Daiza is an elite communicator,” said Consuegra. “You’ll see her call out every action and what we’re supposed to do and how we’re supposed to do it. But she’s also elite off the court. She’s going to go grab a player, check on her and tell that individual what she needs. And then the next time she’s off, she’s gonna go grab another player. Those little things are what all contribute to making her an excellent leader. She’s she’s gonna keep growing, but all those things have contributed to leadership.”

### Determining roles early and finding a balance

The 49ers are a new-look team from last year, losing a number of players, most notably Mikayla Boykin and Jada McMillian, while adding several fresh faces.

With such a new team, there will have to be many adjustments made, and the sooner the roles are determined, the better.

“We’re still kind of tinkering with lineups, figuring out who plays best with whom,” said Consuegra. “But that’ll take some time, even as we’re beginning to get into games.”

Consuegra has seen a lot of promise from the new faces and feels they will be a crucial piece on the squad.

“I think our newcomers, I could probably tell you a different person every day. And that’s, that’s a really good thing,” said Consuegra. “I think they’re all competing at a high level, and they’re all finding a way to impact. And each day, one seems to be better than the other. We’re not going to have enough minutes for the depth on this team.”

### Performance improvements

With the team’s struggles in the previous season, there are many facets of the game where the 49ers must make significant adjustments to return to conference champion form.

The team was at the bottom of C-USA in scoring, sitting dead last in points (1921) and points per game (62). The team did, however, look much better on the other end of the floor, allowing the fourth-least pointer per game (68.2). Their defensive strength was not enough to outweigh the offensive struggles as they had a scoring margin of -6.3, the worst in the conference and No. 288 in the NCAA for D1 schools.

In their conference championship season, Charlotte still struggled in scoring, averaging 63.2 points per game. However, they were stellar on defense, allowing the third least amount of points per game (59), which was good enough for No. 4 in scoring margin in C-USA.

One spot the team needs to find improvement on is turnovers. They only forced 422 last season, the tenth most of the 11-team conference. Meanwhile, they gave up the fourth most turnovers per game in C-USA (16.3), giving them a turnover margin of -2.68, the second lowest in the conference. This was something Consuegra touched on before the 2023-24 season opener.

“We’ve started to be a little bit more specific about shot selection and turnovers,” said Consuegra. “We’ve talked a lot about our streaks, which are consecutive turnovers or consecutive bad shots. I think we’re getting there. I don’t know if we’re quite there yet.”

With many questions about the team, new players and a new conference, Charlotte women’s basketball has countless possibilities for fans to look forward to in the new season.

“OUR KIDS FOUGHT TO THE END, AND I’M PROUD OF THEM FOR THAT. EFFORT HAS NEVER BEEN AN ISSUE FOR THIS TEAM.

- Cara Consuegra, Charlotte women’s basketball head coach

to lead the team to success and to set the tone for the squad.

“As proud as I am of her with her growth on the court, I am more proud of how she’s grown as a leader,” said Consuegra.

Lawrence has seen a lot of growth during her time at Charlotte. In her first two seasons, she combined for 29 games played, averaging 9.7 minutes per game and 2.8 points per game.

“We’re starting to identify roles for players, so they’re very clear about what they do best,” said Consuegra. “You let them play free for a while and identify what they do best and what they do best for the team.”

With so many newcomers and with them taking on a decent role in the upcoming season, finding the balance between the vets and newbies will also be vital to success.

## 2023-24 WOMEN’S BASKETBALL HOME SCHEDULE

Friday, Nov. 10  
**TENNESSEE STATE**

Tuesday, Nov. 14  
**UNC ASHEVILLE**

Friday, Nov. 17  
**GARDNER-WEBB**

Wednesday, Nov. 29  
**MERCER**

Thursday, Dec. 21  
**DAVIDSON**

Saturday, Dec. 30  
**NORTH TEXAS**

Sunday, Jan. 7  
**UAB**

Wednesday, Jan. 17  
**TULANE**

Saturday, Jan. 27  
**TULSA**

Sunday, Feb. 4  
**TEMPLE**

Wednesday, Feb. 7  
**FLORIDIA ATLANTIC**

Wednesday, Feb. 14  
**MEMPHIS**

Saturday, Feb. 24  
**WICHITA STATE**

Tuesday, Mar. 5  
**EAST CAROLINA**



Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics



2023-24

# WOMEN'S BASKETBALL ROSTER



**0**  
**AYLESHA WADE**  
Guard | Junior



**1**  
**JEWEL WATKINS**  
Guard | Junior



**3**  
**TAMIA DAVIS**  
Guard | Fifth Year



**5**  
**NIA YOUNG**  
Guard | Redshirt Sophomore



**9**  
**ANNA EKERSTEDT**  
Forward | Redshirt Sophomore



**10**  
**DAZIA LAWRENCE**  
Guard | Redshirt Junior



**12**  
**IMANI SMITH**  
Guard | Junior



**13**  
**TRACEY HUESTON**  
Forward | Senior



**20**  
**JACEE BUSICK**  
Guard | Senior



**22**  
**CAROLINE THIEL**  
Guard/Forward | Freshman



**23**  
**OLIVIA PORTER**  
Guard | Sophomore



**24**  
**FATOU DIAKITE**  
Forward | Freshman



**31**  
**KEANNA REMBERT**  
Forward | Redshirt Sophomore

Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

# After an offseason of change, Charlotte men’s basketball looks to form new identity in 2023-24 season

Bryson Foster | Staff Writer

As time expired on the 2023 College Basketball Invitational (CBI), the Charlotte men’s basketball team celebrated the first postseason title in the program’s history, defeating the Eastern Kentucky University Colonels, 71-68. Little did the team know that change would be a constant in the offseason.

Brice Williams, the team’s leading scorer, departed first to the University of Nebraska. Aly Khalifa also transferred, going to Brigham Young University. Then, after five seasons at the helm of the 49ers, Ron Sanchez stepped down, heading back to his former stomping grounds at the University of Virginia.

As the start of the 2023-24 season neared, the team reloaded with transfers and returned multiple vital pieces from last year’s championship squad. As the team enters a new conference, one common theme for new Head Coach Aaron Fearne’s group is embracing the challenge of growing.

“We are playing for the University and each other, so there is pressure to perform,” said Fearne. “Sometimes you will succeed, and sometimes you will not, but growing through it is crucial.”

### Reflecting back

In the previous season, the 49ers finished with a 22-14 overall record and were 9-11 in Conference USA (C-USA) play. After a lackluster conference slate and a first-round exit in the C-USA tournament, the 49ers rattled off four straight wins to take the CBI crown.

The team got solid production from forward Igor Miličić Jr. and guard Lu’Cye Patterson last season, averaging 7.7 and 10.2 points per game. The duo returns to the squad and will look to help the 49ers weather the drastic changes.

### Coaching change

After five seasons with the 49ers and serving as the program’s associate head coach last year, Fearne said the coaching change was a surprise. “The transition was shocking but united us,” said Fearne. “Creating culture is something that needs to be worked on consistently, and I am trying to do that.”

Athletic Director Mike Hill said that Fearne provides stability at the head coaching spot.

“He [Fearne] has considerable experience as a head coach, and his leadership ability has been on full display during a very challenging time,” said Hill.

### Old blood

The 49ers are returning nine players from last year’s team. Fearne said Miličić is someone to keep an eye on this season.

“Igor [Miličić] has grown significantly over the summer because he played international basketball,” said Fearne. “There is a pride and passion that comes with doing that, as it shows what it takes to win big games.”

The team returns senior guard Jackson Threadgill, who is entering his fourth year with the squad. He produced well, averaging 6.6 points, 1.8 rebounds and 1.6 assists a year ago. Threadgill is no stranger to pressure, as he nailed a game-winning shot to down cross-county rival Davidson University last season.

Junior guard Isaiah Folkes took a step in his production last year. After playing in just 15 games in 2021-22, Folkes played in all 35 last season while recording starts in 11.

The team has a wealth of young and returning talent, such as Rich Rolf, Nik Graves, Daylen Berry, Robert Braswell IV and Tyler Fearne.

Fearne said he expects his veterans to step up.

“We have depth at every position, and those veterans have the responsibility to perform and produce,” said Fearne. “It is exciting for me to help our players work through challenges and grasp success.”

### New additions

The 49ers have six newcomers, with four transfers and two freshmen.

“All the new guys are great, and we clicked the first time I met them,” said Miličić. “We love spending time together, which is a big part of why we have taken so many steps forward.”

Charlotte gets some much-needed depth in the frontcourt with the addition of three Power Five transfers.

The additions of Rutgers University transfer forward Dean Reiber, University of Southern California transfer forward Iaroslav Niagu and Washington State transfer center Dishon Jackson will look to help the 49ers rebound, which is something they struggled with a year ago, ranking No. 350 in rebounds per game.

Charlotte also adds redshirt junior guard and Pratt Community College transfer Sterling Young. Young averaged 15.9 points, 3.1 assists

and three rebounds per game while shooting 45% from the field.

The 49ers have two first-year players joining the squad from Ramstein, Germany, forward Andrew Bailey and center Nick Richart.

### Schedule sorting

Charlotte will play 12 non-conference games before digging into the conference slate.

The 49ers kicked the season off on Monday, Nov. 6, against the University of Maine inside Halton Arena. Then, on Friday, Nov. 10, the team will compete in the “He Gets Us” Hall of Fame Series at the Spectrum Center against the Liberty University Flames.

Charlotte will also face Davidson, the University of Richmond and Stetson University twice. The major contest for the 49ers in non-conference play will occur on Saturday, Dec. 9, when the squad travels to Durham to take on the No. 2 Duke University Blue Devils in Cameron Indoor Stadium.

“We have a challenging schedule in front of us, and you want to play non-conference opponents that will challenge you at every level,” said Fearne. “You want to peak at the right time and play against good teams, so playing in many game environments is crucial.”

In the American Athletic Conference, Charlotte will play 18 games. Some notable matchups are against No. 10 Florida Atlantic University, who made the Final Four a year ago, and two contests against East Carolina University. The team will also face the University of Memphis and the University of North Texas.

### Improving intensity

Miličić said with the change in coaches, the 49ers are the same.

“The main thing is that we just want to play basketball,” said Miličić. “There are a lot of differences in the offense between the two coaches, but defensively, we are very much the same.”

Fearne said that the team is ready to work to build an identity.

“I tell the guys all the time that it is hard to win. Execution and discipline are critical when it comes to succeeding,” said Fearne.

## 2023-24 MEN’S BASKETBALL HOME SCHEDULE

Monday, Nov. 6  
**MAINE**

Wednesday, Nov. 15  
**UTAH VALLEY**

Saturday, Nov. 25  
**GEORGIA STATE**

Wednesday, Nov. 29  
**DAVIDSON**

Tuesday, Dec. 5  
**STETSON**

Friday, Dec. 22  
**GREENSBORO COLLEGE**

Saturday, Jan. 6  
**FLORIDA ATLANTIC**

Wednesday, Jan. 10  
**TULSA**

Saturday, Jan. 20  
**NORTH TEXAS**

Tuesday, Jan. 23  
**UAB**

Saturday, Feb. 3  
**EAST CAROLINA**

Wednesday, Feb. 14  
**MEMPHIS**

Thursday, Feb. 15  
**UTSA**

Sunday, Feb. 18  
**WICHITA STATE**

Saturday, Mar. 2  
**SOUTH FLORIDA**

Wednesday, Mar. 6  
**RICE**



Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics



2023-24

# MEN'S BASKETBALL ROSTER



**RICH ROLF**  
Forward | Redshirt Freshman



**DISHON JACKSON**  
Center | Redshirt Sophomore



**ANDREW BAILEY**  
Forward | Freshman



**STERLING YOUNG**  
Guard | Redshirt Junior



**ISAIAH FOLKES**  
Guard | Junior



**NIK GRAVES**  
Guard | Sophomore



**DAYLEN BERRY**  
Guard | Redshirt Sophomore



**JACKSON THREADGILL**  
Guard | Senior



**ROBERT BRASWELL IV**  
Forward | Graduate Student



**DEAN REIBER**  
Forward | Redshirt Junior



**IGOR MILIČIĆ JR.**  
Forward | Junior



**LU'CY PATTERSON**  
Guard | Redshirt Junior



**TYLER FEARNE**  
Guard | Redshirt Sophomore



**NICK RICHART**  
Center | Freshman



**IAROSLAV NIAGU**  
Forward | Sophomore

Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

# Charlotte women’s basketball seeks strong inaugural AAC season

Billy McGee | Staff Writer

The Charlotte women’s basketball team is back for a new season, and they are looking to return to their winning ways.

Last season was a disappointing one for the 49ers, going 12-19 overall and 7-13 in conference play, just one year removed from a Conference-USA championship and an appearance in the NCAA tournament.

“Talent and skill are very important, we all know that, but teamwork, chemistry and culture trump that, in my opinion, and I feel like we have the possibility this year to be one of those teams where we’re going to be able to overcome some things because of who we are not what we are,” said Head Coach Cara Consuegra.

### Newcomers

The 49ers have six newcomers to the team for the 2023-24 season. Of the newcomers, four are incoming transfers, while two are freshmen.

The two incoming freshmen are forward Fatou

Diakite and guard/forward Caroline Thiel. The four incoming transfers are Olivia Porter, Imani Smith, Anna Ekerstedt and Jewel Watkins.

“A newcomer I haven’t talked about as much is [Olivia] Porter; she will be our starting point guard,” said Consuegra.

### Returning players

Some notable returning players for this season are Dazia Lawrence and Jacee Busick.

Lawrence returns for her redshirt junior season after playing in all 31 games and leading the team with 16.9 points per game last season. Lawrence had a busy offseason, participating in the FIBA U23 3X3 World Cup.

“For us, watching her [Lawrence] on that stage was really exciting,” said Consuegra. “When you have a great player in your program and also a great leader and great person, you want opportunities for them. I think more than anything, we were just excited about that opportunity for her.”

Busick returns to the 49ers for her senior season after starting all 31 games, averaging 5.5 points and 5.6 rebounds as a junior last season.

### Start of the season

The 2023-24 season will be Charlotte’s first in the American Athletic Conference, where they are looking to bounce back and hopefully contend for a conference title.

“Those that have followed me for a long time know that we always talk about trying to get one percent better,” said Consuegra. “Every day, every rep, every practice, and I feel like this team has really embraced that, and I think for that reason, we’re in a good place. We don’t want to be our best right now, but I think we’re in a really solid place, and we’ll continue to grow.”

The 49ers travel to Raleigh, N.C., to take on the NC State Wolfpack in their season opener on Tuesday, Nov. 7.

Charlotte returns for their first home game

against the Tennessee State University Tigers on Nov. 10.



Charlotte women’s basketball’s Dazia Lawrence (10), Tracey Hueston (13) and Keanna Rembert (31) | Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

# Shooting stars: Highlighting key players on the Charlotte men’s basketball team for the 2023-24 season

Itza Ochoa | Asst. Sports Editor

The Charlotte men’s basketball team is facing a new look entering the 2023-24 season. Since the previous season, six players have left the roster, multiple of them having been impactful on the starting lineup.

Following a 22-14 overall record and a post-season championship title, the 49ers will depend on their up-and-coming athletes to carry on their successes to the new season.

### Jackson Threadgill

Senior guard Threadgill is the last standing player on the current roster to have started in all 36 games in the prior season. Averaging 29.6 minutes per game, Threadgill finished the season having 11 double-digit games, averaging 6.6 points per game and 1.8 on rebounds.

Taking responsibility for working all around the court, Threadgill shot 39.9% from the field and 35.1% from behind the arc. He saw a season-high 17-point game against the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in the quarterfinal round of the College Basketball Invitational (CBI).

Familiar with being put under pressure, Threadgill took credit for the game-winning

buzzer-beater shot versus Davidson College to take home the 68-66 overtime win and the Hornets’ Nest Trophy.

Off the court, Threadgill represented the 49ers at the 2023 National Collegiate Athletic Association Student-Athlete and was named to the 2023 College Sports Communicators Academic All-District, earning the honor while having a cumulative GPA of 3.54 in the Belk College of Business.

### Igor Miličić Jr.

Junior forward transfer from the University of Virginia, Miličić, appeared in 35 of 36 games while making 22 starts in his first year for the 49ers.

An all-around performance player with his 6’10” height and size, Miličić averaged 7.7 points and 4.1 rebounds.

In his debut for the Green and White, Miličić grabbed 16 points and seven rebounds against Coppin State University. One month later, he recorded his first double-double against the University of Detroit Mercy, tallying 20 points and 11 rebounds.

Before Charlotte, Miličić played on the big stage with the Polish senior national team in the FIBA Eurobasket qualifying window, followed by joining the German Pro B League, where he averaged 13.3 points, 5.2 rebounds and 1.8 assists.

Miličić brings a unique form of play to the court, performing as one of the quickest play-makers on the roster, which Charlotte will look to take advantage of.

### Lu’Cye Patterson

Redshirt junior guard Patterson made his way to All-Conference-USA Honorable Mention during his first season with the 49ers. Patterson led the conference in the previous season in assist/turnover ratio with a mark of 2.0 (90 assists to 45 turnovers).

Patterson became a crucial component for the starting five roster, becoming dangerous in the paint and the free throw line. Patterson went 77% from the free throw line, making 95 shots out of 123.

Finishing his debut season with a bang, Patterson scored double-figures in nine of the last 10 games of the regular season. Specifically in the

CBI, Patterson helped push forth the 49ers by averaging 13.3 points, three rebounds and two assists.

His standout performance came in play against Detroit Mercy, where he recorded a career-high point total of 22 with seven assists, zero turnovers and seven rebounds.

### Isaiah Folkes

Junior guard Folkes maneuvered his way from the bench onto the starting five in the last 11 matchups of the season. Folkes brought the season to a close by averaging six points, shooting 63% from the field and 40% from behind the three-point line.

Becoming the 49ers defensive thief, Folkes led the team with 12 steals throughout his starting 11 games. Folkes also snagged a career-high seven steals in the quarterfinals of the CBI.

The postseason tournament became a peak career moment for Folkes as he upped his shooting game with a career-high 11 points against Radford University and another 10 points with a game-sealing bucket in the final moments against Eastern Kentucky University.