Richmond Basketball

2009-10

Clippings

Mooney's Spiders seem built to last

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
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PROVIDENCE, R.I. There's reason to believe this isn't a one-shot deal.

As the University of Richmond recovers from Thursday's 80-71 loss to Saint Mary's in the first round of the NCAA tournament, disappointment should give way to pride, then optimism.

The Spiders (26-9), who went 8-22 three seasons ago, move ahead without guard David Gonzalvez (14.6 ppg) and forward Ryan Butler (8.4 ppg), a senior pair who did "so much on the defensive end and offensive end," said UR guard Kevin Anderson. "They were leaders."

Speaking of Gonzalvez and Butler, Richmond coach Chris Mooney said, "As a program, we owe them everything. We couldn't possibly repay how much they've meant to us.

"To come through a program that's established and do well is one thing, and that's an achievement. But to come through a program and kind of turn the culture around is really, really significant."

All other Spiders are scheduled to return, including Anderson, this season's Atlantic 10 Conference player of the year as a junior.

"We know what we will bring to the table," said junior forward Kevin Smith.

The 6-5 Smith, 6-6 sophomore Francis-Cedric Martel and 6-3 freshman Darien Brothers likely will lead the line for minutes vacated by Butler and Gonzalvez.

"I think we're at a point now where we could be very, very good next year," Mooney said. "I think we could be just as good."

This season's experience should strengthen UR's confidence, and inspire returning players. The Spiders distinguished themselves in nonleague games, went 13-3 in the A-10, and earned their first national ranking since 1986. UR hadn't qualified for the NCAA tournament since 2004.

"To win as many games as we did, to beat the teams we beat, to be in the NCAA tournament, those are all significant accomplishments," Mooney said.
Notes

•Analysts had projected that UR's match-up defense would pose problems for opponents in the NCAA tournament. Saint Mary's coach Randy Bennett didn't see it that way.
"It's a game of match-ups and I think our offense, our personnel, is suited to play against zone and teams that aren't big inside," he said after the game. "Everybody thought we got a bad draw. In some ways, we got a good draw because we can play against those teams. We haven't been beaten by a team that zones all year."

•Successful A-10 coaches often have been courted by programs at higher levels. Mooney's name likely will surface as a potential candidate.

•The A-10 figures to be more competitive next season. The all-league first team consisted of four juniors and a sophomore, the only time in the A-10's 34 years that no senior was included.
Probably, Richmond will be projected among the top three in A-10 preseason polls.

Woody: For UR, commitment doesn't come with guarantee

By Paul Woody
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 19, 2010

PROVIDENCE, R.I. The sheer tonnage of weight lifted by a college athlete is almost unfathomable. Ten reps of a barbell loaded with 200 pounds is a ton, and that's just a warm-up.

The sheer number of shots taken by a college basketball player, when no one is watching, is almost too high to count.

But if you want to be good, if you want your team to be successful, the weight has to be lifted, the shots have to be taken. The bitter irony is all that weight and all those shots do not mean the result will be exactly what you hope.

The University of Richmond Spiders left here last night with an excellent understanding of that.

"We picked a bad day to have a bad game," said Richmond's redshirt junior center Dan Geriot.

The Spiders' opponent, Saint Mary's College, had a great deal to do with that. The Gaels were too big, too smart, too poised and too accurate with their shots and passes for the Spiders in the first round of the NCAA tournament.

Richmond came into the tournament as a No. 7 seed and left after suffering an 80-71 loss to the No. 10 seeded Gaels.

The disappointment was as great for the Spiders as the elation was for the Gaels. St. Mary's victory was its first NCAA tournament triumph in 51 years.

They earned it.

But yesterday's loss diminishes neither the season nor the accomplishments of the Richmond program.

"It's really hard for me to hold my head down for the rest of the day because I'm proud of my team," said senior guard David Gonzalvez. "We lost to a really good team today. I tip my hat to them.

"I'm still really proud of my team and the success we had this year. I expect it to continue."

Nothing is assured. No one knows that better than Gonzalvez, Ryan Butler and Geriot.

When they played their first season together for the Spiders, they suffered through an 8-22 disappointment. Their coach, Chris Mooney, told them to keep working. He told them the team was going to get better, the future would be brighter.

The players had to take that on blind faith. And the success Mooney envisioned has occurred largely because of the work the Spiders did in the offseason, when no one was watching, when no coaches were around to offer encouragement or criticism.

"Whatever you do, lifting weights, getting shots, it has to be consistent and you have to give it all you've got," Gonzalvez said. "You have to get better everyday.

"And you have to stay humble. That's what we've been trying to do, and we've gotten better year after year."

The Spiders finish the 2009-10 season 26-9. They might be 27-8 had they played any number of other teams in the tournament, including some with higher seeds.

The Gaels, with 6-11 post player Omar Samhan, 6-11 forward Ben Allen and a fleet of sharp-shooting perimeter players, proved to be a bad combination for the Spiders' matchup zone defense and modified Princeton offense.

The Spiders had to counter the Gaels' size with speed. The Spiders needed to sweep down the court, get easy baskets and force the Gaels out of their comfort zone.

But it's difficult to use your speed when you can't run a fastbreak.

The Gaels missed 27 shots. They grabbed the rebound on 19. They scored 21 second-chance points and had 32 points in the paint. They also made 8 of 19 shots from 3-point range.

St. Mary's is good.

Yesterday's result to the contrary, so are the Spiders.

Every good program has players who work diligently in the offseason. The effort doesn't come with any guarantee. The only guarantee is that if you don't put in the time there is no chance to be successful.

"The ball doesn't always fall your way," Gonzalvez said. "You don't win every game. If you give it all you've got, and leave it on the floor, you should find satisfaction in that."

By that standard, and it is a very important standard, the Spiders can find satisfaction in the midst of their disappointment.

UR's Anderson tops T-D men's basketball team

By Paul Woody
Richmond Times-Dispatch
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Kevin Anderson is the rarest of college basketball players.

He is a 6-0 guard capable of dominating a game.

The University of Richmond performer is quick enough to get around defenders, agile enough to avoid big men in the paint and can hang in the air an extra second and find open teammates.

Anderson also is a tough defender, fearless even when he somehow is matched up with a post player.

Anderson is more than his statistics indicate. And his statistics aren't bad -- 17.8 points, 3.5 rebounds, 2.7 assists per game.

He is a relentless competitor whose expression never changes. And late in the game, when the outcome is on the line, he not only wants the ball, he almost always does something exceptional once he has it.

Anderson is a primary reason the Spiders play their opening-round game in the NCAA tournament today against Saint Mary's College from Moraga, Calif.

For all that, Anderson, a junior, has been selected as The Times-Dispatch player of the year.

"I just try to be aggressive and go to the hole," Anderson said. "I'm quicker than most guards, but I'm not always the quickest guard out there.

"Our offense really helps me. I use screens, and when I don't have a shot, my teammates are always cutting, going backdoor, moving and they make it easy for me to see them and get them the ball."

Not coincidentally, Anderson has a good coach.

Chris Mooney has rebuilt a Richmond program that reached its nadir with an 8-22 record three years ago.

This season, the Spiders are 26-8, were runners-up in the Atlantic 10 tournament and received an at-large bid, and a No. 7 seed, to the NCAA tournament.

Mooney has been selected as The Times-Dispatch coach of the year.

"I think 'coach of the year' is something of a misnomer," Mooney said. "It probably should be 'team of the year' or 'program of the year.

"I'm honored, but I'm more proud of our team and our program. There are so many facets to coaching, and the most important thing absolutely is to have a great staff, guys who work hard and you can trust. We have that here."

Mooney also has some very good players, led by Anderson, who was the A-10 player of the year.

"Players are going to win and lose games," Mooney said. "That's never going to change. If you can recruit well and have a good culture around your program, you can be successful.

"Kevin is a special player. He plays with tremendous confidence and poise. He has an uncanny sense for basketball. During a game, he sees how a defender is playing him, how the other team is playing him and has a knack for exploiting any advantage."

These selections, as well as the firstand second-team all-state squads, were made by a panel of Times-Dispatch writers and editors.

Anderson, who was a second-team selection last year, was a unanimous first-team selection this year.

Joining him on the first team are guard Malcolm Delaney from Virginia Tech, post player Art Parakhouski from Radford, forward Gerald Lee from Old Dominion and center Larry Sanders from VCU.

Delaney and Parakhouski were first-team selections last season. Sanders was a second-team selection last year.

Lee led Old Dominion to the regular-season title in the Colonial Athletic Association, the CAA tournament championship and the NCAA tournament.

The Monarchs, a No.11 seed, play Notre Dame today.

The second team consists of five guards: Michael Deloach from Norfolk State, David Gonzalvez from Richmond, Sylven Landesberg from Virginia, Joey Rodriguez from VCU and David Schneider from William and Mary.

Landesberg was a second-team selection last year.

Also receiving votes and earning honorable mention were Dorenzo Hudson (Virginia Tech), Denzel Bowles (James Madison), Todd Phillips (Eastern Mennonite), Dana Smith (Longwood), Danny Jones (Randolph-Macon) and Jeff Allen (Virginia Tech).

Richmond Spiders weave a dangerous web for tourney run

By Erik Brady
USA Today
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RICHMOND, Va. — David Gonzalvez remembers his mother giving him a bath at 4 or 5. She turned on the water, and a big, black spider popped out of the faucet and ran between his legs.

"I've been scared of spiders ever since," he says, smiling broadly. "Ironic, isn't it?"

These are days of high irony for the Richmond Spiders, giant-killers of NCAA tourneys past who are a seventh seed this time, first-round favorites for the first time in their fairy tale history.

Upset U — the only school to win NCAA men's tournament games as a 12, 13, 14 and 15 seed — will find itself trying to fend off a mild upset Thursday against 10th-seeded Saint Mary's.

"For us to be able to wear white and be the higher seed (is exciting)," coach Chris Mooney says. "(But) we're not quite a giant."

The Spiders wore white in one of their three Atlantic 10 tournament games last weekend. They wore red in their semifinal overtime win against Xavier and blue in their tight loss to Temple in the final. Now comes Richmond's first NCAA tournament since 2004 — and second since the last of those seminal upsets in 1998.

"NCAA tournament: I can't wait," Gonzalvez says. "Feels like I've been waiting all my life."

This is the rapid-fire way Gonzalvez talks. He is one-half of the backcourt that Mooney thinks is among the best in the country. The other guard is A-10 player of the year Kevin Anderson. Mooney styles them as "Fire and Ice."

"It's easy to see who's who," Mooney says. "Dave is so passionate and intense and wears his emotions on his sleeve. Kevin is so dispassionate you would barely know he is in a game. It's funny how both approaches work and fit them so well."

Both were on display in Richmond's last regular-season game, when the Spiders won at Charlotte 89-84 as Anderson knocked down a 25-foot three-pointer with 5.3 seconds left to send the game to overtime.

"Kevin, he's amazing; he makes a shot like that, and he has no facial expression," says Gonzalvez, whose own face always is a canvas for his emotions. "And afterward he just calmly walked over to the bench and I was the one who had to get him excited."

Gonzalvez bearhugged Anderson from behind, as if by the power of touch he could transpose his passion.

"I just show no emotion," Anderson says, shrugging. "I don't know why."

He is wearing a large stud in each ear. Ice? "This is fake ice here," Anderson says, laughing. "This ice isn't real."

The real stuff runs in his veins.

"When time is draining down and Kevin has the ball in his hands, he is the calmest guy on the court," Gonzalvez says. "Most guys are really nervous or don't know what to do. He's like a fish in water, feeling right at home."

Anderson, 21, averages 17.8 points a game and is a junior from Atlanta. Gonzalvez, 22, scores 14.5 points and is a senior from nearby Marietta, Ga. Growing up, they knew of Richmond, capital of Virginia, as a farm team of the Atlanta Braves. They didn't know of Richmond, giant-killer, at all. Those upsets are from well before their time.

Slain giants include No. 5 seed Auburn (with Charles Barkley) in 1984, No. 4 Indiana (coached by Bob Knight) and No. 5 Georgia Tech in 1988, No. 2 Syracuse in 1991 (coached by Jim Boeheim) and No. 3 South Carolina in 1998.

"That whole thing about giant-killers, we're just learning about that," Anderson says.

Ryan Butler knows: The 6-7 swingman was born to it. His father played at Richmond in the 1970s, and he grew up across the street from the private school's leafy campus.

"It's wild to think about us" being seeded in the top half of the draw, Butler says. "We've won so much as an underdog, and now we're the favorite. But in the NCAA tournament it doesn't matter what seed you are. There's always upsets."

Princeton influence

Mooney played in the NCAA tournament twice for Princeton. This is his first as a head coach.

"I think we go into this tournament differently than (Richmond) went into it back against Auburn or Indiana," he says. "It's very exciting. I have tremendous respect for Saint Mary's and how good they are."

Mooney is 37 but still looks like the altar boy he used to be — and not a bit like Pete Carril, the disheveled guru for whom he was a four-year starter at Princeton.

"As different as our appearances are," Mooney says, "I took so much and learned so much from him."

That includes many of the principles of the so-called Princeton offense, of which Mooney's teams run a hybrid version.

Mooney, in his fifth season at Richmond, always knew he wanted to coach, so he majored in basketball as much as English at Princeton. He got a job as a law clerk out of college but soon followed his dream, first as head coach at Lansdale (Pa.) Catholic High School and then at Division III's Beaver College (since renamed Arcadia University) in suburban Philadelphia.

He was basketball coach and coordinator of campus facilities, which included renting out Grey Towers Castle for weddings.

"I was 25 and not much of what you'd call a host," Mooney says. "I'd never even had anyone over to dinner. We probably did 25 weddings a year. It was an interesting way to get ready for basketball practice."

It also turned out to be good practice for recruiting: "These moms, like recruits' moms, are very demanding. When their daughter is getting married, or their son is going to play for you in college, they want the very best for them, that's for sure."

Mooney did not do much planning for his own wedding. That fell to Lia, his college sweetheart, who was a year behind him at Princeton.

"I got into college early, and so that March I was already accepted, and my Dad said, 'You should go and watch your team play,' " she says. "And I said, 'I don't like basketball.' " She laughs. "I think I sealed my fate right there."

They have been married for 11 years and have a 10-month-old son, Danny. Her doctorate in childhood psychology from Penn will come in handy.

And, yes, she sometimes sings Danny a nursery rhyme that Gonzalvez would rather not hear — Itsy, Bitsy Spider.

'Can be fatal'

Gonzalvez remains petrified of arachnids but loves his two-legged teammates — "our Spiders," as he calls them.

"I was a Wildcat in high school. We were ferocious," he says. "And then I got here and I'm like, Spiders? We're an insect? Now I love the name. No one else has it. And a spider can be deadly. We're small, but one bite can be fatal."

Anderson is small, by basketball standards — slightly built at 6-0 and 175 pounds officially, though he is probably an inch or so smaller. "To be the A-10 player of the year as a junior," Mooney says, "he can put 6-1 or 6-2 now."

Richmond (enrollment: 2,767) owns regular-season wins against tournament teams Florida, Missouri, Old Dominion and Temple. Among its losses are at Wake Forest in one overtime and at Xavier in two. That last one really hurt because Richmond finished 13-3 in the A-10, a game behind Temple and Xavier each at 14-2.

The A-10, Mooney says, "is really tough, so many good teams, so many great players."

What makes Anderson the best of those? Don't ask Ice, who doesn't like to talk about himself. Ask Fire, who likes to talk about anything except spiders.

"The things that make him who he is: One, his competitive nature," Gonzalvez says. "Two, the gift from God, his talent level. Three, that whole ice component to his personality. And fourth, he's fearless."

It turns out he does fear one thing: losing in the tournament.

"I don't want to get knocked out," Anderson says. "If we get knocked out, I'm going to break down. I don't want to go through that. Who knows if we get there next year?"

Gonzalvez looks at Anderson as if he can't believe his ears.

"That's funny that Kevin says that because that's the last thing that I think about when I think about the tournament," Gonzalvez says. "I think about how God has blessed us, blessed our team this year, and I think about how far we can go. I'm just optimistic, man. I don't think about losing.

"I just think the team that dreams it, that just leaves it all out on the floor, is going to be the team that wins."

Atlanta Pair Leads Richmond Spiders

By Mike Tierney
Atlanta Journal Constitution
March 15, 2010

Each year, a sprinkler head pops up in the garden that grows the multitude of college basketball prospects in metro Atlanta. It then sprays them to all corners of the country.

Odd that two of them would float off to the same campus 500 miles away to play for a fresh coach with no recruiting clout here. Odder that they would meld into the University of Richmond starting backcourt. Odder still that they would become team ringleaders -- in peer respect, points produced and media publicity.

Oddest of all, seemingly, is that they were strangers before college. But teen hoops in the A-T-L is a vast expanse, with an array of AAU programs and scattered pockets of high school prowess. David Gonzalvez and Kevin Anderson knew the other's cousin, but not each other.

Now, in their third season as a terrific tandem, Gonzalvez, the senior from Wheeler High in Marietta and, Anderson, the junior from Peachtree Ridge High in Suwanee, have taken Richmond into the NCAA tournament for the first time in six years. The Spiders, who won a school-record 26 games, drew a No. 7 seeding and will face St. Mary's in the first round of the South Region in Providence, R.I., on Thursday.

The team just lost by four to Temple in the finals of the A-10 tournament last weekend. Anderson wound up the A-10's player of the year, Gonzalvez a second-team all-star and first-unit all-defensive.

With 206 starts between them, they are intuitive on the court, sensing whose shot is heating up and feeding him. But there is no mistaking the pair: Gonzalvez shoots as squarely with his words as he does with the ball; Anderson is modest enough to deflect praise as he does passes against players whom he guards.

When Anderson first arrived, Richmond was reeling from an 8-22 season.

"I wanted to help turn the program around," he said the other day.

OK, but nearly a 180 degrees? He admitted, "I didn't think it would be like this."

Gonzalvez was uninvolved in Anderson's recruitment.

"I was," he said recently, "trying to leave then."

In the two seasons prior to the 22-loss horror, Gonzalvez had stomached just two defeats and he turned disagreeable. Coach Chris Mooney's structured offense, he believed, was ineffective. He felt ill at ease in the classrooms and out on the town.

"I was just an arrogant freshman," Gonzalvez said. "My decision-making was terrible. I thought I was king of the world."

Gonzalvez vented those frustrations, including his opinion of the coach, to the coach. Not the ideal approach to foster a long-term working relationship.

Yet Mooney "never turned his back on me," said Gonzalvez, even after declaring his intention to transfer. Mooney offered to facilitate his exit but indicated he wanted Gonzalvez to stay.

After a spiritual awakening, Gonzalvez said, he became less selfish, if not less blunt. Mooney says he does not know a more genuine person.

"He is very honest," the coach said. "He has a hard time being deceitful."

Anderson is more reserved, aside from boasts that no teammate can master him at video games. With basketball, he leaves the promotion to Gonzalvez, who said of Anderson, "Some of the stuff he does on the court, the little man is amazing."

Anderson is listed at 6 feet, a figure that his former high school coach says "may be generous."

The point guard was lightly recruited out of Peachtree Ridge.

"It was a size thing," said Gerald Arnold, who estimated Anderson carried 140 pounds as a senior.

But the transfer from Whitefield Academy carried his team to 27 wins and the final four of the Class AAAAA playoffs as a senior. Ex-Georgia coach Dennis Felton issued a "preferred walk-on" invitation, but Anderson wanted to play for scholarship pay.

Though a quiet sort, Anderson is no wallflower. At Peachtree Ridge, his new coaches jokingly announced a raffle for students to win a date with the newcomer. Several girls were willing to pony up for the privilege.

"Kevin was a celebrity on campus," Arnold said.

Gonzalvez, though a solid 6-4 on a state Class AAAAA champion at Wheeler, also stirred little recruiting enthusiasm compared to his peers among the majors.

"I thought I could play with those guys," he said. Instead of settling with a junior college or the lesser division of four-year schools, Gonzalvez fled to Notre Dame Prep in Fitchburg, Mass.

With nine eventual Division 1 signees, the team lost one game. Gonzalvez was advised he may warrant minimal playing minutes but wound up starting part-time.

Both are aware that the reputation of Richmond basketball, for all of its regular season success, is built on the NCAA tournament. The Spiders have taken down four favorites as double-digit seeds, in part because of the challenging non-league schedule that serves as a dry run.

This season alone, they have bulldozed Florida, Missouri and Mississippi State while extending Wake Forest to overtime before falling.

Mooney has another label in mind for his team.

"Our [eventual] goal," he said, "is to become the giant instead of the giant-killer."

For now, he will entrust his two Atlantans with the slingshots.

With tourney run, UR left no room for doubt

By Paul Woody
Richmond Times-Dispatch
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ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. Coaches tend to remember losses far longer than they recall victories. Yesterday, University of Richmond coach Chris Mooney had the chance to capture the biggest victory in his five years with the Spiders.

But Temple was better in the Atlantic 10 tournament championship game. Under normal circumstances, that loss might haunt Mooney for days or weeks.

These are not normal circumstances.

Mooney mulled the loss for three hours, a comparative millisecond in a coach's mind.

"Until 6 p.m.," Mooney said, smiling. "As tough as this was, as much as we would have liked to have won the A-10 championship, and no offense to the A-10, but our next game is bigger."

That game will be in the first round of NCAA tournament, and it will be Richmond's first berth in the field since 2004.

Richmond (26-8) earned a No. 7 seed and will play Saint Mary's from the West Coast Conference, a No. 10 seed, Thursday in the first-round game in Providence, R.I.

Richmond always has been an underdog in the NCAA tournament, a giant killer.

No more. This is the first time Richmond enters the tournament as a higher seed, the first time the Spiders get to wear white uniforms in the opening round.

They have earned it. They are 6-2 against teams in the NCAA field. Within the conference, the Spiders split with Temple and Xavier, teams that received No. 5 and No. 6 seeds in the NCAA field.

However, the A-10 did not get the respect it deserves. Temple should have been a third or fourth seed. Richmond and Xavier are about as equal as teams can be. If Xavier is a No. 6, Richmond should be a No. 6.

"I thought we were in position to get a sixth seed," Mooney said.

Richmond earned this bid with a sterling season in the A-10 and a strong showing in nonconference games. Richmond beat Missouri, Florida and Old Dominion, a trio of NCAA tournament teams. The Spiders also beat Mississippi State, an NCAA bubble team. The Spiders won at home against Temple when the Owls were ranked 17th.

Even though the Spiders have a decent seed, Richmond still will be a darkhorse team.

However, the Spiders are in the tournament.

Virginia Tech is not. And few teams have reason to be as bitter about that as the Hokies.

They were 10-6 in the ACC and finished tied for third in the regular season. But a quarterfinal loss to Miami in the ACC tournament, combined with a weak nonconference schedule, apparently doomed the Hokies.

Virginia Tech's nonconference schedule included Brown, UNC Greensboro, Campbell, Delaware, Temple, Iowa, Georgia, VMI, Charleston Southern, Maryland-Baltimore County, Longwood, Seton Hall and N.C. Central.

It's not the Hokies' fault that Iowa, Georgia and Penn State, teams in legitimate major conferences, weren't very good this year. Losing to Temple did not help the Hokies' case. Virginia Tech's other nonconference opponents are a who's who of also-rans and bottom-tier RPI teams.

But if the NCAA selection committee is sending Virginia Tech a message about its non-conference schedule, how can it snub William and Mary? The Tribe beat three teams in the NCAA field, Wake Forest, Maryland and Richmond. And the Wake Forest and Maryland games were on the road.

And to further add to the Hokies' fury, they beat Wake Forest and Clemson (Clemson is a No. 7 NCAA seed). Wake Forest and Clemson lost in the first round of the ACC tournament. Virginia Tech finished tied for third in the ACC and had a first-round bye. If the Hokies aren't good enough to be in the NCAA tournament, Wake Forest and Clemson have no business there, either.

The Spiders, though, took care of business from the start of the regular season to the finish.

"We're not backing off from anybody," said Dan Geriot, the Spiders' junior backup center. We think we're one of the best teams in the country, and we're ready to prove it."

The Spiders have what they deserve. Their challenge now is to capitalize on the opportunity.

Temple grinds down UR 56-52 in tourney final

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 15, 2010

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. -- Justin Harper hit three impressive fade-away jumpers. But those hoops from the University of Richmond's 6-10 forward illustrated the Spiders' difficulty yesterday in the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament final. Against Temple's nationally ranked defense, UR rarely got near the rim.

When the Spiders did, they had trouble finishing in a 56-52 grinder the top-seeded Owls won before 7,882 at Boardwalk Hall for their third consecutive league title. Third-seeded Richmond (26-8) scored a season-low, shot 43.4 percent, missed 14 of 19 from 3-point distance, and collected one point from the foul line.

Temple (29-5) is rated fifth nationally in scoring defense (56.8 ppg) and fourth in 3-point percentage defense (27.7). The Owls' perimeter speed and interior size gummed up UR's cut-and-screen operation. But Spiders' fatigue probably figured into the equation also, acknowledged Richmond coach Chris Mooney.

"Both teams were probably tired," he said. "That's what the tournament format does to you. I think we were [tired], but I don't necessarily think that dictated the outcome of the game."

Temple cruised through two games here before yesterday, winning by 18 and 13 points. UR was extended in the quarterfinals by Massachusetts 77-72 late Friday night and needed overtime to get by Xavier 89-85 in Saturday's semifinals.

"You never know why your shots don't fall," UR guard David Gonzalvez said. "When you don't make shots, people say you're tired. When you do make shots, people say you're fresh."

Temple led 7-0, by 12 with 12 minutes left and 49-41 with five minutes to go. UR then made a series of defensive stops, and trailed 49-46 with 3:32 remaining. Gonzalvez missed the front end of a one-and one. Ryan Butler's contested transition layup didn't go down. Kevin Anderson missed a five-footer. Gonzalvez and Butler missed 20-footers.

Said Anderson: "We had a chance. They were good shots, good layups, good pull-ups, good 3s. They were all good shots, and they just didn't fall."

UR desperately needed a 3-pointer down 53-50 with seven seconds left. Gonzalvez, pressured by Juan Fernandez (18 points), was short on an attempt from just beyond the top of the key.

Temple hit 12 of 14 from the foul line. UR was 1 of 5. Those numbers reflect the difference in the game, according to Mooney, who had no beef with the way in which the game was officiated.

"I couldn't be more proud of my team and our players," he said. "We didn't play beautifully, but we played tough and I thought we competed and scrapped and fought until the end. I don't think we have anything to hang our heads over."

All-tournament: Temple guard Juan Fernandez, the most outstanding player, was joined by Temple forward Lavoy Allen, Xavier guard Jordan Crawford, and Spiders guards Kevin Anderson and David Gonzalvez.

Spiders made long climb from their 8-22 season

By Paul Woody
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 14, 2010

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. Dan Geriot will have chills when he steps on the court today, and it will not be because he's feeling ill or from the breeze off the ocean.

Geriot and his University of Richmond teammates yesterday reached the Atlantic 10 championship game. The Spiders have not played in the final since the 2001-02 season, but that's not the reason Geriot, David Gonzalvez and Ryan Butler attach such significance to this championship appearance.

The first year that trio played together at Richmond, the Spiders finished 8-22. Things looked bleak. No one was talking about championships.

"We had a reputation as being losers, around campus and in the league," Geriot said. "You can't be 8-22 and expect people to respect you.

"We had a lot of unhappy guys. We knew we had to really dedicate ourselves and make Richmond basketball our lives. I did that. Dave did that. Butler, it's always been his life."

Butler, a redshirt senior, and Gonzalvez are in their final seasons for the Spiders. Geriot would be but for a knee injury that sidelined him last year. Today, they will walk onto the court in Boardwalk Hall and play Temple for the A-10 title.

This has not been an easy climb for Butler, Geriot and Gonzalvez. Losing can become a habit. Chris Mooney, the Spiders' young coach, has exacting standards and accepts nothing less than a maximum effort each day.

Yet Mooney was the lone member of the UR program who saw a bright future after that 8-22 record in 2006-07. His challenge was getting the players to believe that.

"That's what Mooney," -- and Butler caught himself -- "coach would try to tell us. Not during the year when we were 8-22, but in the offseason. He told us to work hard, that we were going to be there one day."

To get here today, Richmond had to come from behind, then go into overtime to beat Xavier.

Temple is next on the docket, and the Owls are a top 20 team on a roll.

The Spiders will be ready. They are in the title game because they handle pressure perhaps as well as any team in the country.

But that's not the only reason they are 26-7 and playing for the conference tournament championship.

Every member of Mooney's first big recruiting class -- four other freshmen came in with Geriot and Gonzalvez, and it was Butler's redshirt freshman season -- who stayed has gotten better. Mooney matured as a coach. Talented recruits have been added.

"It was really rough on us our first year," Gonzalvez said. "We were so young, so inexperienced. It's hard for any freshman in college basketball to adjust to the college life, the academics, the schedule, lifting, getting used to the speed of the game.

"Those who stayed worked really hard. Coach told us it would get better, but it was kind of hard to see the future."

Anyone who saw the Spiders yesterday got a view of what Mooney and his players have accomplished.

The Spiders are versatile. They can go big with Geriot in the middle.

"When Dan's in the game, our offense moves at its best," Mooney said. "He has the best understanding of what we're trying to do. He's the centerpiece of offense and makes sure ball gets from one side of floor to the other."

They can go small with three forwards and two guards and become a quick, mobile defensive unit.

Both approaches were necessary to beat Xavier.

But reaching the A-10 title game was not just a matter of winning yesterday or setting high goals at the beginning of the season.

"Experience is great, but it's all hard work," Geriot said. "It's the way we work in weight room, the way we push each other. It's the chemistry we have off the court. I think it's second to none in the country.

"Coach Mooney told us we were going to get there, that we could be at the top of the league. He told us, 'It's your program do what you want with it.' And it's worked out pretty well."

The Spiders have no plans to stop working now.

Revenge win puts Richmond in A-10 final

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 14, 2010

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. -- They were bouncing off the walls. The University of Richmond's players stayed poised through the obligatory postgame handshake lines following yesterday's overtime conquest of Xavier, then headed for their locker room through a narrow corridor of Boardwalk Hall.

There, they started celebrating by chest-bumping, side-bumping and back-bumping everything within range, including the walls.

The Spiders' 89-85 win in the Atlantic 10 Conference semifinals not only takes them to this afternoon's league championship game against top-seeded Temple, it gave third-seeded UR (26-7) a victory over every A-10 opponent this season. At Xavier on Feb. 28, Richmond fell 78-76 in double-overtime in the only regular-season meeting, and that supplied more motivation for yesterday's rematch.

"We wanted to get them again," UR guard Kevin Anderson, the A-10 player of the year, said of the second-seeded Musketeers (24-8). "We got them again."

Anderson (45 minutes) scored 27 points, 23 after halftime. David Gonzalvez (44 minutes), UR's other starting guard, scored 26, 16 in the first half.

"Unbelievable. Fifty-three points combined," said UR forward Kevin Smith. "A lot of teams have one point guard who's leading the team. We've got two. Both are floor generals. Both can handle the ball, shoot, make good decisions. More times than not, they're making great decisions."

Anderson executed a baseline cross-over move and layup with 3.1 seconds left in regulation to tie it at 73. Gonzalvez hit a 3-pointer 20 seconds into OT to set the tone for the extra five minutes.

Turnover spasms by UR allowed Xavier to get away to a six-point lead in the first half, nine-point advantage early in the second half, and a five-point lead with 2 minutes left. Gonzalvez responded with a 3-pointer.

Said Anderson: "This was just another opportunity to come back, fight back, show our heart."

The 6-0 Anderson made all Musketeers look slow. The Spiders also got a major off-the-bench boost from 6-6 sophomore Francis-Cedric Martel (10 points, eight rebounds, two blocks and a steal), and reserve center Dan Geriot scored 11. But Anderson and Gonzalvez (five assists) kept UR orderly, purposeful and productive.

"Gonzalvez did it by getting to the foul line, especially in the first half," Xavier coach Chris Mack said of the senior who converted nine free throws before the break (13 overall). "Anderson took over down the stretch. He's like the Energizer Bunny. Never gets tired."

The Spiders hit a season-high 23 foul shots (26 attempts), staying aggressive, not settling for jumpers. "That was one of our goals we wrote up on the board before the game: Get to the free throw line," Gonzalvez said.

Xavier took 36 foul shots (26 hits). Musketeer Dante' Jackson failed on the front end of a one-and-one chance when Xavier was ahead 73-71 with 15 seconds left, and the Muskies also struggled from the line in OT. They were fouled often because Richmond went late without a post man. Martel, 6-7 Ryan Butler and the 6-5 Smith joined Anderson and Gonzalvez.

"We have a really good front line, we feel," UR coach Chris Mooney said. "But at the same time, we think that we're probably at our most effective defensively when we have a small lineup in there. [That] really gives us a chance to put pressure on the ball."

UR downs UMass to reach A-10 semifinals

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 13, 2010

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. Behind Boardwalk Hall's baskets are some temporary bleachers, then a lot of space. Depth perception issues could cause shooting problems. Or maybe not.

Nine first-half 3-pointers got the University of Richmond in position for its 77-72, late-night extermination of Massachusetts in the quarterfinals of the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament. Last night's game didn't start until nearly 9:30 p.m., and ended at 11:28 p.m., following a rally by UMass, which scored 51 second-half points.

The Spiders' first four buckets were 3-pointers, as they went ahead 12-6.

"I think they were really tight on defense," said UR guard David Gonzalvez. "When we did drive, we kicked it out to open guys."

And when UR center Dan Geriot hit a sweeping, old-school hook over UMass' 6-10, 275-pound Hashim Bailey to make it 16-6, the outcome didn't seem much in doubt, though only 7:30 had elapsed.

"I thought we were really good in the first half, and shooting the ball so well obviously helps," said UR coach Chris Mooney.

Richmond's match-up zone caused turnovers, forced bad shots, and generally kept the dribble-drive offense of UMass from making much progress. It was 38-21 at halftime. UMass cut the lead to four in the final minute, and to three with a few seconds left.

"They outplayed us in the second half," Mooney said. He credited the second-half contribution of reserve forward Kevin Smith for keeping UR ahead.

The third-seeded Spiders (25-7) advanced to today's 3:30 p.m. semifinal vs. secondseeded Xavier (24-7), which eliminated seventh-seeded Dayton 78-73 in the first quarterfinal of last night's session. Dayton led by 15 with 11:16 left. Top-seeded Temple and fifth-seeded Rhode Island will meet in the first semifinal.

The Spiders, who finished with 11 3-point goals (20 attempts), had five players in double-figures.

UR and Xavier played a double-overtime game in Cincinnati on Feb. 28 in their only meeting of the regular season. The Musketeers won 78-76, Richmond's lone loss since Jan. 20.

"I think there's a feeling that we were very close to sharing the conference [regular-season] championship and a double-overtime loss at Xavier kind of prevented that," Mooney said.

Richmond went 13-3 in the A-10. Xavier and Temple each went 14-2. UR had the tie-breaker over Temple, which the Spiders beat, if those teams had finished with the same record. Xavier is the only A-10 team UR did not defeat this season.

The 11th-seeded Minutemen (12-20) started three freshmen, a sophomore, and senior guard Ricky Harris (19.7 ppg), who had 1,941 career points heading into last night's quarterfinal. UMass needed a win in its regular-season finale to qualify for the 12-team league tournament, then won at sixth-seeded Charlotte in Tuesday's first round. That was UMass' first A-10 tourney win since 2002.

The Spiders earned a first-round bye by finishing among the top four in the regular-season race. They looked much fresher early, when UMass failed to find Spiders' snipers posted just beyond the 3-point arc. In the first half, Gonzalvez and Ryan Butler made three 3s each, and Justin Harper had two.

When these teams played in mid-January at the Robins Center, Darrius Garrett, 6-9, came off the bench and collected 14 blocks, a UR and conference record, as Richmond won 70-63 in overtime in their only meeting in the regular season.

UR notes: Mooney delivers good news in style

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 13, 2010

Mooney delivers good news in style
Sources say Chris Mooney was a pretty good shooter while a four-year starter at Princeton. As the University of Richmond's coach, he recently demonstrated a nice touch.

Atlantic 10 Conference coaches voted Sunday morning for the league's player of the year. Spiders junior guard Kevin Anderson came out on top. The announcement was scheduled to be made Sunday at about 4 p.m. Before then, Mooney wanted to tell Anderson face to face.

"Coach rode over to my apartment. He surprised me. He said he needed an autograph for a neighbor," Anderson said. "He came out of the car and gave me a big hug and told me I was player of the year."

Anderson said he was "shocked" that he won because he was in no way dominant statistically in the A-10. Among league players, the 6-0, 175-pounder finished fifth in scoring (17.8 ppg), sixth in field goal percentage (46.3) and wasn't among the top 10 in assists.

He was the first player in UR history to be named to the all-Atlantic 10 first team. UR joined the league for the 2001-02 season.

Keys to every game
UR set a school record for regular-season wins (24-7) primarily for two reasons, in Mooney's estimation. First, he believes Anderson (17.8 ppg) and 6-4 senior David Gonzalvez (14.3 ppg) form one of the nation's top backcourts.

"Both their decision-making and ability to score is very important," Mooney said.

Then, factor in UR's match-up defense. The Spiders allowed an average of 61.4 points in the regular season.

"Our defense has been very good to great almost every game this year," Mooney said. "If you have guards who can take care of the ball, run the team and score, and then at the defensive end if you're very good, that's going to give you a pretty good chance to win games."

Bounced around
The Spiders have played A-10 tournaments in Philadelphia, Dayton, Ohio, Cincinnati and Atlantic City, N.J., where it has been held since 2007.

Saint Louis coach Rick Majerus yesterday sounded as if he couldn't care less where the tournament is held. He is no fan of conference tournaments, believing that the regular-season games in the league should mean more, and that conference tournaments affect the academic performance of the players who miss classes to participate.

"You're not going to remember 10 years out if you won the conference tournament," said Majerus, whose Billikens were eliminated 63-47 by Rhode Island yesterday. "I've always pushed the academic agenda. Where are these guys going? I don't think there's a player [in the A-10 tournament] who can make a real career of basketball. Even if there were, at what expense?"

UR's players were on spring break in the days leading into this tournament.
Not yours, not mine

Apart from winning 10 of their past 11 games (the only loss being a double-overtime defeat at Xavier), the Spiders may have felt comfortable going into this tournament at Boardwalk Hall for this reason: They were 3-0 on neutral courts this season. Richmond beat Mississippi State and Missouri in South Padre Island, Texas, and Florida in Sunrise, Fla.

No other A-10 team had more than two neutral-court victories.

Spiders start A-10 tourney in uncommon position

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 12, 2010

The current University of Richmond basketball team is the only one in school history that knows it's almost certainly headed to the NCAA tournament regardless of conference-tournament performance.

Every informed bracket prognosticator from Sandbridge to San Diego thinks the Spiders (24-7) carry credentials necessary for at-large entry.

How might that affect UR as it plays in the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament, which starts for the third-seeded Spiders with a quarterfinal game vs. 11th-seeded Massachusetts (12-19) tonight at 9 in Atlantic City, N.J.?

"I don't get a sense that our guys are overlooking anything," said Chris Mooney, Richmond's fifth-year coach. "We're still a team that plays with something to prove and feels that we can still do some things in this conference.

"We'll worry about the NCAA tournament come Sunday night. But for now, our focus is squarely on UMass and the A-10 tournament."

UR's 1985-86 team made the NCAAs via at-large bid. But those Spiders were by no means a lock. That was the first team in Colonial Athletic Association history to earn an at-large bid. The 2003-04 Spiders were at-large qualifiers out of the A-10, but also went into Selection Sunday with fingers crossed.

This season's team has notable non-conference wins (Mississippi State, Missouri, Florida, Old Dominion), an impressive A-10 worksheet (13-3), and is No. 24 in the RPI. So much talk regarding the Spiders involves what seed Richmond will get in the NCAAs, where it will be sent, and potential first-round opponents. All of that discussion ignores this weekend's activity at Boardwalk Hall.

"We want [to win the A-10 tournament] just as bad as we want to get to the NCAA tournament," said UR guard David Gonzalvez.

"Last year and the year before, it's kind of like no one really expected anything from Richmond. If we got deep into the conference [tournament], then it would have been a big accomplishment. But this year, I think if we don't win this thing, it would kind of be a letdown for us in our eyes."

Up first for Richmond is a young but dangerous UMass team. The Minutemen went 5-11 in conference competition and needed a victory over Rhode Island on the last day of the regular season to make the 12-team league tournament. UMass got that (69-67), then prevailed at sixth-seeded Charlotte (59-56) Tuesday night in a first-round game.

"We know they're probably feeling very good right now," Mooney said of the Minutemen.

UR and UMass met once this season. Richmond's Darrius Garrett came off the bench for 14 blocks a league and school record, and two shy of the NCAA mark as UR won 70-63 in overtime at the Robins Center. UMass coach Derek Kellogg estimated that Garrett changed "six or seven" other shots.

"We could have easily lost that game," UR guard Kevin Anderson said. "Darrius, with the 14 blocks, if it wasn't for him, we don't win that game."

Spiders head into postseason with newly developed depth

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 11, 2010

What could have been a crushing blow didn't crush the University of Richmond last Saturday at Charlotte.

In a game neither team was controlling, Spiders guard Kevin Anderson picked up his fourth foul and went to the bench with 7:34 left. Richmond led 61-60. Anderson, the Atlantic 10 Conference player of the year, spent the next five minutes seated.

"Even without Kevin, we were able to play well, continue to fight, and give ourselves a chance for when he was able to come back in the game," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "We feel like our depth is so good that we can go long periods of time with multiple groups on the floor."

Anderson re-entered with 2:32 remaining. Richmond trailed 65-64. UR (24-7), which meets UMass (12-19) in the A-10 tournament quarterfinals tomorrow night in Atlantic City, N.J., won 89-84 at Charlotte in overtime.

"I knew if we just took care of the ball until [Anderson] came back, we'd be fine," said 6-5 junior Kevin Smith, one of Richmond's key reserves.

Anderson scored 24. Gonzalvez scored 29 and had 10 rebounds. Deeper analysis of those 45 minutes in Charlotte reveals that the contributions of Richmond's bench players also were vital. That has been the case through this season's second half.

Three UR starters Anderson, forward Ryan Butler and forward Justin Harper committed four fouls at Charlotte. A fourth starter, center Darrius Garrett, finished with three personals. Two came in the first 2:37 and he sat the remainder of the first half.

Dan Geriot, 6-9, plugged the hole left by Garrett. In place of the others, Mooney spliced 6-6 sophomore Francis-Cedric Martel (25 minutes) and Smith (20 minutes).

"When I was at my most tired point, all my teammates were scoring," said Gonzalvez, who played 44 minutes. "It was awesome. I could just catch my breath and focus on the defensive end."

Smith could be a bitter bit-player. He started 35 of Richmond's 36 games last season. The reserve role he has embraced includes very few shots (28 baskets in 31 games), and a heavy load of dirty work: energetic defense, rebounding, screening, passing and cutting.

"You have to take a step back and understand 'This is not about myself. This is about a greater picture,'" said Smith, who's from Murfreesboro, Tenn. "You have to humble yourself sometimes. You take that [approach], and you'll be given something back."

In long run, attrition, injuries benefited Spiders

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 9, 2010

The day before the University of Richmond opened basketball practice this season, the Spiders played a pick-up game. Kevin Hovde dribbled to the basket, shot a layup, and his left foot landed on a teammate's foot.

Hovde broke his ankle and tore ligaments. Surgery was required. Hovde hasn't suited up for a game this season. He recently resumed running and doing drills with the Spiders, who are 24-7, seeded third in this week's Atlantic 10 Conference tournament and almost certainly headed to the NCAA tournament.

"It was pretty upsetting, now that we're finally good, to get hurt and not be able to play," said Hovde, a 6-6 forward who is redshirting. He will be back in 2010-11.

Hovde's injury was the latest twist in the splintering of Chris Mooney's first recruiting class as Spiders coach. In 2006-07, UR had seven freshmen, including forward Ryan Butler, who redshirted 2005-06 as a true freshman because of a broken foot. Three of those freshmen -- Butler, guard David Gonzalvez and center Dan Geriot -- started on a team that went 8-22.

Three seasons after struggling with that rookie-laden team, Richmond has been ranked in national polls and featured in national publications. Given that UR had seven freshmen in 2006-07, the presumption would be that several of those players developed into senior stars who have carried a veteran Spiders team. That isn't the case. Gonzalvez and Butler are UR's only seniors.

The fact that the entire group of seven didn't make it to senior year at UR turned out to be a tremendous benefit to the program. Spiders classes are more balanced. Richmond signed significantly better players in place of those who left. The Spiders' next season will again be projected as one of the A-10's top teams. They seem to be set up for sustained success.

WHAT HAPPENED? Three scholarship players from that freshman class of 2006-07 transferred. Guard Stephen Kendall left the program early during his freshman season after not playing in any UR games. Forward David Brewster was suspended for academic reasons after 13 games -- he started five -- and did not return. Forward Brian Morris started 23 of 30 games as a freshman, averaged 8.1 points and transferred.

"We're looking to have a high retention rate, [but] the larger your class size is, the more likely there are going to be kids that just don't fit or don't play as much as they want to," Jim Miller, UR's athletic director, said after those three players left Richmond.

The Spiders signed a larger-than-usual class going into that 2006-07 season because they needed bodies. Previous retention issues and admissions problems for those who signed letters of intent while Jerry Wainwright was the Richmond coach left UR desperate for players. Chances weren't great that all seven freshmen would last four years at Richmond. But after Kendall, Brewster and Morris transferred, Mooney said he and his staff members would make adjustments to retain more players.

"If you didn't learn [from the attrition], you'd just be on your way to ignorance," he said.

Geriot sat out last season because of a knee injury suffered during the summer of 2008. He has another season of eligibility remaining as a result of his medical redshirt year, as does Hovde.

BALANCE COUNTS: Experience matters hugely in college athletics. Balancing four classes is a high priority for coaches, who work with 13 scholarships at the Division I level. Coaches want that balance so there's a greater chance of program consistency, not just an opportunity for a quality team every few years.

Among current scholarship players, UR has two seniors, five juniors (counting Hovde), four sophomores and two freshmen. Three freshmen are signed for next season. Hovde, on scholarship this season, will play as a walk-on next season so UR will have 13 scholarship players.

The form of natural selection that resulted in Butler and Gonzalvez being Richmond's only seniors this season couldn't have worked out much better for UR. The Spiders have relatively balanced classes of quality players, and next season's team will benefit from leadership of a pair of fifth-year seniors, Geriot and Hovde.

UR's Anderson is A-10's top player

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times' Dispatch
March 8, 2010

University of Richmond junior guard Kevin Anderson yesterday was named the 2009-10 Atlantic 10 Conference player of the year in voting conducted among the league's 14 head coaches.

The Spiders entered the A-10 for 2001-02 and never before had a player make first-team all-conference. UR's Chris Mooney was a candidate for coach of the year after leading the Spiders to a 13-3 A-10 record and a 24-7 mark overall. That award went to Temple's Fran Dunphy.

Richmond, which appears to be headed to its first NCAA tournament since 2004, won the most regular-season games in program history, and its most A-10 games.

Anderson, 6-0 and from Atlanta, ranks fifth in the league in scoring (17.8 ppg), and led the Spiders in assists (3.4 apg) and steals (1.8 spg). He scored 20 or more 12 times.

"He's a special player," Mooney said.

Second-team recognition went to UR guard David Gonzalvez (14.3 ppg), a 6-4 senior who was also named to the all-defensive team.

On Saturday at Charlotte, Anderson hit a 25-footer that tied the game with 5 seconds left in regulation. UR went on to win 89-84 in overtime. That was the latest of several late-game plays from Anderson that helped the Spiders finish third in the A-10 and post notable nonconference wins over Mississippi State, Missouri and Florida.

"We won some big games this year. Some had to do with me making big shots late, but some had to do with the team playing defense and all of us just coming together, being exactly what a team needs to be to win games," Anderson said. "That's why I think we've been successful this year.

"I have confidence in each and every one of our guys, like they have confidence in me."

Last season, Anderson was a second-team choice. "I picked up a few things from last season. I'm shooting a little better from [3-point range], but I've still got a lot of room for improvement on that," said Anderson. "My assists weren't up that much and my turnovers were about the same.

"Those are things I can improve on."

The Spiders open A-10 tournament play Friday at 9 p.m. in Atlantic City, N.J., and will face either Charlotte or Massachusetts. Those teams meet in a first-round game tomorrow night in Charlotte.

Mooney's come a long way

By Mike Sielski
Bucks County Courier Times
March 10, 2010

PHILADELPHIA - At Archbishop Ryan High School, Chris Mooney remains something of a legend 20 years after he graduated.

A faculty member remembers when Princeton's Pete Carril was recruiting Mooney, and Carril called the school and went on and on about what a perfect fit Mooney would be at the university.

The guidance-office secretary, Barbara Corney, is still a bit peeved that her son swiped the Princeton sweatshirt that Mooney had sent to her out of gratitude for helping him with his college applications. Corney would have been thrilled with a thank-you note, but Mooney, who by then was the head coach at the University of Richmond, had also sent her a $75 restaurant gift certificate.

"Chris was blond hair, blue eyes, mannerly to an extreme, humble, just everything that every woman wants in a son," said George Deal, a Ryan history teacher and an assistant basketball coach when Mooney played there. "And he had the highest basketball IQ of anyone I ever coached."

Out of Ryan and Princeton, through a coaching career that has seen him jump from Lansdale Catholic High to Beaver College (now Arcadia University) to Air Force to Richmond, Mooney is now poised to reach the pinnacle of his profession. Richmond is 24-7 - its victory total is a school regular-season record - and is all but assured of making the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2004.

Last week, the Spiders' point guard, junior Kevin Anderson, was voted the Atlantic 10 Player of the Year. And at 37, five years after taking over a once-proud program that had been left with only seven scholarship players, Mooney was selected Monday as one of the 15 finalists for the Phelan National Coach of the Year Award.

"I think," said Temple coach Fran Dunphy, himself a finalist for the Phelan Award, "he's one of the rising stars in our world."

Temple is the A-10 tournament's two-time defending champion, and for Dunphy, the prospect of having to beat Richmond to win a third title has to be humbling. After all, Dunphy was Penn's head coach in 1990 - when Mooney, a 6-foot-6 forward, led Ryan to the Philadelphia Catholic League Northern Division championship and was named the league's most valuable player - and he nearly persuaded Mooney to stay in the city to play college ball.

Mooney's mother had died of cancer before his senior year, so Dave Mulholland, Ryan's head coach then, and Deal counseled Mooney during his recruitment. In the end, there were only two choices: Penn and Princeton.
Advertisement Click Here

"When Carril was recruiting Chris," Deal said, "one of the things that we liked was that he said, 'I know exactly how I'm going to use him. He's going to be the recipient of our first pass of our guard, and he's going to run the offense on the perimeter.' "

As hard as Dunphy pursued him, Mooney chose Princeton, starting for four years and scoring 1,071 points there, taking on the template for the kind of coach he would become. It hardly seems a coincidence, given Carril's influence on Mooney, that this season Richmond ranks 11th in the nation in turnover margin and 17th in field-goal-percentage defense - a smart team with a smart coach.

"He obviously runs the Princeton system offensively," Dunphy said, "but it's more hybridish than anything else these days. He's really got some good players, and he gives them the freedom they need to go make plays."

Mooney's experience at Princeton, of course, wasn't without its difficult moments. At first, he labored to grasp the subtleties and intricacies of Princeton's offense, and Carril, gruff and unsparing toward his players, didn't hesitate to remind Mooney how much he was struggling. One day, sensing trepidation in Mooney's voice during a phone call, Mulholland told him, "I'll see you tomorrow."

The next afternoon, Mulholland drove up Route 1, snuck into Jadwin Gym and hid in the arena's upper bleachers, close enough to watch Princeton practice but far enough away so that Carril couldn't see him - or so he thought.

"Chris was having a tough practice," Mulholland said, "which reflected why he called. He was a freshman player trying to fit into a very complicated system. And out of the clear blue, without anybody knowing I was in the gym, Carril hollers from 200 feet away, 'Hey, Coach, you didn't do a very good job with this kid.' "

It's hard to envision anyone saying the same thing now - certainly not at Ryan. There, they talk about Chris Mooney with fondness for the boy he used to be and pride in the man he is.

"He wanted to come back to Ryan and be a coach," Barbara Corney said, "but he was so unassuming, I felt he would not go further in coaching than high school. But he had something about him.

"Now," she said with a warm smile, "I know he'll never come back."

Coach Did Odd Jobs on Way to a Top Job

By Adam Himmelsbach
New York Times
March 7, 2010

RICHMOND, Va. — When the Richmond men’s basketball team gathered at midcourt during a recent practice, it was difficult to discern the head coach from his players.

Wearing a T-shirt and shorts, Chris Mooney, 37, stood with his team without standing out. He has a trim build, thick brown hair and a face that could make a bartender think twice. But his youthful appearance belies a winding basketball journey.

After Mooney graduated from Princeton in 1994, where he was an all-Ivy League forward for Coach Pete Carril, he worked as a law clerk, a high school English teacher and a kind of wedding planner. Coaching basketball, financially speaking, was a side job.

But Mooney was grinding toward an opportunity like this one.

This season, he has already led Richmond (24-7) to the most regular-season wins in its 96-year history. The Spiders, who have defeated Florida, Missouri, Mississippi State and Temple, will probably reach the N.C.A.A. tournament for the first time since 2004.

“Chris always thought this group of kids could do something special,” said Mooney’s wife of 12 years, Lia. “It’s been amazing.”

Mooney was raised in an Irish Catholic neighborhood in northeast Philadelphia. When he was in third grade and his older brother, Kevin, shot baskets on a Nerf hoop in the family’s home, Mooney would put on his Communion suit, scribble plays in a notebook and pretend to be a coach.

After sprouting to 6 feet 6 inches and starring for Archbishop Ryan High School, Mooney enrolled at Princeton, where he was a four-year starter. He studied Carril and his legendary offense closely, realizing the system was more a style than a rigid set of plays.

“Chris was always curious,” said Northwestern Coach Bill Carmody, who was an assistant at Princeton when Mooney played there. “Some guys, when they’re young, want to be doctors or engineers. He wanted to be a coach all along, and he picked up things from a lot of people.”

Mooney graduated with a degree in English, and opportunities to coach basketball were fleeting. He first worked as a law clerk, sorting files and moving boxes for a firm that was run by two Princeton fans.

Mooney applied for the head-coaching opening at Lansdale High School in Pennsylvania by faxing his handwritten résumé. Frank Giovonizzi, who was the athletic director and assistant principal, was put off by Mooney’s approach but intrigued by his pedigree.

“Then he came in for an interview and was horrible,” Giovonizzi said. “I told him to come back for a second interview wearing a sweatsuit and sneakers, because I thought he’d be more comfortable. He was, and he nailed it.”

Mooney was hired to coach basketball and teach English, sometimes slipping U2 lyrics into the poetry curriculum. He was demonstrative on the sideline — Giovonizzi sometimes sat on the bench to calm him — but he was also successful, guiding the Crusaders to the top of the Pioneer Athletic Conference.

In 1997, Mooney was hired to coach Division III Beaver College, which is in Glenside, Pa., and is now Arcadia University. The coaching position was part time, so Mooney also coordinated the use of campus facilities, including a castle that held wedding receptions.

He showed the space to newly engaged couples and helped them decide where the band should play and how tables should be arranged.

“I was 25 years old and I’d never even had people over for dinner,” Mooney said. “And here I am helping brides prepare for weddings.”

The basketball team did not have a manager, so Mooney washed uniforms, swept the court and filled water coolers. There were just six players on the roster during much of Mooney’s first season. When the two captains met with referees before games, the other players would stop warm-ups and wait.

In 2000, Mooney was hired as an assistant at Air Force, which was coached by the former Princeton assistant Joe Scott. Mooney became the Falcons’ coach in 2004. The next season, he was hired by Richmond, going just 21-39 in his first two seasons.

But this year the Spiders returned four starters from a 20-win team, along with center Dan Geriot, who missed last season with a knee injury after leading the team in scoring as a sophomore.

Within this close-knit group, the team’s managers and stars spend most of their free time together, and walk-ons are chided or praised as much as scholarship players.

“Coach says the only rule around here is: don’t be a jerk,” the senior guard David Gonzalvez said. “That pretty much covers everything.”

Richmond has used Mooney’s version of the Princeton offense as well as a pesky matchup zone defense to surge into the national spotlight. On Feb. 15, the team was ranked in the Associated Press poll for the first time since 1986.

The university’s athletic director, Jim Miller, said people now stopped him to talk about basketball when he wore a Spiders shirt in public. When some players recently ate at an Italian restaurant here, their meal was interrupted by several well-wishers.

Of course, this treatment is not unusual for an N.C.A.A tournament team. But the Spiders had recently operated more anonymously, overshadowed in their city by Virginia Commonwealth, which has reached two of the last three N.C.A.A. tournaments.

“I remember when we were 8-22, and things were bad,” Geriot said. “Like, some events were for frats, and we weren’t really allowed to go to them. Now, it’s like, ‘Come on over, fellas.’ This has been the time of our lives.”

Richmond was once an N.C.A.A. tournament darling; it was the first program to win first-round games as a 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th seed. This season, the Spiders are in line for a higher seeding. But if their story does turn a bit Cinderella, their coach knows how to find the castle — as long as it is not already booked for a wedding.

Sharing the Ball, at Any Speed

By Adam Himmelsbach
New York Times
March 7, 2010

RICHMOND, Va. — When Richmond Coach Chris Mooney was on a recruiting visit to Princeton as a high school senior in 1989, he watched a group of Tigers basketball players in an intense four-on-four game.
Richmond Coach Chris Mooney said the offense he learned at Princeton is about sharing the ball, not slowing down the game. Scott K. Brown/Associated Press Richmond Coach Chris Mooney said the offense he learned at Princeton was about sharing the ball, not slowing down the game.

They were many of the same players who had nearly shocked the college basketball world the previous March, when the 16th-seeded Tigers lost to top-seeded Georgetown, 50-49, in the first round of the N.C.A.A. tournament.

In that game, Princeton had slowed the game to a turtle's pace and caught the Hoyas off guard with a series of backdoor cuts. In that game, Coach Pete Carril's legendary Princeton offense was introduced to the nation.

Or was it?

In the pickup game Mooney watched during his recruiting visit, he saw the same backdoor cuts, but he also saw shots going up far more quickly.

"There was incredible sharing of the ball and ball movement," said Mooney, who became an all-Ivy League forward for the Tigers. "A traditional fan might think of the Princeton offense and think of a low-scoring game, but I figured out that day it was more of a philosophy, a way to play."

Richmond (24-7), which is probably bound for the N.C.A.A. tournament for the first time since 2004, runs a version of the Princeton offense. But Mooney cringes when people assume his team passes the ball in a circle until there are 3 seconds left on the shot clock. Several N.B.A. teams, such as the Washington Wizards and the Sacramento Kings — Carrill has been an assistant with both teams — have used versions of the Princeton approach.

Mooney said there were plenty of times when the Princeton teams of the early 1990s sped up the pace.

"The shot clock is not a part of teaching the offense," Mooney said. "But that's hard to convey to someone who's seen Princeton play three times, and all the scores are in the 40s."

Mooney was referring to the Tigers' N.C.A.A. tournament near-misses (and its 43-41 upset of U.C.L.A. in the first round in 1996), when Princeton's best chance was to shorten the game.

In the same season the Tigers scored just 49 points in their tournament loss to Georgetown, they scored 78 in a win against Columbia. In 1990-91, when they lost to Villanova in the N.C.A.A. tournament's first round, 50-48, they scored 84 in a game against Cornell. And the following year, when Princeton lost in the N.C.A.A tournament to Syracuse, 51-43, the Tigers scored 87 against Harvard.

"Nobody who played at Princeton calls it the Princeton offense," Mooney said. "We just say it's the way we play. It's just five guys who can dribble, pass and shoot, playing together in a cohesive manner."

Guards lift Richmond to overtime victory at Charlotte

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 7, 2010

CHARLOTTE -- Kevin Anderson hit a 25-footer with 5.3 seconds left in regulation to force overtime. When he got to the University of Richmond's bench area, David Gonzalvez lifted Anderson from behind and transported him a few feet to a seat.

Both guards -- Anderson and Gonzalvez -- carried the Spiders, who beat Charlotte 89-84 in OT yesterday before 6,559 at Halton Arena. In Richmond's final regular-season game, the 6-4 Gonzalvez scored 29 and had 10 rebounds in 44 minutes, and the 6-0 Anderson scored 24. Each hit four 3-pointers.

"Our guards are the two best guards in the [Atlantic 10 Conference], and one of the best backcourts in the United States," said UR coach Chris Mooney.

Pressure by UR prohibited Charlotte from getting off a final shot in regulation. Overtime began 70-70, and UR made all four of its OT shots. Three-pointers by Justin Harper and Anderson capped Richmond's first two OT possessions, and gave the Spiders a 76-72 lead.

Richmond tripled the Niners to death with 12 3-point buckets (31 attempts), and five 3-point plays on two-point baskets and free throws (four of those by Gonzalvez).

The Spiders (13-3, 24-7) avenged a January loss to Charlotte at the Robins Center, and this season defeated every A-10 opponent but Xavier, which beat UR in double-overtime.

The Niners (9-7, 19-11), who have lost six of their last seven, came into this game as the A-10's top free-throw-shooting team (73.6 percent). They missed four of eight foul shots in the final 2:32 to leave the door open for the Spiders, then allowed Anderson to get off the 3-point attempt with 5.3 seconds left.

UR trailed 69-67 when Anderson committed a turnover with 11 seconds remaining. Richmond fouled. Charlotte's Charles Dewhurst made one of two free throws. Anderson dribbled upcourt and shot his tying jumper several feet beyond the top of the key.

Charlotte coach Bobby Lutz said after the game that the Niners, ahead 70-67 when Richmond took possession with 11 seconds left, "should've" fouled Anderson before he was able to get a clean look from 3-point distance.

The Spiders survived serious foul trouble caused by the Niners' dedication to inside offense. Five Richmond players picked up four or more personals, which gave UR a chance to show off its depth. Francis-Cedric Martel, a 6-6 sophomore, 6-5 junior Kevin Smith, and 6-9 Dan Geriot all were heavily involved off the bench.

"They've played in big games. They've taken big shots. They've made big plays," Gonzalvez said. "It's great, because we can trust those guys when they get in the game. I don't think every team has that."

The Spiders played Thursday night, winning a physical game vs. visiting Dayton, then took a bus to Charlotte late Thursday so they would have time to practice here Friday.

"There were parts of the game when maybe there were six or seven possessions in a row, and you got a little winded," Gonzalvez said. "You've just got to catch your breath as fast as you can, and really push through it. It's a part of being tough."

NEXT: The Spiders are off until Friday, when they'll play in the quarterfinals of the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, N.J. In a format change this season, first-round games will be held Tuesday at campus sites. The Spiders earned a first-round bye in the 12-team field by finishing among the top four in the league's regular-season race.

The A-10 will announce its all-league teams and coach of the year today. Anderson seems a lock to become UR's first, first-team pick, and is in the running for player of the year. Mooney is among the top candidates for coach of the year.

The Ninja, Martel, keeps UR's defense active

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 6, 2010

To his University of Richmond teammates, Francis-Cedric Martel is The Ninja, an all-business, sneaky-quick 6-6 sophomore. In his presence, offensive players become highly uncomfortable because Martel constantly applies pressure.

The Montreal resident was at his Ninja-like best in UR's 60-56 win over Dayton on Thursday, deflecting balls, grabbing key rebounds, tipping balls to teammates. In nine second-half minutes, Martel keyed a Spiders' defensive upgrade, helping hold the Flyers to eight points in the last eight minutes of the Atlantic 10 Conference game.

"He stole the ball from some of Dayton's quickest guards, just straight-up picked them, at crucial times of the game," UR guard David Gonzalvez said of Martel, who had four rebounds, three steals and five fouls in 14 minutes. "Without him, we wouldn't have won."

A tough, athletic player with unwavering defensive commitment was what Richmond coach Chris Mooney felt the Spiders needed to complement the skilled group of offensive players UR already had. Said Mooney, of his trip to see Martel in high school: "I went up to Montreal, had to make a connection, long day. And I think he played eight minutes and fouled out of the game. So I knew he was aggressive."

The instructions Martel receives before entering a game don't change. "Bring energy, rebound, defend, and run offense correctly. Don't make mistakes," Martel said. "Put hands on every ball I can."

Martel admits he was slightly disturbed earlier this season because he wasn't playing more. His limited appearances usually produced positive results, but Richmond is a veteran team that relies on the experience of perimeter players Kevin Anderson, Gonzalvez and Ryan Butler. They take the big shots. They minimize turnovers.

"Now, I accept my role, and the team is doing well," said Martel, who plays an average of about 12 minutes. "We're having a great season, so [playing time] doesn't bother me anymore."

Gonzalvez and Butler are seniors, and their departure will open up additional minutes for Martel, who shows a quality shooting touch and ability to get to the basket in Spiders' practices.

"He's a scorer, and we're not even seeing that part of his game because I think he's focusing on his aggressiveness and his defense and his hustle," said Mooney, whose Spiders (12-3, 23-7) play their final regular-season game today at Charlotte (9-6, 19-10).

Butler, Gonzalvez "locked" as Spiders

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 4, 2010

Coming out of a TV timeout late in Sunday's game at Xavier, David Gonzalvez left the University of Richmond's bench with angry eyes and fists held at waist-level. It appeared as if he were going after somebody who had slapped his mother.

Gonvalvez stomped to near midcourt, where Ryan Butler stood.

"This is our time! Lock up!" Gonzalvez shouted at Butler.

"We've been feeding off each other for about two months defensively," Butler said. "We realize this is our last go-around, and we're going to do everything we can."

Tonight is the final home game for Gonzalvez and Butler, UR's two seniors. They started on an 8-22 team as freshmen. The Spiders they now lead are 22-7, seeking a victory over Dayton that would erase doubts concerning a Richmond at-large bid to the NCAA tournament. ESPN Bracketologist Joe Lunardi said yesterday that he has the Spiders "on my locks board, and I don't know that I've ever had to take a team off the locks board. I'm pretty conservative with that."

Asked Tuesday for one-word descriptions of his seniors, Richmond coach Chris Mooney provided "tenacious" for Butler and "winner" for Gonzalvez. "Growth" fits both.

Following his final season at Douglas Freeman High, Butler filled out an application for New Jersey's Blair Academy, where he planned to spend a post-graduate year. That, as it turned out, wasn't necessary. Jerry Wainwright, then UR's coach, didn't offer Butler a scholarship. Wainwright left for DePaul. Mooney was hired. His first signee was Butler.

Butler redshirted his first UR year (broken foot), then gradually developed into a valuable complementary player with defensive quickness rooted in his soccer background. "The way he moves his feet is just amazing. His anticipation is like no other defender I've ever seen," Gonzalvez said of the 6-7 Butler. "He's like a cat."

Gonzalvez, from Marietta, Ga., also five years out of high school, originally signed with a Division II school in South Carolina, then decided he would play Division I. Gonzalvez spent a year at Notre Dame Prep in Massachusetts.

"We had guys there who didn't get off our bench, and they went on to [major-college programs]," the 6-4 Gonzalvez said of the team with nine Division-I players. "Being able to play with that competition every single day, it was really a special situation."

Gonzalvez believes his deep shooting ability is "a gift from God." His on-court ferocity helped Richmond lose its reputation as a soft program. "If you beat him, he's going to keep coming at you until you play him again, until he wins," Butler said.

Richmond supplied both with on-the-job training. Attrition had stripped the Spiders of quality upperclassmen. Gonzalvez dribbled too much, and was prone to quick 3-point attempts. Butler periodically passed recklessly, and he allowed mistakes to drain his confidence.

They eliminated bad habits, and in four years added about 15 muscular pounds apiece. They'll graduate in May, Gonzalvez with a sociology degree, Butler with one in history.

NOTES: Prior to tip-off tonight, UR will recognize Nathan Mwenda, 14, who was diagnosed with a brain tumor and has been "adopted" by the Spiders . . . UR plans a white-out, and requests that fans dress accordingly.

Spiders looking to replicate challenging schedule

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 3, 2010

In early March, focus on strong finishes consumes college basketball coaches. But looking ahead several months is part of Jamal Brunt's job. The University of Richmond assistant is heavily involved in scheduling, whose importance is obvious to anybody following the Spiders.

Securing a high-quality schedule outside Atlantic 10 Conference competition this season gave UR an opportunity to ascend in the college basketball hierarchy. The Spiders took advantage, beating Mississippi State, Missouri, and Florida. Also, their Rating Percentage Index position derived some benefit from losses at Wake Forest and South Carolina.

In terms of qualification for the NCAA tournament, "Winning games is number one. Who you play is a close second," said Jim Miller, Richmond's athletic director.

The Spiders (11-3 A-10, 22-7), with two regular-season games remaining, have an RPI of 28. That puts them in solid position to receive an at-large invitation. Miller yesterday chose not to project what is left for UR to do in order to

make the NCAAs for the first time in six years. But he said, "If we hadn't had those five games against BCS schools, I think we'd be really sweating it out right now."

UR is attempting to arrange a comparably challenging non-conference schedule for next season, and Brunt has started the work required to fill remaining schedule slots. Miller notes that when Richmond seeks home-and-home agreements from schools in power leagues, the response is almost always negative. The Spiders pose too great a threat. A few consecutive years of NCAA tournament involvement by Richmond, however, could change the picture, Miller said. He points to Xavier and Gonzaga as non-BCS schools whose consistent accomplishment allows them to put together impressive home schedules.

"I think we need to attain that level of success to enhance our schedule even more," Miller said.

UR has contracts with Bucknell, VCU, William and Mary and Wake Forest for games at the Robins Center next season, and will play at Old Dominion, UNC Greensboro and VMI. The Spiders would find very attractive the chance to play in a neutral-court setting similar to the South Padre Island Invitational, whose title they won in late November. There, UR upended Mississippi State and Missouri. The Spiders also played Florida on a neutral court.

According to Brunt, Richmond's success this season has led to "a few more conversations with different people who are putting on these events."

Be Very Afraid

By George Dohrmann
Sports Illustrated
March 1, 2010

Kevin Anderson didn't know the history until last week. That's when Richmond earned its first national ranking (No. 25) since 1986 and reporters asked the junior point guard about the Spiders' prior contributions to the madness of March: the upset of Charles Barkley and fifth-seeded Auburn in '84; the surprising trip to the Sweet 16 in '88; the toppling of second-seeded Syracuse in '91 and third-seeded South Carolina in '98. Richmond is the first school to win NCAA tournament games as a 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th seed, and while that may be ancient lore to the current Spiders, it still impressed them.

"We have been so far from being in the tournament my first few years here that I didn't know about any of it," Anderson says. "Now I hear about Richmond being this giant killer, and I like that nickname. I like it a lot."

The school that draws Richmond (22--6 at week's end, 11--2 in the Atlantic 10) in the first round will not be so amused. A disciplined defensive squad with veterans at key spots, the Spiders are the class of the surprisingly strong A-10. Six teams in the conference—Richmond, Temple, Xavier, Rhode Island, Dayton and Charlotte—have RPIs in the top 51, a better number than the SEC and the Big Ten.

Richmond coach Chris Mooney, 37, envisioned an NCAA bid for his team after a 20--16 finish last year, a vast improvement over the Spiders' 8--22 mark in 2006--07, his second season, when he played six freshmen. "We saw enough improvement," he says, "that it led us to believe this year could be special."

The coach uses the same adjective—special—to describe the 5'11", 175-pound Anderson, who was averaging a team-high 17.5 points through Sunday with an arsenal of floaters, runners and midrange jumpers. Anderson doesn't dominate the ball, and his instincts on where and when to involve teammates is uncanny.

Having a squad loaded with upperclassmen has also given Richmond a lift. In a win over Rhode Island on Feb. 10, the Spiders fell behind and Mooney called a timeout. He marveled as Anderson and seniors David Gonzalvez and Ryan Butler discussed adjustments during the huddle, figuring out on their own how to get back in the game. "I don't know the exact number, but the majority of [our wins] have come because of our experience," Mooney says.

Not to mention Richmond's defense, which has improved since Mooney inserted shot-blocking sophomore center Darrius Garrett into the starting lineup in January. The results were on display last week as Richmond defeated Fordham 84--56 (while scoring 33 points off of turnovers) and George Washington 74--70. "Our defense is what we rely on, but we also can put up points in bunches if we need to," says Mooney.

That makes Richmond even more dangerous, a giant killer lying in wait.

Xavier ends UR streak in double overtime

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
March 1, 2010

CINCINNATI -- Again and again yesterday, a capacity crowd of 10,250 at the Cintas Center stood, turned up the volume, sensed the kill.

Xavier went ahead by a handful of points on a few first-half occasions and repeated the surges in the second half. These were cues for the visitors to fade. That happens here often.

The University of Richmond didn't fade, even when trailing by five early in the second overtime. The Atlantic 10 Conference showdown of leaders featured contrasting styles, and the 23rd-ranked Spiders exhibited toughness and shooting skill to hang with bigger, more physical XU, which has won the past three A-10 regular-season titles.

But UR needed one more 3-pointer, one more defensive stop, one more steal, or maybe just one more block-out to end the Musketeers' 30-game home winning streak against league opposition.

Xavier won 78-76 in the 50-minute matinee that UR coach Chris Mooney called "as good of a college basketball game, as exciting, as well-played, and as hard-played, as I've been a part of."

UR (11-3, 22-7), whose eight-game winning streak snapped, fell behind Xavier (12-2, 21-7) and Temple (12-2, 24-5) in the A-10, which is in its final week of the regular season.

"We're not down at all, definitely not down. We're not hanging our heads," UR guard Kevin Anderson said. "We're just disappointed because we know we're the better team."

The Spiders were outscored 36-26 in the paint and outrebounded by 12. But they made 12 3-pointers (8 in the first half) and caused 20 turnovers (10 steals) that led to 27 UR points. Richmond guard David Gonzalvez (18 points) hit the last of his 4 3-pointers with 24 seconds left in regulation to tie it. His aggressive defense forced difficult attempts from XU star guard Jordan Crawford (19 points) at the end of regulation and in the final seconds of the first OT. Said Gonzalvez, who had five steals: "I'm thinking 'Attack on defense.' Not to be attacked, but to attack."

Richmond's final shot in the second OT came from forward Justin Harper (15 points), who caught an inbounds pass on the left wing with 3.1 seconds left and Xavier ahead 78-76. "I took a look at the basket and saw basically that they weren't guarding me. Nobody was directly in front of me, so I just took the lane to the basket," Harper said.

The 6-10 junior dribbled left to right and reached the goal as the Musketeers converged. His shot rolled off the rim. Harper didn't get much lift with his legs or the ball.

"In the end, it's just a shot you've got to make, man," Harper said. "I was kind of surprised at how open the lane was."

XU guard Terrell Holloway, who was averaging 10.9 points, scored 11 of his 24 points in the overtimes. "There's a saying in New York: 'When the lights are on, it's time to perform,'" said Holloway, a resident of Hempstead, N.Y.

A 6-footer having such an impact late for Xavier was a surprise in a game during which the Musketeers got a combined 15 free throw attempts and 22 rebounds from 6-9 Jason Love and 6-8 Jamel McLean, a Hampton resident.

Anderson scored all of his 17 points after halftime. Crawford, the 6-4 sophomore who transferred from Indiana, took 22 shots and scored 14 of his 19 before halftime. Those are the top candidates for A-10 player of the year.

"We knew [Crawford] was going to shoot the ball every chance he got," Anderson said. "You can know it, but still, he just squared himself a couple of times and got some quick 3s, and that got them going.

"In the second half, we didn't allow that."

Xavier is 14-0 here this season. Though Richmond was ranked, this didn't feel like an upset, given the Musketeers' well-established home-court advantage.

"I know moving forward, we'll store that memory both as a positive and as a motivating factor," Mooney said.

Spiders take on Xavier, team “that has set the standard”

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 28, 2010

Today's game in Cincinnati involving the University of Richmond and Xavier could determine the Atlantic 10 Conference's regular-season winner. The Musketeers are accustomed to this position. The Spiders are not.

Fourth place is UR's highest A-10 finish since joining the league for 2001-02, and the Spiders last qualified for the NCAA tournament in 2004. Xavier is "the team that has set the standard in the Atlantic 10 [during] the last few years," said Richmond coach Chris Mooney, whose Spiders (11-2, 22-6) are ranked No. 23 in The AP Poll.

The Musketeers have played in 19 of the past 27 NCAA tournaments, with five different head coaches, and eight of the past nine, with three different head coaches. In the past six years, they advanced to two Elite Eights and a Sweet 16.

But this season, it's Richmond that steadily climbed in the Ratings Percentage Index toward its goal of securing an at-large NCAA bid. Xavier (11-2, 20-7) is making a late push following a slow start. Under first-year coach Chris Mack, a former Xavier assistant who succeeded Sean Miller (moved to Arizona), the Musketeers were 6-4 with losses to Marquette, Baylor, Kansas State, and Butler.

"People were putting some forks in us," said Mack, a former Xavier guard.

The Musketeers bounced back, and haven't lost at their Cintas Center (13-0), where average attendance is 10,120. "We have a lot of pride in the program," Mack said. "We have some kids who have experienced success at the highest level, have won conference championships, have felt what it's like to be on an Elite Eight and Sweet 16 team.

"So I feel those kids don't want to let that legacy down."

Today's game matches top candidates for A-10 player of the year: UR junior guard Kevin Anderson (17.5 ppg) and XU sophomore guard Jordan Crawford (20.0 ppg), a transfer from Indiana. Mooney and Mack, along with Temple's Fran Dunphy, are coach-of-the-year possibilities.

The Spiders must contain a formidable Muskies' front line that includes Hampton resident Jamel McLean, a 6-8, 235-pound Bethel High graduate who transferred from Tulsa and averages 8.4 points and 7.1 rebounds. His improvement has been among the keys for rejuvenated Xavier, according to Mack.

"When Jamel comes with the energy that he has brought the last several games, he's a load," Mack said.

A win today would almost certainly sew up an at-large bid for the Spiders, who have two regular-season games remaining (Dayton on Thursday and at Charlotte on Saturday).

"We're probably going to get every team's best shot," said UR forward Ryan Butler. "They're going to come in, either seeing we're in first place in the conference or ranked nationally. We embrace that. I think that we want teams' best shots. I think it's going to prepare us for what we're trying to do here towards the end of the season."

UR’s Geriot improved with weight loss

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 27, 2010

Dan Geriot's plan was to get bigger. He did. Too big, in retrospect.

The 6-9 center led the University of Richmond scoring (14.3 ppg) and rebounding (5.5 rpg) as a sophomore, then missed last season with a right knee injury (torn anterior cruciate ligament) that required surgery. Geriot didn't waste the redshirt season. He lifted weights like never before and went from 235 pounds to 255 pounds.

The additional weight slowed him early this season. So, in addition to practice, he has spent time on the treadmill with the purpose of dropping weight. Now, Geriot weighs 237 pounds. He looks slimmer, compared to November. His stamina and quickness have increased.

"I definitely feel like I'm lighter on my feet," said Geriot, who averages 7.2 points and 4.1 rebounds.

Darrius Garrett, a 6-9 sophomore, became UR's starting center in late January. Geriot averages about 24 minutes and gives Richmond quality passing that lubricates the Spiders' version of the Princeton offense. Though he usually plays only about half of the game, Geriot ranks third among Spiders in assists (2.0 apg).

But it's the interior presence of Geriot that will be important tomorrow, when Richmond plays at Xavier in an Atlantic 10 Conference game that could determine the league's regular-season champion. The Spiders (11-2, 22-6), ranked No. 23, will deal with a front line of the Musketeers (11-2, 20-7) that includes 6-9, 265-pound Jason Love (11.8 ppg, 8.4 rpg) and 6-8, 235-pound Jamel McLean (8.4 ppg, 7.1 rpg).

Off the bench, Xavier brings 7-0, 265-pound Kenny Frease, 6-8 Andrew Taylor and 6-9 Jeff Robinson.

"With them being a national program for so many years, they're able to get these big athletes," Geriot said. "We'll be prepared. We know we need to rebound it to win the game. We feel that's one of our only weaknesses, rebounding."

The Musketeers, in the midst of their fifth straight 20-win season, lead the A-10 in field-goal percentage (47.1) mostly because of their power game. Love, with seven double-doubles this season, has made 68.2 percent in Xavier's last 10 games.

At their on-campus Cintas Center, the Musketeers have won 30 straight vs. A-10 competition. Richmond has won twice there.

Underdog no more: Richmond ready to prove it's no upstart

By Jack Carey
USA Today
Feb. 25, 2010

The Spiders (22-6, 11-2 Atlantic 10) have already tied the school record for regular-season wins, have non-conference victories against Mississippi State,
Missouri and Florida and have beaten No. 18 Temple in league play. They lead the Atlantic 10 and have a key league test Sunday at Xavier.

Richmond takes an eight-game winning streak, its longest in 12 years, into the contest and is 25th (through Tuesday) in the Ratings percentage Index, one tool the NCAA uses to help select and seed tournament teams.

Giant-killer or emerging giant?

"We understand the tradition here and the great job done by Coach Tarrant," says fifth-year coach Chris Mooney. "But I believe the goal has always been to wear the white jersey in the tournament, to get the highest possible seed we can."

A win Sunday would go a long way toward that, although the Spiders have dangerous regular-season games remaining against Dayton and Charlotte.

The A-10 has five teams among the RPI's top 43.

"I think the league is tremendous," says Mooney. "Any league would be proud of numbers like that. There are a lot of good players and teams you have to face in this conference."

The Cinderella role has fit Richmond well in past NCAA tournaments. The Spiders are famous for pulling early-round upsets against such power-conference programs as Syracuse, Indiana, Auburn, Georgia Tech and South Carolina, first under former
coach Dick Tarrant, then John Beilein.

The Spiders might not be playing that role this season, however. Not that they can't win postseason games, but they might not be really considered upstarts.

Richmond is 24th in the latest USA TODAY/ESPN Coaches' Poll and has been in the Associated Press media rankings for two consecutive weeks (23rd this week).

That includes his own, even if his players still wouldn't mind using the program's famous underdog status for their benefit.

"In our minds, we'll always be the 'Davids,' " says senior guard David Gonzalvez. "When we play teams like Wake Forest, Missouri, Mississippi State or Florida, we know most of the people don't expect us to win."

The Spiders have been doing their best to thwart those expectations, thanks in large part to their matchup zone defense, which is allowing 60.2 points a game and holding opponents to 38.7% shooting from the field.

The experienced, heady Spiders have had more steals than turnovers in a game 11 times this season, including the last three, and have reached double figures in steals nine times.

"Our defense has been really good and at times, great," says Mooney.

As is the case with many teams that don't lose players early to the NBA draft, the Spiders say being able to keep the club together is paying big dividends.

"Experience is a big reason why we're playing well," says junior guard Kevin Anderson. "We know where each guy is going to be on the court, and we know
what's expected of everybody.

"We're comfortable on the court with each other, and we knew we were capable of an Atlantic 10 title and capable of getting to the tournament, and that's the position we've put ourselves in now."

Gonzalvez is glad to be a part of it. He was seriously thinking of transferring after his freshman season.

"It was really hard my freshman year," he says. "We were 8-22, and things were completely different. We had six freshmen. It was hard to look past that year
and think we could get better.

"We were skeptical. And when you're a freshman, you don't really have a (personal) foundation of what you believe in in place."

Skeptics are harder to find now.

"We're confident in what we do," says Anderson. "But we know while it's hard to get in the Top 25, it's also hard to stay there. Staying is the challenge."

In time, Mooney refined UR hoops

By Paul Woody
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 26, 2010

Between 1997 and 2000, when Chris Mooney was the men’s basketball coach at Beaver College, he sometimes cut practice short to talk with a bride.

Not his bride, Lia. She was busy working on her Ph.D in child psychology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Mooney had to talk with any bride whose wedding was going to take place in the Grey Towers Castle on the campus of Beaver College, now Arcadia University, in the Philadelphia suburb of Glenside, Pa.

Mooney's job as basketball coach at the Division III school was part time.

His full-time job was as the director of conference services. That included booking weddings at the Grey Towers Castle—a building on the Arcadia campus that literally is a castle.

For a man intent on being a basketball coach, serving as a part-time wedding planner can be a bit of a distraction.

Mooney no longer plans conferences nor confers with brides, except Lia.

Now, Mooney is on the verge of turning the Robins Center into the castle it once was for Spiders teams.

It hasn't been easy. It hasn't always been pretty. There were times when failure seemed imminent.

Mooney persisted. His players improved. And, perhaps even more important, the coach improved.

Teams are a reflection of their coaches.

A coach who is out of control on the sidelines, who spends most of the game berating officials and glowering at players will have a team always looking to blame someone else for its problems.

Instead, the Spiders share plaudits as well as they share the ball.

They are ranked 23rd in the country by The Associated Press. An invitation to the NCAA tournament is well within their reach.

When Mooney arrived at Richmond, after serving as the coach at the Air Force Academy for a year, he faced a rebuilding process.

It took time, and it included a bit of stress.

In his first four seasons at Richmond, Mooney earned his share of technical fouls. He had a sideline demeanor that can charitably be described as angry.

Mooney regularly spent 40 minutes of game time and two hours of real time mad.

He was mad at the officials and his players.

It took the players a while to understand that college basketball isn't about fun. It's about winning.

No player at Richmond typifies the change during the Mooney years better than Ryan Butler, a 6-7 guard/forward. He was Mooney's first recruit and was on the receiving end of Mooney's wrath for several years.

Mooney never meant it to be personal. Butler had to learn to listen to the instruction and filter out the tone in which it was offered. He has become a pivotal player in the Spiders' success.

"The first two years were rough," Butler said. "There were times when we didn't get along very well. I think he ultimately knew we would work it out.

"I appreciate the firmness and the way he taught me to play basketball. I think he made me into the player and person I am today by not allowing me to get down on myself, by being demanding.

"Our relationship now is awesome. I can talk to him about anything from life to school to basketball. If we hadn't gone through what we went through, I don't think we'd have as strong a relationship as a player and coach. Adversity helped us."

Mooney is not the same coach he was when he arrived at Richmond.

He is more composed on the sideline. Technical fouls are rare.

It helps that the Spiders are very good.

It helps that Mooney has a better understanding of himself and his job.

“With more experience, I’ve realized it’s much better to present a calm front with my players and the officials,“ Mooney said.

“Even veteran players feel an impact from the coach’s reaction. I’ve improved. I would hope that in five years, I’m even better.“

That will be good news for the Spiders. It will not be such good news for the Spiders’ opponents.

6-foot Anderson the player that makes Richmond go

By Hank Kurz
Associated Press
February 26, 2010

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) -Kevin Anderson is the smallest player on the court for No. 23 Richmond, and the 6-foot point guard is also the one most likely to make the biggest plays.

Anderson leads the Spiders in scoring with a 17.5 average, and in assists and steals, and has senior backcourt mate David Gonzalvez feeling grateful they wear the same uniform.

"Man, I would fear him if I was the guard guarding him because, at any moment, he can decide to take over the game,'' Gonzalvez said. "We always joke with him because he has a baby face, but we say, 'Don't let the baby face fool you; this guy is a monster on the court.'''

That boyish face sports a determined scowl with the game on the line, often followed by a wide smile after the under-recruited guard out of Georgia makes another clutch play.

"I think it just points to his confidence,'' Richmond coach Chris Mooney said of Anderson, discovered when an AAU manager called to offer the Spiders a chance to come see him play.

"Everybody else is playing so, so hard and, not that he's not playing hard, but he's kind of playing easy,'' Mooney said. "He's so good and has such great sports instincts - when to drive, how to float the ball over somebody. His demeanor is just evidence of how much confidence he has.''

And the results show how much the Spiders are benefiting.

Richmond (22-6, 11-2 Atlantic 10), ranked for the first time in 24 years, has won eight consecutive games and will face Xavier for the conference lead Sunday in Ohio. The Musketeers also are 11-2 in league play, and have lost just once at home in 28 games over two seasons.

But they know very well how disruptive Anderson can be.

Last season, as a sophomore, he scored a career-best 29 points to lead the Spiders to an 80-75 victory against 17th-ranked Xavier, causing then-coach Sean Miller to gush afterward.

"Kevin Anderson, my opinion, is the best point guard we've played against. He'll be the player of the year in our conference before his career is over,'' Miller said after Anderson made 10 of 20 shots with one assist, two steals and no turnovers playing all 40 minutes.

"He's a phenomenal player. He is dynamic. We had no answer,'' Miller said, using his hands to show that Anderson was playing at a higher level that "gave us no chance to win.''

It's a level the Spiders see all the time.

"When the game is tight and we need big plays, it seems like he's a fish in water at that moment,'' Gonzalvez said. "Everyone else is so nervous, it's crunch time, 2 minutes left, we're down one, up one, and that's when he's the most calm and wants the ball the most.''

Last Saturday, the Spiders were getting all they could handle from George Washington, trailing until Anderson made a 15-foot jumper with 1:22 remaining. In a game that was close throughout, he scored or assisted on 12 of Richmond's 16 second-half field goals.

"Kevin Anderson is the best basketball player in the world,'' Colonial coach Karl Hobbs deadpanned after the game, noting that he was being sarcastic, but only marginally.

"The last 8 minutes of the game, it was just Anderson making plays,'' Hobbs said.

Anderson routinely deflects credit for his late-game exploits, crediting the team's defensive work for creating easy scoring chances, and leaders like Gonzalvez and Ryan Butler, the lone seniors on the team, for what they bring.

"He's always a high energy, high spirit kind of guy,'' Anderson said of Gonzalvez, the No. 2 scorer. "Most of the time he rallies our comebacks because of his defense and leadership.''

Gonzalvez said that way of thinking is what makes Anderson so special.

"I don't think he wants to be a guy who gets the praise or is in the spotlight, but at the end of the game, he wants to be the guy to take over the game,'' he said.

"That's all we care about.''

UR Basketball Notes

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 25, 2010

The Posse is back, riding separately
The Spiders in November simultaneously substituted five reserves for starters. The incoming wave was dubbed The Posse, and announced as such when it took the Robins Center court.

That five-for-five approach faded before Christmas, but The Posse lives on individually. In recent games, 23rd-ranked UR has received a noticeable lift from subs Kevin Smith (6-5), Francis-Cedric Martel (6-6), and Darien Brothers (6-3). Also coming off the bench is former starter Dan Geriot (6-9).

"If you look at our stat sheet, there's a big drop-off after the fifth-leading scorer to the sixth-leading scorer," said Richmond coach Chris Mooney. "So our depth hasn't shown up with balanced scoring from one through eight. But it has shown up with different guys bringing their impact to the game. Whether that's Dan off the bench, Kevin Smith, Francis, Darien Brothers, these guys bring something to the game and, one way or another, it shows up."

Smith, a junior, showed up vs. George Washington last Saturday. In a 74-70 Spiders' win, Smith in 16 minutes scored a season-high 11 points and had four steals.

"His energy is great," Mooney said of Smith. His two transition dunks in the second half were crowd-juicers, and the second put UR ahead 74-70 with 30 seconds left.

Mooney: Crowd of 9,025 pushed Spiders
For GW's visit, UR drew its largest home crowd (9,025) since 2002. The Spiders had been averaging 4,099 at the Robins Center (cap. 9,071) this season, though snowfall limited crowds for Saturday home games vs. Saint Louis (Jan. 30) and Temple (Feb. 6).

"We were really, really good down the stretch [vs. GW], and that was good to see," Mooney said. "I think that had a lot to do with the home crowd that we had . . . It was the kind of home-court advantage that has a direct impact on the result of the game.

"We've been working very, very hard to, not only to do well, but to promote our team. I might not be the best promoter because I'm a little bit understated. But for us to come out and have a great crowd like that, I know our guys genuinely appreciate that."

The Spiders have one more home game: Dayton visits next Thursday.

Schedule-maker looks pretty sharp
Assuming UR makes the NCAA tournament, the Spiders' opportunities for significant nonconference wins will be viewed as a major reason. Richmond played Missouri, Mississippi State and Florida on neutral courts, and won all three.

"We created a schedule to challenge ourselves and also put us in a position we hope we are in now," Mooney said. "We hoped to win some [non-conference] games, and not only gain confidence from those wins, but I think we would gain confidence just from playing those games and that kind of schedule."

The Spiders' league schedule also broke well for them. Following six league games, they had a Wednesday bye (week between games). After seven more league games, they had a Wednesday bye.

"If we could have planned it, I think this is the way we would have planned it," Mooney said. "It's as close to ideal as I think you can get."

But UR finishes with three games in seven days. -- John O'Connor

Traveling call allows Butlers see every Spiders' minute

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 24, 2010

Following the University of Richmond's 74-70 win over George Washington on Saturday night, Colonials coach Karl Hobbs recognized Spider Ryan Butler "as good a role player as there is, and he's tough as nails. He does all of the little things that make this team special."

Steady, strong play from the Douglas Freeman High graduate may stem in part from support he receives, even on the road. His parents, Jeff and Ruth Butler, haven't missed a UR game this season. To appreciate the commitment and time that has required, check out some of the places the 23rd-ranked Spiders (22-6) have appeared since mid-November:

South Padre Island, Texas; Columbia, S.C.; Sunrise, Fla., Lewisburg, Pa., Pittsburgh; St. Louis; Philadelphia; Kingston, R.I.; and St. Bonaventure, N.Y. Throw in less-taxing trips to Williamsburg, Washington and Winston-Salem, N.C.

UR still has regular-season visits to Cincinnati (Xavier) and Charlotte, and the Butlers plan to be on hand. The A-10 tournament will be held in Atlantic City, N.J., and then it's on to postseason hoops, probably the NCAA tournament.

"Wherever they're going, we're going too, of course," said Jeff Butler, Richmond's leading scorer during the 1975-76 and 1976-77 seasons.

The Spiders earlier this month completed a 69-67 win at Rhode Island on a very snowy night. UR guard David Gonzalvez waited near press row at the Ryan Center before appearing on a post-game radio show. He spied Ruth and Jeff Butler.

"You made it here? In this snow?" Gonzalvez said to Ruth Butler, who graduated from Hermitage High School. "You're road warriors. Road warriors!"

Last summer, Ruth Butler very much was looking forward to Ryan's final season of college eligibility, and asked her husband, "Wouldn't it be great if we could go to every game?" Jeff responded, with eyebrows raised: "Ruth, that's a lot of games."

Ruth Butler works as a nurse, and arranged her schedule so the trips could be possible. Jeff Butler, originally from the Pittsburgh area, retired last year after three decades as an Henrico County school teacher. "The timing, for me, was perfect," Jeff Butler said. He chose not to estimate the financial investment.

They booked flights for the longest trips. In anticipation of extended drives, they purchased a new Dodge Caravan.

"I thought there were a few games they didn't necessarily have to go to," said Ryan Butler, a 6-7 forward who averages 8 points, 3 rebounds and 1.5 assists for the A-10's first-place team (11-2). "Some were pretty far."

But he added that he appreciates consistently seeing his parents in seats behind Richmond's bench, the usual spot reserved for supporters of the visiting team.

The most demanding journey for Ruth and Jeff Butler was the 18-hour, round-trip drive to St. Bonaventure, which is near Buffalo, N.Y. The strangest twist involved the mysterious disappearance of the champagne-colored Caravan. When they flew back to Richmond's airport the day after the Rhode Island game, the van wasn't where the Butlers parked it. An airport construction project required the vehicle's relocation while they were away.

Following the Spiders would have been enjoyable regardless of record, Ruth Butler said, but the team's success made the trips more special. And now, relatively speaking, there isn't much roadwork left. That could be a relief to well-traveled Ruth, but it isn't.

"I can't think of anything I will miss more," she said. Then she paused. "Look what you did!"

She was crying.

UR on verge of unprecedented football/hoops success

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 23, 2010

With the exception of three losing seasons, Bill Dunbar has worked on the University of Richmond's statistics crew for home basketball games since 1963.

Of the current Spiders team, Dunbar said, "This is the best I've seen."

His viewpoint, Dunbar acknowledges, is based on incomplete data. This 22-6 team has three regular-season games, the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament and postseason competition remaining before its book is closed. There is another pinnacle worth considering. Combining football and men's basketball, is this the best school year in UR history?

Based on wins, it almost certainly will be.

According to UR, the Spiders began playing football in 1881 and launched their basketball program in 1913. For decades, both sports played fewer games than they do now, and faced wide-ranging levels of competition. Richmond Athletic Director Jim Miller now notes, the Spiders are "in the toughest football league we can be in, and we're in the toughest basketball league we can be in."

UR plays football in the Colonial Athletic Association, widely regarded as the FCS' best conference, and plays basketball in the A-10, often recognized as the top league for schools that don't play in BCS conferences (the ACC, Southeastern, Big Ten, etc.).

The 1934 Richmond football team went 8-1, losing to Emory & Henry, and the 1934-35 basketball team finished 20-0. That's only 28 combined wins, but tough to beat, in terms of a school-year winning percentage.

With its next basketball victory, UR football and basketball in 2009-10 can reach a record win level: 34. UR plays at Xavier on Sunday.

Two other school years include 33 wins. In 1987-88, UR won seven football games and 26 in basketball, while reaching the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament. Last school year, the Spiders won 13 football games on the way to the FCS national title, and 20 basketball games (with 16 losses). FCS playoffs allow the Spiders more opportunity for victories than UR teams that predated Richmond's FCS membership (early 1980s).

This school year probably is the finest in UR athletics history, in terms of national respect. The 11-2 football team was ranked No. 1 in the FCS for most of the season (it fell to Appalachian State in the FCS quarterfinals), and received a vote in one AP poll, ordinarily reserved for FBS programs. The basketball team was slotted at No. 25 in last week's AP poll, and that was the program's first national ranking since 1986. It rose to No. 23 yesterday.

In modern times, the only school year to rival this one was 1985-86. The 1985 football team started 7-0 (including a win at Virginia Tech) and was ranked No. 1 for five weeks in Division I-AA (which became the FCS). The 1985-86 basketball team captured the school's first at-large bid to the NCAA tournament. When longtime UR fans are asked to name the top hoops team in school history, the 1985-86 squad is commonly the answer. The current team, however, is gaining support.

"In basketball, it's clear that we are attracting better players and continuing to get better and better," said Miller, UR's AD since 2000. Richmond hired Chris Mooney as coach in 2005. After a rebuilding phase lengthened by attrition, Mooney has the Spiders on track for their first NCAA tournament bid since 2004.

UR's basketball depth sets this team apart, in the estimation of Dick Tarrant, the Spiders' coach 1981-93 and the program's top winner, with a .655 percentage. He named four Richmond reserves who "would have started on many of my teams." Also, according to Tarrant, this Richmond team is unquestionably the most athletic in school history.

In football, the Spiders qualified for the last three FCS playoffs, and the foundation for that accomplishment began with the hiring of Dave Clawson as coach for the 2004 season, according to Miller. "Before that there were periodic good years," Miller said. "I think we've been steadily progressing since Dave Clawson [arrived]. Football hasn't been a fluke."

Mike London succeeded Clawson in 2008, when the Spiders won the FCS title. Richmond hired Latrell Scott, a former UR assistant, as football coach in mid-December after London moved to Virginia.

Recent Spiders football teams may or may not have been able to successfully compete with earlier teams that played at a higher level. The 3-8 team of 1977, as an example, met West Virginia, North Carolina, East Carolina, Virginia Tech, Georgia and Maryland. The UR basketball team went 4-22 in 1977-78, establishing that school year one of the least successful in school history.

Note: UR junior guard Kevin Anderson earned his second A-10 player-of-the-week honor of the season and fourth of his career. He led Richmond to wins over Fordham (84-56) and George Washington (74-70). Anderson averaged 21.5 points, 4.5 assists, three steals and 2.5 rebounds while making 17 of 26 shots.

UR players lead clinic for Special Olympics basketball teams

By Jeremy Slayton
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 22, 2010

For a few hours yesterday, they were simply basketball players bonding over a shared interest.

It was an opportunity for members of the University of Richmond men's basketball team to step away from the grind of a grueling season; it was also a chance for 100 Special Olympics Virginia athletes to learn from some of their heroes.

Special Olympian Montreil Ellis described it as a special event. "I like being here with the volunteers and the people around me," he said.

The 25th-ranked Spiders, fresh off a 74-70 victory over George Washington on Saturday night, eagerly hit the courts yesterday morning at the The Weinstein Center for Recreation and Wellness on the UR campus to lead a basketball clinic for Special Olympics basketball teams from central Virginia and the Williamsburg area.

"Even after a win such as that -- it's a big win -- to turn around and do something for the community the next morning says a lot about our team and what we're about," said Spiders junior Justin Harper.

The clinic was facilitated by Farm Bureau Insurance, which has maintained longtime partnerships with Richmond and Special Olympics Virginia. It marks the first time such a clinic was held at the University of Richmond and models one set up by Roy Williams, first at the University of Kansas and now the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The weekend was all about the Special Olympics athletes. They attended Richmond's win Saturday night and were in the crowd yesterday for the Spiders women's basketball game against St. Joseph's University.

"We think it's important for us to reach out and be supportive to these truly great athletes," said Spiders head coach Chris Mooney. "We talked about it with our guys, probably about a month ago, [and] every single guy signed up and is here and wants to be part of this."

Just being around each other, the smiles spread across the basketball players' faces. The Spiders demonstrated fundamentals of the game, from dribbling to layups.

Errant passes or missed shots didn't matter. Encouragement was readily given -- a pat on the back, a high five. The score wasn't kept; fun is what counted. Near the end of the clinic, the Spiders took part in a shooting contest, which delighted the Special Olympians.

"It's just great to give back and enjoy Sunday morning with them. It's all about going out there and having fun," said senior David Gonzalvez, the Spiders' second-leading scorer. "Our guys love doing it. That's part of the reason I love my team so much, because they love getting up and doing this stuff."

Special Olympic athlete Will Daniel is a longtime Spiders fan. He greeted Gonzalvez with a handshake and a hug before one of the drills. Daniel said he likes all the Spiders' players but listed Gonzalvez and senior Ryan Butler as his favorites. Daniel said he first knew Butler through a local recreation association and said with a smile: "I taught him everything he knows -- almost."

Daniel hopes to take what he learned and apply it next weekend at the Special Olympics' James River Regional Basketball Tournament at the U-Turn Sports Performance Academy.

"It's just a great feeling to be here with my team and getting ready for our tournament coming up," Daniel said.

Composure and Anderson help Spiders win again

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 21, 2010

In front of the largest Robins Center crowd in eight years, three things showed up down the stretch last night for the University of Richmond: poise, defense, and Kevin Anderson.

The 6-0 junior scored 17 of his 24 points in the second half as the 25th-rated Spiders outlasted Atlantic 10 Conference rival George Washington 74-70 before 9,025. Richmond hadn't drawn a larger home crowd since 9,171 watched UR-Syracuse in the quarterfinals of the 2002 National Invitation Tournament.

The Spiders' eighth straight victory was the most competitive, energy-filled game of the season at the Robins Center, and featured contrasting styles. The Colonials went aggressively to the basket and beat the Spiders by 12 on the boards. Richmond (11-2, 22-6), the A-10's first-place team, hit eight 3-point shots (four by Ryan Butler) and made 20 of 29 free-throw attempts.

It was tied 68-68 with two minutes left. GW (4-8, 14-11) committed a couple of turnovers that were the result of intensified UR defense, and Anderson took over.

"Kevin is a special player. He has a unique ability to score in a variety of ways, whether it's creating shots, going all the way to the basket, stopping in the paint and shooting runners and floaters," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "He creates a lot of problems."

Anderson's quickness freed him for a 12-footer that made it 70-68 with 1:22 left. Anderson then hit a couple of free throws and threw baseball pass over GW's pressure for a Kevin Smith hammer-dunk that made it 74-70 with 30 seconds left.

"At the end of the day, Anderson was just too good tonight," said Colonials' coach Karl Hobbs.

He paid respect to Mooney's coaching, then Hobbs added, Anderson "makes you look special because we really handled, for the most part, them running their offense. The last eight minutes of the game, it was basically Anderson making plays."

Richmond, in beating GW for the second time this season, scored 16 second-half field goals. Anderson was responsible for seven of them, and also had five second-half assists. Butler scored 17, and five Spiders reached double-figures on a night when UR's defense slipped during the first 38 minutes.

"Our defense just got stronger and stronger late," Anderson said. "We came away with big stops."

GW was held to two points in its last six possessions.

For the 11th time this season, Richmond had more steals (10) than turnovers (7). Smith, a 6-5 junior, made four steals, scored a season-high 11, and allowed Richmond to stay strong after starting guard David Gonzalvez went out with four fouls with 10:27 left.

On the need-it-more meter, Richmond definitely scored higher coming into this one. The Colonials didn't have a great deal on the line. But the Spiders are trying to secure an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament. A loss to a team with a losing conference record would seriously damage UR's RPI ranking.

GW attacked Richmond inside, primarily with drives. Twenty of the Colonials' 28 first-half points came in the lane.

"They kind of lull you to sleep offensively, the way they just swing the ball around the perimeter, then all of a sudden, they'll drive baseline on you or drive middle," Butler said. "We prepared for it all week, but I think we still got lulled to sleep a little bit.

"We talked about it halftime and made the adjustment."

Spiders lead with uncommon match-up defense

By John O'Connor
February 20, 2010
Richmond Times-Dispatch

While Dave Robbins coached Virginia Union University to 713 wins from the late 1970s to 2008, the Panthers used a confounding match-up defense whose specifics he was reluctant to discuss. Robbins believed leaks would help VUU opponents prepare.

Robbins' full explanation of The Circle Defense came after he retired, through a 60-minute video he was asked to produce by Wisconsin-based Sysko's Books & Videos.

Maybe this is Chris Mooney's future.

The University of Richmond's fifth-year coach learned a match-up defense while playing at Princeton, and brought it (with some tweaks) to the Spiders, now ranked No. 25 and leading the Atlantic 10 Conference. They allow an average of 59.8 points, 16th-best among 334 Division I teams, according to the latest NCAA stats. Opponents shoot 38.3 percent (14th nationally).

Mooney chooses not to provide details of Richmond's match-up -- he simply calls it "our defense" probably for the same reason Robbins hesitated.

"It's not nearly as complex as the sound of it makes it seem," Mooney said.

But with short prep time, it's a pain to face, and perhaps more complicated than Mooney suggests. For Spiders, "I think it takes a full year to figure out," said Ryan Butler a fifth-year UR senior.

Richmond's match-up mixes man-to-man and zone principles. Screens designed to free shooters aren't nearly as effective because the Spiders switch on every pick. They rarely get caught in height mismatches because almost all of UR's players are 6-4 or taller. If the Spiders are caught short, they understand they need to help out in the post, or force an extra pass that provides time to reconfigure, according to Butler.

"You kind of have to use your brain, and trust your teammates," said UR guard David Gonzalvez.

Only two players this season have scored more than 20 points against the Spiders (10-2, 21-6). Both were guards, William and Mary's David Schneider (25 points) and UNC Greensboro's Brandon Evans (22). Mooney's match-up, like most defenses, prioritizes interior protection. But UR does a better job of it than most.

Cutters are usually passed from one Spider to another, though not always. That depends on the opponent's personnel. Other variations are evident from game to game, half to half, possession to possession. Temple coach Fran Dunphy noted after his Owls fell 71-54 at Richmond that "it takes a while" to find any rhythm against Spiders' resistance because it's so unusual. All of the analysis seems to amuse Mooney.

"It's 99 percent the players, and maybe one percent the concept," he said of UR's defense.

UR one of several A-10 teams shooting at NCAA goal

John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 19, 2010

The University of Richmond hopes to put itself in position for an at-large bid to the NCAAs, so it doesn't have to win the automatic bid that comes with the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament championship.

As many as six A-10 teams -- Richmond, Xavier, Temple, Charlotte, Dayton, and Rhode Island -- have been viewed as candidates for the NCAA tournament. Four probably is a fair guess today of how many will make it.

"It's always dangerous when you start throwing out projections, but I can say the A-10 has been having a great year," said A-10 Commissioner Bernadette McGlade. "Hopefully, everyone will finish strong and we'll have a good [league tournament], and then it's in the hands of that selection committee.

"We do have some of the best teams in the country playing in this league right now, [but the number that makes the NCAA field] also depends on conference playoffs and automatic qualifiers from other leagues."

1986 Spiders defied odds to get bid

By John O'Connor
February 19, 2010
Richmond Times-Dispatch

In 1986 B.B. (Before Bracketology), the University of Richmond played its way into a national ranking (No. 20) and an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament. The current Spiders have one of those -- No.25 in The AP poll -- and continue to seek the other. Conditions seem favorable.

UR (10-2 Atlantic 10, 21-6) is right in the middle of the never-ending speculation regarding potential qualifiers. Hoop heads know the Spiders have veteran guards, can shoot the 3, posted a few nice nonleague victories and hold opponents to an average of fewer than 60 points. If the season stopped today, they would be in.

Twenty-four years ago, these matters were far more mysterious and unpredictable. Colonial Athletic Association member Richmond was a national secret compared to the current Spiders. That 1985-86 team started 16-1, including

wins over Providence, Wake Forest, Stanford and Virginia. They earned a No. 20 ranking in late January, then lost two straight to fall from the poll. UR won its next four, moving to 20-3. An at-large bid? For Richmond?

"Everyone kept saying 'Could it happen? Could it happen?'" recalled Chuck Boone, the UR athletic director at the time.

At-large invitations then were distributed, and are still, by the Division I Basketball Committee. There was no publicly available Ratings Percentage Index, no cyber number-crunchers computing schedule strength and records against top-50 competition.

The Spiders had never before captured an at-large bid. No CAA team had. Dick Tarrant, UR's coach, wasn't optimistic, based on history. But the NCAA tournament expanded from 53 teams to 64 in 1985. There was reason to believe that there could be a spot for Richmond.

"I know the players were confident," said UR radio analyst Greg Beckwith, the senior point guard on the 1985-86 team that also included seniors John Newman (21.9 ppg) and John Davis. "Back then, you didn't play as many games. We got to 20-3, and the teams we lost to were legitimate."

Richmond had fallen at Georgia Tech (featuring a handful of future pros), to Old Dominion (featuring future NBA standout Kenny Gattison), and at Virginia Tech (featuring future NBA standout Dell Curry).

UR's quest for the NCAAs took a blow in mid-February with a season-ending injury (fractured right elbow) suffered by the 6-5 Davis, the Spiders' finest defender and glue guy. Without him, the Spiders lost to a 20-win George Mason team, and to a 30-win Navy team (featuring junior David Robinson). UR completed its regular-season with a CAA mark of 12-2, a game behind Navy.

"We didn't have the chemistry or intellect [Davis] afforded us," Tarrant said.

The Spiders headed to the CAA tournament at GMU's Patriot Center. Mason beat Richmond 62-60 in the semifinals (Navy won it). At 23-6, with three losses in their last six games and a key starter unavailable, the Spiders didn't know if they were NCAA-bound. UR made it, the first at-large team in CAA and school history.

"It was a bit of a surprise to me," Tarrant said.

Epilogue: Saint Joseph's 6-6 Maurice Martin scored 21 to help eliminate the Spiders 60-59 in the first round of the NCAAs, in Syracuse, N.Y. Tarrant remains convinced that Martin would have been much less productive if Davis had guarded him.

UR shows it's worthy of ranking

By Paul Woody
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 18, 2010

When you are the nation's 25th-ranked team, sit in first place in the Atlantic 10 and stand 27th in the Ratings Percentage Index, you are supposed to handle an inferior opponent on your home court with little difficulty.

And that's what the Richmond Spiders did to the Fordham Rams.

The Spiders are No. 25 in the country, lead the A-10 standings and hold the 27th spot in the RPI, the measurement used to select at-large teams and seed every team in the NCAA tournament. All of that could have become tainted had Fordham made a game of it last night or even pulled off an upset.

Come to think of it, if the Rams had just made a game of it, that would have been an upset.

But Fordham, winless in the A-10, 2-22 overall, never had a chance.

"We had a home game, we're the 25th-ranked team in the country, that's got to be a win," junior center Dan Geriot said.

It was an 84-56 blowout for the Spiders, who delivered an outstanding game on a number of levels. The Spiders weren't tentative. They jumped to an early lead, built it through the first half and used the second half to rest the regulars and give the backups ample time to play.

"They're terrific," Fordham interim coach Jared Grasso said. "A, because of their style [a matchup zone on defense that is difficult to simulate in practice] and, B, they have a senior-junior backcourt. Their guards [David Gonzalvez and Kevin Anderson] are as good as there are in this league. And that's how you win in college basketball, with guards like that.

"They're a legitimate Top 25 team. We've played Villanova, St. John's, Temple, Xavier, and they're as good as any of those teams."

With all that and with their 21-6 record, Richmond coach Chris Mooney had every reason to be happy last night.

"Happy would be a strong word," Mooney said, smiling slightly. "But I am pleased. A team reacts in different ways and usually how their upperclassmen lead them. There was no nonsense about our approach. That was probably what I was most pleased about.

"We respected Fordham, but we cared about Richmond and playing well and winning the game."

Not so long ago, the Spiders were in a situation similar to Fordham. In Mooney's second season at Richmond, it wasn't unusual to see four freshmen in the starting lineup. The Spiders finished 8-22 after going 13-17 in Mooney's inaugural season, and it wasn't clear things would improve.

Now, things could not be much better.

And the Spiders deserve praise for how they're handling their new-found fame.

They have no false pretensions about being ranked 25th. They are proud of it, but not overconfident because of it. Breaking into the Top 25 long has been a team goal, and the Spiders are embracing it.

They understand it guarantees nothing. George Washington, Xavier, Dayton and Charlotte will provide much stiffer competition than Fordham and will not be in awe of a ranked team.

But the Spiders do see being No. 25 as recognition of their talent and accomplishments.

"We had talked about the ranking," Mooney said. "We tried not to shy away from it. We wanted those things. We treat it as a responsibility.

"To be where we are now, a confident, veteran team, says a lot about these guys. It speaks to our program, the players we have and how the players have been able to build the program."

The good thing about the Spiders is they don't think the construction job is complete. They realize there still is work to do.

And they are confident they can get it done.

Gonzalvez changed mind, changed Spiders

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 17, 2010

In March 2007, David Gonzalvez concluded he needed to transfer from the University of Richmond.

As a freshman in 2006-07, the 6-4 guard from Marietta, Ga., made 20 starts, averaging 30.5 minutes and 9.6 points for an 8-22 team. But Gonzalvez requested that UR coach Chris Mooney give him a release from his scholarship for the purpose of switching schools.

"He thinks he can have more success elsewhere," Mooney said at the time.

The course of Richmond basketball changed when Gonzalvez changed his mind. He is now a senior who has scored 1,575 points (seventh on the school's career list), and helped the Spiders to the top of the Atlantic 10 Conference standings, and the program's first national ranking (No.25) since 1986.

"His leadership has been great, his passion," Mooney said.

This David Gonzalvez seems quite different from the David Gonzalvez who wanted out of UR in March 2007.

"Now that I'm older - and I've changed a lot, matured a lot - I know that my coaches are all good guys, and they're not out to get me, and they want the best for us," he said. "I know that Richmond has a good basketball program, and it's also a really good university. I know the city of Richmond is a great city to live in.

"My freshman year, if you had asked me questions about those things, I would have said 'Coach stinks, the city is boring, and I don't like the school.' That all had to do with me."

Gonzalvez said a religious awakening that occurred after he requested his scholarship release is responsible for his staying at UR and turning into "a completely different person." One of that person's first acts was asking Mooney if he would allow a lost sheep back in the fold. Mooney did. More was required.

"I had to go and ask my team for forgiveness," Gonzalvez said.

That granted, the episode was put behind Gonzalvez and the Spiders. Together, they have made remarkable progress. Gonzalvez is a four-year starter averaging 13.8 points, and one of the major reasons Richmond is on track for the program's first NCAA tournament bid since 2004.

As the Spiders (9-2, 20-6) defeated Rhode Island and St. Bonaventure in their past two games, Gonzalvez scored 44 points, earning the national player-of-the-week honor from ESPN.com. He shot 60 percent from the field (15 of 25), 50 percent from 3-point distance (4 of 8), and 83.3 percent from the foul line (10 of 12). Gonzalvez also had seven steals and seven rebounds.

"David was tremendous," Mooney said.

In March 2007, being tremendous may have been enough for Gonzalvez. Priorities change.

"I'm just thinking about how many more games that we could potentially have as a team if we keep winning," he said.

Spiders check in at No. 25 in AP poll

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
February 16, 2010

Senior Ryan Butler yesterday recognized the University of Richmond's appearance in The Associated Press Basketball Top 25 Poll -- at No. 25 -- as "a big step." The Spiders' first national ranking since 1986 is amplified, Butler said, by where the program was.

In 2006-07, UR went 4-12 in the Atlantic 10 Conference and 8-22 overall.

"Obviously, that was really hard for everyone, all the coaches, all the players," Spiders senior guard David Gonzalvez said. "Really, really hard."

Chris Mooney was in his second season as coach, and Gonzalvez remembers Mooney consistently telling his players "Listen, it's going to get better."

Said Gonzalvez: "When you're 8-22, it's hard to believe that. But it has gotten better, and everyone has put a lot of work in to be better each year."

Before the release of yesterday's poll, the Spiders (9-2, 20-6) had been knocking on the door of national ranking. For several weeks, they were listed in the "others receiving votes" category. Richmond was last ranked in late January of 1986, when the Spiders were 16-1.

UR, the A-10's first-place team, has won six straight.

"With our main goal this year obviously getting to the [NCAA] tournament, being ranked is huge for us," Gonzalvez said. The Spiders defeated Temple, then ranked No. 19, at the Robins Center on Feb. 6, and followed that with a win at Rhode Island. Victories over well-regarded opponents fortified a Richmond portfolio that already included wins over Mississippi State, Missouri, Florida and Old Dominion.

Mooney called the ranking "something special. Obviously, it doesn't necessarily mean everything, or even have an impact on what you're trying to accomplish. But it [is] very nice for recognition."

UR Athletic Director Jim Miller said he appreciated the poll position because it brings attention to "the accomplishment the team has made in the last several years and, obviously and most importantly, this year."

The Spiders play Fordham (0-11, 2-21) at the Robins Center tomorrow night and entertain George Washington (3-7, 13-10) on Saturday night.

UR's football team, a regular in the Football Championship Subdivision poll in recent years, made news in November by drawing a vote in The Associated Press Top 25 Poll, ordinarily reserved for Football Bowl Subdivision teams. UR was among those "others receiving votes," because of its No. 25 vote on the ballot of Ray Ratto of the San Francisco Chronicle. The Spiders, 2008 FCS champions, were 8-0 at the time and winners of 17 straight.

Jeff Goodman's Blog

By Jeff Goodman
FoxSports.com
Feb. 16, 2010

Richmond is ranked today for the first time since Jan. 28, 1986.

The Spiders were expected to have success this season with a veteran team that includes seniors David Gonzalvez and Ryan Butler, juniors Kevin Anderson and Justin Harper and the return of big man Dan Geriot - the team's leading scorer for two straight years before missing last season with a torn ACL.

They were supposed to compete with the traditional powers like Xavier and Dayton for the Atlantic 10 title, but few expected the Spiders to lead the conference race with a handful of games left on the slate.

Especially with Geriot struggling to regain his old form.

Geriot was an all-league guy two years ago when he averaged 14.3 points and 5.5 boards. Now, he's putting up 7.2 points and 4.2 boards per game.

Mooney said that Geriot has been a tremendous leader and teammate despite the fact his production is down.

"Obviously, he wants to put up better numbers," Mooney said. "But he hasn't buried his head and hasn't put himself above the team."

"He's getting better and more confident each game," he added.

Mooney anticipated Richmond averaging close to 80 points per game this season, but that hasn't happened. The Spiders are averaging 67.5 points and no longer is "Let's try to score 80" on the board before games.

"We've scrapped that," Mooney said. "We're going to win games with our defense. We talked about it as a team and made that shift."

Teams are shooting just 38 percent from the field (tied for first with Temple in the league) against the Spiders this season, and Mooney's team also has two of the top defensive guards in Anderson and Gonzalvez - along with defensive-minded big man Darius Garrett, who has replaced Geriot in the starting lineup.

Richmond is 20-6 this season and 9-2 in league play with a pair of home games upcoming against Fordham and George Washington - two of the bottom-tier teams in the A-10

Mooney said that a quality non-conference schedule clearly helped prepare his team for league play.

The Spiders beat Mississippi State and Missouri, two potential tournament teams, out in San Padre Island. They also beat Billy Donovan's Florida team down in Sunrise, Fla., and nearly knocked off Wake Forest in Winston-Salem.

The other non-league losses were of the quality variety - road setbacks at South Carolina, VCU and William & Mary.

Mooney said that being able to rely on his backcourt of Anderson, who leads the team in scoring, and Gonzalvez has been crucial in the team's success.

"Kevin is really a special player," Mooney said of Anderson, who had 31 in the loss to Wake and 29 in a victory against Temple. "He's made big plays down the stretch in every game."

Mooney said that Anderson was huge in the recent road win at Rhode Island against an athletic Rams club that constantly employs full-court pressure.

"We knew we had to get the ball inbounded to Kevin to neutralize their press," Mooney said.

Now, Richmond finds itself in the Top 25 for just the second time since 1958 and the sixth week in school history.

"I knew going into the season we were capable of winning the league title," Mooney said. "We talked to our guys about trying to win the title and get ranked, but everyone knows that getting ranked doesn't mean you're in the NCAA tournament."

A few more wins does.

Richmond in Top 25 for first time in 24 years

By Jim O'Connell
Associated Press
February 15, 2010

Chris Mooney and the Richmond Spiders set a bunch of goals before the season, including an Atlantic 10 regular-season title and their first NCAA tournament bid in six years.

After two road victories last week moved the Spiders into first place in the conference, they accomplished another goal Monday: making the Top 25 for the first time in 24 years.

"It's really a significant accomplishment, and we've been very open with our guys about this, that it was something that we wanted to accomplish," said Mooney, in his fifth season in charge. "It's not going to help us beat Fordham, but it's certainly going to make us feel really good and understand we've been recognized in a really, really elite category."

In a week when Kansas State climbed to No. 7, its highest ranking in nearly five decades, the Spiders joined the AP poll at No. 25 for the first time since January 1986. It's just the fourth time in school history that the small, private school has been in the poll.

The Spiders (20-6, 9-2) host Fordham (2-21, 0-11) on Wednesday night, trying to stretch their winning streak to seven. Last week, they used a late 9-1 run to hand Rhode Island just its fourth loss, 69-67, and then rolled at St. Bonaventure, 68-49.

Mooney doesn't expect the Spiders' new status to be a problem.

"We'll see if it changes anything," he said Monday. "We didn't want to hide from it. We wanted to seek it, and I know that ultimately it doesn't mean you've accomplished your other goals. It doesn't give you the championship of the A-10, or it doesn't give you an NCAA tournament berth, but it does mean something."

Richmond, whose winning streak includes a 71-54 victory over Temple, was also ranked for three weeks in 1954-55, two weeks in 1957-58 and the one-week stint in January 1986.

Its success last week stood in contrast to four of the top 10 teams losing.

Kansas (24-1) was again a runaway No. 1, receiving 62 first-place votes from the 65-member national media panel to hold the top spot for the third week in a row. Kentucky (24-1), which had the other No. 1 nods, moved up one spot to No. 2.

Villanova moved up one place to No. 3, with Purdue gaining two places to fourth, the sixth week this season the Boilermakers have reached that spot.

Syracuse, which had its 11-game winning streak stopped by Louisville on Sunday, dropped from second to fifth. Duke strengthened its lead in the Atlantic Coast Conference with a win over Maryland on Saturday and jumped from eighth to sixth.

Kansas State (20-4) achieved its highest ranking since it was sixth in the final poll of the 1961-62 season. West Virginia, which lost to Villanova and Pitt last week, fell to No. 8, followed by Ohio State and Georgetown, an upset victim of Rutgers on Sunday.

Michigan State, which lost to Purdue, dropped one spot to 11th and was followed by New Mexico, Gonzaga, Wisconsin, Texas, BYU, Vanderbilt, Butler, Pittsburgh and Tennessee, which dropped eight spots after losing to Vanderbilt and Kentucky.

The last five teams were Temple, Baylor and newcomers Wake Forest, Texas A&M and Richmond.

Northern Iowa, Georgia Tech and UNLV dropped out this week.

Wake Forest (18-5), which has won four straight and six of seven including a 75-64 victory over Georgia Tech on Saturday, moved in for the first time this season. The Demon Deacons, who were ranked all last season including one week at No. 1, are in second place in the ACC.

Texas A&M (18-6) was ranked for four weeks earlier this season and the Aggies moved back in having won four straight and six of seven, moving into a second-place tie with Kansas State in the Big 12 behind Kansas.

Northern Iowa (22-3), which has clinched at least a share of the Missouri Valley Conference title, dropped out from No. 19 following a 68-59 loss at Bradley on Saturday that snapped a six-game winning streak.

Georgia Tech (17-8) fell out from 20th after six straight weeks in the rankings. The Yellow Jackets, who lost to Miami and Wake Forest last week, dropped to 1-5 in ACC road games.

UNLV (19-6) returned to the poll last week at No. 23 after being out the previous eight weeks. The Rebels had won seven of eight games before losing to New Mexico and San Diego State.

Ohio State is in two of this week's six games between ranked teams. The Buckeyes host Purdue on Wednesday and are at Michigan State on Sunday. The other games are: Kansas at Texas A&M on Monday; Syracuse at Georgetown on Thursday; Kentucky at Vanderbilt on Saturday; and Villanova at Pittsburgh on Sunday.
AP Sports Writer Hank Kurz Jr. in Richmond contributed to this report.

Andy Katz: Weekly Watch

ESPN.com
Feb. 14, 2010

Player of the Week: David Gonzalvez, Richmond
The numbers David Gonzalvez put up -- 19 points on 7-of-12 shooting -- weren't the only story of Richmond's 69-67 win at Rhode Island. It was when Gonzalvez made a 3-pointer with 1:22 to play to give the Spiders a 67-66 lead in Kingston. Teammate Kevin Anderson then hit a layup to put Richmond ahead by three with 23 seconds left.

Gonzalvez continued his torrid week by leading the Spiders to a 68-49 victory over St. Bonaventure on Saturday that turned the wheel toward a possible A-10 title and NCAA berth. Gonzalvez scored a team-high 25 points in 34 minutes as the Spiders moved to 20-6 overall -- 9-2 in the A-10 -- to stay equal in the loss column with Xavier, Temple and Charlotte.

Richmond has quietly put together a stellar season with nonconference wins over Mississippi State, Florida and a run to the top of the A-10. Gonzalvez is one of the main reasons.

Defense key to UR's 68-49 win over St. Bonaventure

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 14, 2010

ST. BONAVENTURE, N.Y. – Down one point at the break following an emotional St. Bonaventure run, the University of Richmond responded by holding the Bonnies to zero points in the first 7:43 of the second half.

That intensified defensive work keyed the pivotal stretch of the Spiders' 68-49 Atlantic 10 Conference victory Saturday before 5,013 at the Reilly Center. Richmond (9-2, 20-6) has won six straight, and reached the 20-win mark for the second consecutive season.

"Twenty wins is awfully nice on February 13th," UR coach Chris Mooney said. "That's pretty fast, I think, for any program, and certainly for us, that's a great sign."

Richmond hadn't reached the 20-win mark this early in the season since 1986. That NCAA tournament team also won its 20th game on Feb. 13. These Spiders arrived at St. Bonaventure allowing an average of 60 points in A-10 play.

"We know we can't get to where we're trying to go, which is the NCAA tournament, without having solid defense," said UR forward Justin Harper, who scored 14 and had 9 rebounds.

Guard David Gonzalvez scored 25, and the Spiders knocked out the Bonnies (3-7, 10-13) with a 21-4 punch to start the second half.

Spiders work around weakness in rebounding

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 13, 2010

Rebounding isn't one of the University of Richmond's strengths. The 19-6 Spiders, obviously, have found ways around that.

UR, whose five-game winning streak includes back-to-back victories over Temple and Rhode Island, plays this afternoon at St. Bonaventure, and past performance suggests the Spiders will probably get outrebounded. In the case of Richmond, however, that stat means little.

The Spiders have been outrebounded 19 times. They rank 12th among 14 Atlantic 10 teams in rebounding margin (minus-4.5).

"I would prefer to rebound better. We're more capable now than we have been [in previous years]," UR coach Chris Mooney said yesterday after practice at the Robins Center.

Without superior efforts on the glass, UR (8-2, 19-6) is in a three-way tie atop the league standings with Charlotte (8-2, 18-6) and Xavier (8-2, 16-7), and the Spiders check in at No. 27 in the latest Ratings Percentage Index.

Richmond was outrebounded by 20 in a win over UNC Wilmington. The Spiders downed Mississippi State, though they were outrebounded 41-24. How has UR pushed through rebounding issues?

Mooney provided his top three reasons:

Defend. Though Mississippi State grabbed 20 offensive rebounds against Richmond, the Bulldogs were limited to 62 points and 33.3-percent shooting. In 10 league games, UR has allowed an average of 60 points, least in the A-10, and conference opponents have shot 39.9 percent.

Limit turnovers. UR averages 11.1 turnovers in A-10 competition, and the Spiders' turnover margin (plus-2.6) ranks second in the league.

Steal the ball. Richmond makes about eight steals a game, a high number given that the Spiders are not often involved in fast-paced contests and also press rarely.

"I believe rebounding is the only stat our opponents are better than us, except maybe number of free throws, and we've really narrowed that," Mooney said

Spiders go deep for notable wins

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 12, 2010

University of Richmond coach Chris Mooney repeatedly said through the season's first 20 or so games that the Spiders were better shooters than their 3-point success rate indicated. Guess he was right.

Richmond recently collected two notable wins -- Saturday over Temple (71-54) and Wednesday at Rhode Island (69-67) -- and did so in large part because of extremely good 3-point shooting (18-29, 62.1 percent).

The Division I annual 3-point percentage has hovered between 34 and 36 percent since 1992. The 3-point arc became part of the Division I game for the 1986-87 season. Nationally, percentages ranged from 38 to 36 in the first five years.

Mooney's habit of signing players with outside-shooting ability -- regardless of position -- is reflected by UR having six players who made at least one 3-pointer in the last two games. "They're a very good 3-point shooting team. That's a major part of their offense," George Washington coach Karl Hobbs said after the Spiders bagged 9 of 20 3-point attempts in a 62-57 January win at GW.

Through 25 games, UR (8-2 in the A-10, 19-6) has made 34.7 percent of its 3-point attempts. While UR has recently excelled from 3-point distance, it has also defended the 3-point shot well. In A-10 competition, the Spiders have made 37.1 percent from 3-point range and held opponents to 27.8 percent.

Win over Rhode Island boosts UR's NCAA case

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 11, 2010

David Gonzalvez got the University of Richmond off to a late scoring start last night with 3-pointers, then punctuated a 69-67 win at Rhode Island with a huge one in an Atlantic 10 Conference game at the Ryan Center in snowy Kingston, R.I.

The Spiders (8-2, 19-6), now tied for first place in the A-10, rallied from a five-point deficit in the final 2:40 to hand the Rams (7-3, 19-4) only their second home-court defeat of the season. Rhode Island led 66-64 when Gozalvez (19 points) hit a 3-pointer with 1:21 left. That put UR up 67-66, and Kevin Anderson followed with a layup in traffic to make it 69-66 with 20 seconds left.

The Rams had led 9-0 after 2½ minutes before Gonzalvez's 3s brought back UR.

Gonzalvez and Anderson (16 points), UR's other guard, combined to score 35 of Richmond's 69 points. The Rams had the ball with 4.2 seconds left. URI's Keith Cothran missed a 3-point attempt at the horn.

"What a great win, what a gutsy, tough [victory]," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "I can't say enough about our players in such a hostile environment, a great college basketball atmosphere.

"I couldn't be more proud of our effort . . . We were calm and cool, veteran players making veteran plays. Just so tough, that's what I'm most proud of. "

Richmond beat Temple 71-54 last Saturday and shot 77.3 percent in the first half. Last night, UR shot 73.7 percent in the second half (14 of 19), making 5 of 6 attempts from 3-point distance. Overall, the Spiders hit 58.3 percent and 9 of 13 shots from 3-point range.

UR led by six with 5:44 left, then had turnover issues and lost the advantage for about three minutes. The Spiders' rediscovered composure, especially from Gonzalvez and Anderson, carried them to their fifth straight win.

The Rams came into this game ranked No. 14 in the RPI. A road victory over such a well-regarded opponent does wonders for the Spiders' RPI (No. 31) as they enhanced their portfolio for at-large admission to the NCAA tournament. Richmond, which already defeated Temple (RPI of 17), Old Dominion (35), Missouri (46) and Florida (48), hasn't qualified for the NCAAs since 2004.

"This win was so important, especially after beating Temple at home," Gonzalvez said.

The Spiders' first-half push was keyed, as so many of their spurts have been this season, by 3-point goals. Gonzalvez hit two in a row, then forward Ryan Butler hit a pair, as Richmond went ahead 28-21 by outscoring Rhode Island 28-12.

"We knew we could make a few mistakes in the beginning, but if we do, just don't get rattled," Gonzalvez.

Richmond 6-9 sophomore Darrius Garrett, the shot-blocking center (2.2 bpg) who had started four recent games, hyperextended his left knee in Tuesday's practice. He started, with a bandaged knee but played two minutes. UR got 12 points from 6-9 junior Dan Geriot, his first double-figure effort since the Spiders' A-10 opener at Duquesne Jan. 6.

"Dan was terrific," Mooney said.

UR did something that only Temple had done this season: beat the Rams at the Ryan Center. Rhode Island came in 10-1 at home, including wins over Providence and Northeastern. Checking Rhode Island's offense, which was averaging 78.8 points, was the top priority for the Spiders, who had been allowing an A-10-low of 59.2 points per game in conference games.

During the four-game winning streak UR brought into this pivotal contest, Spiders' opponents had averaged 51.3 points. None reached 60, and Richmond again last night clamped down.

NOTES: The Spiders will play at St. Bonaventure on Saturday at 2 p.m. The Bonnies (2-6, 9-12) began a three-game homestand against Fordham last night. Saturday's UR-St. Bonaventure game will be televised by Comcast SportsNet.

UR is offering a $30 ticket package for its last three home basketball games of the regular season. The package applies to all seats in the Robins Center. Regularly priced tickets cost $20 and $10. UR entertains Fordham Wednesday, George Washington next Saturday, and Dayton March 4. The phone number for the UR ticket office is 1-877-SPIDER1.

Spiders get another shot at improving RPI

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 10, 2010

The University of Richmond's RPI position could jump again tonight. After gaining about a 10-slot elevation as a result of Saturday's win over 19th-ranked Temple (then-No. 15 in the RPI), the Spiders play at Rhode Island, unranked in polls but No. 12 in the Ratings Percentage Index, used to determine at-large qualifiers for the NCAA tournament.

As Richmond headed into this pivotal two-game challenge in the Atlantic 10 Conference, Spiders coach Chris Mooney said he told his players, "It's like playing Syracuse and Michigan State. So, this is a big deal."

UR is No. 30, or thereabouts, according to well-regarded RPI gauges.

"I think we're getting more and more hungry with each game," senior guard David Gonzalvez said. "Everybody realizes the importance of this season and how this season could be [highly successful], potentially."

The Spiders (7-2, 18-6) and Rams (7-2, 19-3) collected notable nonconference wins, setting them up for NCAA tournament inclusion. UR topped Mississippi State, Missouri, Old Dominion and Florida. URI defeated Providence, Northeastern, Boston College and Oklahoma State. In league play, Richmond and Rhode Island continued playing well.

The number of at-large candidates from the A-10 inevitably shrinks this time of the season because contenders knock off one another. UR and URI will compete to defend and fortify their RPI spots. The Spiders get more chances in upcoming games against Xavier (RPI of 27) and Dayton (RPI of 33) and Charlotte (RPI of 46).

"That's the great thing about when you can win," Mooney said. "The next one is always that much more important."

The Spiders have not been as reliant this season on 3-point shooting as they were in past seasons, though many of their most impressive A-10 victories included 3-point spurts. That also has been a habit of Rhode Island.

"We've got to be good whether we shoot well from the 3, or we don't," Gonzalvez, 1 for 15 on 3-point attempts in Richmond's last three road games. "That's the mark of a solid team that's able to grind it out. Regardless of how they shoot, they're still able to come out with a win."

Rhode Island also wins with pressure defense. Mooney said a primary concern is that the Rams' defense tends to speed up opponents that don't want to play fast.

Storming the court after Temple win didn’t cost UR

By John O’Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 9, 2010

University of Richmond supporters stormed the court following Saturday's 71-54 victory over 19th-ranked Temple. About 100 happy students celebrated with the Spiders by jumping around for a minute or two.

If this had been a Southeastern Conference game rather than an Atlantic 10 Conference game, UR would have been automatically fined, as South Carolina was reminded late last month. Following the Gamecocks' 68-62 win over top-ranked Kentucky, South Carolina supporters charged onto the court and celebrated. It cost the school $25,000. Storming the court violated SEC sportsmanship rules enacted in 2004.

There is no overall NCAA policy. The Atlantic 10 Conference, to which UR belongs, does not have a policy. The A-10 trusts "administrators at our institutions to put policies in place that ensure the safety of the fans, student-athletes and coaches," according to Stephen Haug, an assistant commissioner with the A-10.

Also, the Richmond-based Colonial Athletic Association has no automatic fine for rushing the court following games. CAA Commissioner Tom Yeager said his league, and most leagues, examine situations on a case-by-case basis when required.

"There is an expectation of game management and standards of behavior," said Yeager. "If there was an incident, we would obviously look at it, and it could result in some kind of [penalty]. We have the same concern about throwing [things] onto the court, and all different kinds of stuff beyond just rushing the court.

"But as far as 'Rush the court, get a bill from the conference office,' I think the SEC may be about the only [league] that's going to do that."

The ACC does not have a rule regarding fans storming the court. Brian Morrison, one of the league's associate commissioners, said the ACC regularly reviews crowd-control policies that each school has in place, and makes sure both the teams and officials can safely exit the court following games.

The SEC sportsmanship policy applies to all sports but was formed primarily to deal with problems such as those that had previously appeared in football and basketball. It states "access to competition areas shall be limited to participating student-athletes, coaches, officials, support personnel and properly-credentialed individuals at all time. For the safety of participants and spectators alike, at no time before, during or after a contest shall spectators be permitted to enter the competition area."

Penalties range from $5,000 (first offense) to $50,000. South Carolina had previously violated the SEC policy, in football and basketball.

"The policy is designed to penalize violations, yes," said Charles Bloom, an assistant commissioner at the SEC, "but also to force institutions to think about these game-management issues prior to [problems], to put in place a strategy to stop a potential violation from happening."

The SEC is the only league Bloom knows of that has a policy applicable to storming basketball courts. The SEC's proactive stance grew out of a 2003 summit on sportsmanship and fan behavior in which officials from several leagues and the NCAA took part. The storming of football fields, and accompanying danger, was among the reasons the summit was organized.

"A report came out of that, but there was no national policy developed," Bloom said. "Basically, it was determined that each institution, each conference, must do what's best for itself."

No inside joke: 6-0 Anderson playing key role in UR’s interior scoring

By John O’Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 8, 2010

Wednesday, 7 p.m. The University of Richmond has outscored opponents 656-605 in the paint this season. That seems almost unbelievable.

The Spiders' top two scorers are guards Kevin Anderson and David Gonzalvez. Forwards Justin Harper and Ryan Butler, the team's thirdand fourth-leading scorers, do their damage mostly from outside. Starting center Darrius Garrett and Dan Geriot, his backup, together average fewer than 10 points.

How, then, to explain UR's ability to score inside? Anderson, 6-0 and Richmond's shortest scholarship player, makes it happen.

The junior scored 29 in a 71-54 win over 19th-ranked Temple on Saturday, and only two of his 11 field goals were 3-pointers. Most of the rest came on drives as the 175-pounder challenged the Atlantic 10 Conference team with the finest collection of big bodies.

"With that kind of size about him, it's hard to score in there with that many big guys that we have," Temple coach Fran Dunphy said of Anderson. "He didn't have that much difficulty."

This is fairly common for Anderson, who's not a great shooter -- he's made about 31 percent of 3-point attempts in his career -- but is a great scorer, because of his ability to penetrate with quickness and finish without fear.

Wake Forest, which beat UR in overtime on Dec. 31, featured the same kind of size as Temple. Anderson scored a career-high 31, with only two 3-pointers among 12 buckets.

"I'm not scared to get my shot blocked," said Anderson, who averages 17.7 points per game. "I'm not scared to get knocked down. I'll get right back up."

Spoken like a former football player, which Anderson is. The Atlanta resident played defensive back through three years of high school and reluctantly gave up that sport to concentrate on basketball as a senior.

Anderson doesn't do out-of-control Kamikaze moves to the hoop. He maneuvers his body to launch with confidence.

"I just trust that I can make every shot possible," Anderson said.

Part of that is the arc factor. Anderson's repertoire includes varying shot altitudes.

"When I'm driving to the hole, if I see a big man or a long 6-5 or 6-6 guard in there that I know can jump, I'm definitely going to put it more up in the air and shoot a floater rather than a pull-up," Anderson said. "Sometimes, I might try to go into guys' bodies, just to change it up and keep them off-balance through the game."

He is also the primary ball-handler for a Richmond team that averages only 12 turnovers.

Temple tried to come back from an 18-point halftime hole by slapping full-court defense on the Spiders (7-2, 18-6). Anderson defeated that.

"A press is not nearly as effective when he has the ball," said UR coach Chris Mooney.

Sizzling Spiders jolt No. 19 Temple

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 7, 2010

Kevin Anderson dribbled full speed from the right wing to the free throw line during the first half. As the University of Richmond's 6-0 junior sensed Temple's 6-6 Rahlir Jefferson closing in, Anderson shot what looked like, from a footwork standpoint, a layup from 15 feet.

"I got that from [Phoenix Suns guard] Steve Nash," Anderson said. "If I had tried a jump-stop and pull-up jumper, [Jefferson] would have gotten to it. So I just decided to do the runner."

The uncommon shot went in, as did so many other Richmond's first-half attempts. UR made 77.3 percent (17 of 22) to take an 18-point lead at the break, and beat the 19th-ranked Owls 71-54 in an Atlantic 10 Conference game yesterday before about 4,500 at the Robins Center.

Anderson scored 29 -- two shy of his career-high -- and the Spiders (7-2, 18-6) knocked off a ranked A-10 opponent for the third time in three seasons. Temple (7-2, 19-5), which defeated Villanova, Virginia Tech, Penn State, Miami and Seton Hall in non-conference competition, was allowing an average of 57 points, best in the A-10. The Owls had limited eight league opponents to 38.3-percent shooting, and a 32-percent success rate on 3-point attempts.

But the Spiders, winners of four straight and six of seven, hit 9 of their first 14 shots, including 4 of 7 from 3-point distance, to go ahead 24-14. They finished the afternoon making 57.8 percent.

"Our first half was almost flawless," said Richmond coach Chris Mooney. UR hit 8 of 11 3-point tries in the first half.

"Some [games] you just shoot really well. Some [games] you shoot really poorly," said Spiders' guard David Gonzalvez (13 points). "We just came out on fire."

Richmond's 77.3-percent shooting in the first half was followed by more of the same early in the second half. UR was up 53-30, its largest advantage, with 14:58 left. That came, fittingly, on an Anderson hoop.

"We had some details that we kind of fell down on defensively, and when you do that, (Anderson) makes you pay," Temple coach Fran Dunphy said.

Temple's second-half defensive pressure shook the Spiders. They led 57-49 with 5:54 left. But Anderson hit a pair of free throws, reserve forward Francis-Cedric Martel made a jumper, and Richmond stabilized. The remarkable first-half performance turned out to be more than sufficient to earn a win that will increase UR's chances of qualifying for the NCAA tournament.

"We obviously didn't defend very well, but I think you have to give Richmond a great deal of credit, making as many shots as they did," said Dunphy. "We gave them open looks and they buried every one of them."

The Owls, with a handful of interior players with NBA bodies, collected 16 offensive rebounds. But Richmond's inside toughness prevented Temple from overwhelming the Spiders around the basket.

"We hang our hats on our defense," said UR forward Ryan Butler (12 points). "We know we're not going to shoot the ball well every game."

The Owls played without injured Juan Fernandez, their second-leading scorer (12.3 ppg), top assist man (3.5 apg), and one of the league's best 3-point shooters (43.6 percent).

"We need him to play our best basketball, but he's not available," Dunphy said. "He's our best playmaker, and the way Richmond defends you, you have to make plays. You're not going to really get much out of your set offense.

"But that would be minimizing how good Richmond played. They played great."

Temple found few gaps in UR's matchup defense, repeating the scenario evident in last Saturday's 62-36 win over Saint Louis and last Wednesday's 68-58 victory at Saint Joseph's.

"We needed great ball-movement and great cuts to the basket, but I don't think that was there in the first half," said Lavoy Allen (17 points, 19 rebounds), a 6-9 Owls' junior.

NEXT: UR plays at Rhode Island on Wednesday.

Spiders make a compelling argument with victory over Owls

By Paul Woody
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 7, 2010

The smile on the face of David Gonzalvez was as wide as the snow is deep and as bright as the weather has been uncomfortable.

"It's an awesome day, an awesome day," the senior guard for the University of Richmond Spiders said.

The Spiders beat Temple yesterday, and it was not just another victory at home on a snow-covered weekend.

The Owls were ranked 19th in the country in The Associated Press poll. Even more important, Temple was ranked 16th in the ratings percentage index, the standard that often determines which teams earn at-large bids to the NCAA tournament.

This was no skin-of-their-teeth, hoping-to-hold-on-untilthe-clock-runs-out victory. Richmond won 71-54. The Spiders had a torrid first half, weathered a Temple comeback and expanded their lead in the closing minutes.

The Spiders have beaten teams ranked in the top 20 before -- Dayton in 2008 and Xavier last season. But those victories came when Richmond's record was 10-7 and 16-14.

They were nice little upsets, but didn't make much difference in Richmond's season.

"That we're still alive and in the hunt makes it big," Richmond coach Chris Mooney said. "It's not the first of the year. It's after the dust has settled. It's at a time when everybody is making a move."

The Spiders are 18-6 overall, 7-2 in the Atlantic-10 Conference. They entered yesterday's game standing 34th in the RPI. A loss, especially at home, would have damaged that standing and created doubts about the postseason.

Instead, yesterday's victory makes the statement that beating a top-ranked, highly-rated team is neither an accident nor a one-time thing for the Spiders.

Mooney is in his fifth season at Richmond, and reaching this point has had its challenges.

"We feel like we had a game plan," Mooney said. "We felt we could attract a certain level of student-athlete who would excel at Richmond.

"Then, it's an every day commitment to improvement. When certain guys aren't doing so well, that's addressed. That might seem like it's taking steps backward, but, finally, it gets to the point where the players are addressing it themselves. They don't want to let the team down. That comes with maturity."

Yesterday's victory does not ensure Richmond a spot in the 65-team NCAA tournament. It certainly should help. But there are tough games ahead. Richmond goes to Rhode Island (7-2, 19-3, 12th in the RPI) Wednesday and closes the season at Xavier, at home against Dayton and at Charlotte.

Xavier and Charlotte figure to be in the race for the regular-season title. Dayton, after beating Xavier yesterday, might sneak into the mix as well.

The Spiders know this isn't going to be easy. They also know what it took to get the program to this point.

"These guys work very, very hard and not only have worked hard this week and this season, but they have worked hard to build the program to the point where we can be considered an elite team in the A-10 and a national basketball program," Mooney said.

Ryan Butler, a fifth-year senior swingman, has seen the steps forward and backward. Frustration often has outweighed elation.

Until now. And Butler has a good grasp on why things have changed.

"Experience helps any team," he said. "With experience comes more focus. We come mentally prepared to practice so we can be prepared to win games. We know what we want to accomplish.

"We [the seniors] know we only have seven games left. We know we're not going to get this chance much longer. We want to do whatever we can to win so we continue to play as long as possible."

If the Spiders can play as they did against Temple, their chances of playing in the NCAA tournament are excellent.

The good news for the Spiders is they are mature and talented enough to win on days when they don't shoot 58 percent from the field and 56 percent from 3-point range, as they did yesterday.

"They have a really good plan. They stick to it," said Temple coach Fran Dunphy. "They have really good players.

"They're a force to be reckoned with in our league. When you play them, it is not a box of chocolates."

Those are sweet words to the Spiders' ears.

Strength of A-10 helps Spiders in NCAA push

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
February 2, 2010

The University of Richmond's basketball players have yellow rubber wristbands that read "Collective will. NCAA 2010."

Explains sophomore center Darrius Garrett: "Basically, that means the team has the collective will to get to the NCAAs. Every person on this team all the way down the line -- coaches, assistant coaches, trainers, all the players -- knows that's our goal this year."

The Spiders haven't participated in the NCAA tournament since 2004. They're in decent shape to do so in 2010, in part because of their affiliation with the Atlantic 10 Conference. When UR left the Colonial Athletic Association for the A-10 in 2001-02, the opportunity to qualify for the NCAA tournament through regular-season accomplishment rather than the much narrower passage of league tournament titles was appealing.

Though the A-10 in recent years has been down compared to previous achievement, this season the league may advance as many as six teams to the NCAA tournament. According to the most recent Ratings Percentage Index, Rhode Island is No. 11,

Temple is No. 15 and Xavier checks in at No. 22. Richmond, next at No. 39, is also under consideration for an NCAA at-large bid, and could elevate its status with a successful week.

The Spiders (5-2, 16-6) tomorrow play at Saint Joseph's (2-5, 8-13), Saturday entertain Temple (6-1, 18-4), and next Wednesday visit Rhode Island (5-2, 17-3). UR later will play Xavier and Dayton (RPI of 40) and has a rematch with Charlotte (RPI of 42) before beginning league tournament competition.

"Joining the Atlantic 10 was a great move by the University of Richmond. You're joining one of the elite conferences in the country," said fifth-year Spiders coach Chris Mooney. "What it does is it gives you a much greater opportunity to earn an at-large bid . . . we hope that we can kind of capitalize on it."

Added Jim Miller, UR's athletic director since 2000: "There are different reasons to be in conferences. There are different values. But the main reason we joined the Atlantic 10 was, it is the strongest men's basketball conference that we could be a member of.

"I don't want to get into that group of people that thinks the only measure of a successful season is to be in the NCAA tournament. That is probably one of the most important measuring sticks. But there are other things. Night in and night out, game in and game out, we have strong teams coming into our building playing."

The Spiders began fortifying their 2009-10 portfolio with nonconference victories over Mississippi State, Missouri, Florida and Old Dominion. Those wins will carry considerable weight when the NCAA tournament field is determined. Mooney requests that his players concentrate on the next opponent, but he also reminds them of big-picture ramifications related to notable schedule stretches. The next week of games could determine if Richmond reaches the NCAA tournament.

"We want to keep our guys informed," Mooney said. "We don't go into the particulars about the [RPI], or anything like that. But we talk about where we are right now, and we're in a position now if we move forward and do well, we'll accomplish what we want to.

"We make our guys aware of that. We know how many gams are left and where those games are, and how important each of them is."

In Mooney's estimation, the Spiders head into the demanding stretch playing as well as they have all season. UR's match-up defense gives opponents trouble, guards Kevin Anderson and David Gonzalvez are experienced and productive, 6-10 junior Justin Harper has provided consistent scoring (reached double-figure in eight of the last nine games), and the Spiders' reserves have recently supplied starters rest without significant drop-off.

"They're a veteran team with a lot of good players," said Saint Louis coach Rick Majerus, whose Billikens were humbled 62-36 at the Robins Center on Saturday. "They took it to us and they just kicked our [tail]."

UR’s defense has chilling effect in win

By John O’Connor
Richmond Times Dispatch
January 31, 2010

Sound defense. Before about 1,500 at the Robins Center yesterday in a 62-36 burial of Saint Louis, the University of Richmond displayed it in several ways.

The Spiders talk to one another a lot while guarding. That communication is not so easy to hear when the building is noisy, but yesterday's crowd was limited because of quickly accumulating snow in the area.

The exchange of information was part of a defensive effort that shut out the Billikens on 3-pointers (0 for 10) and from the free throw line (0 for 3). Richmond (5-2 in the A-10, 16-6) also caused 23 turnovers, and had 13 steals and eight blocks.

"That was probably our best defensive game of the year and our best first half of the season," said Richmond coach Chris Mooney, whose team had seven days to prepare for SLU (3-3, 12-8).

The Spiders went ahead 11-4 behind a couple of 3-pointers from senior guard David Gonzalvez, led 37-20 at halftime and were ahead 49-22 with 14 minutes remaining. UR hadn't held an opponent to fewer points since defeating American 73-32 in 2001.

"For whatever reason, I don't know how you're 18 or 19 years old and you come out flat, but we were flat. [The Spiders] were on top of their game," said SLU coach Rick Majerus. "And it was game over. Period. There's not much more you can say about it.

"We just played badly. You can use any metaphor, adjective, adverbs you want, but I think I summed it up and you can underscore the word 'badly.'"

Among the positive signs for the Spiders:

•To-the-basket aggressiveness of 6-10 junior Justin Harper, who scored 16 while making only one 3-pointer. "Those are higher-percentage shots," Harper said. "Coach [Mooney] is trying to tell me to get shots while attacking the basket early. That usually gets me into a better flow, offensively and into the game more."

•UR rolled without typical production from 6-0 junior Kevin Anderson, who was averaging 18.1 points and scored a season-low six. Anderson had reached double figures in every other game this season but took only seven shots. "The stat that I like the most is that he played only 29 minutes," Mooney said of Anderson, who had been averaging 38.8 minutes in A-10 competition. Lacking Anderson's normal scoring and winning with ease "shows maybe we're a little more well-rounded than we were earlier in the season," Mooney said.

•Bench support. Richmond's reserves outscored SLU subs 23-4, with 6-6 sophomore Francis Cedric-Martel scoring 10 (with five rebounds) in 20 minutes. "Everybody that went in the game played well," Mooney said. "One of those days where, fueled by our defense, we were able to have some confidence, and were able to play well on offense as well."

When these teams played Jan. 9 in St. Louis, the Billikens won 63-58 without 6-9 Willie Reed (12.2 ppg, 8.3 rpg), who served a one-game suspension imposed by Majerus.

"We wanted to make sure we came out on their stuff this time because we struggled at St. Louis on defense," said sophomore center Darrius Garrett, who had four of UR's eight blocks. "We came out with great defensive intensity.

"I couldn't get too much going on the offensive end, so I'm wanting to make sure I made it up on the defensive end this game."

SLU has no juniors or seniors, but that was not a major factor, in the viewpoint of Majerus.

Next: UR plays at Saint Joseph's on Wednesday night.

UR overcomes GW in foul-filled game

By John O'Connor
January 24, 2010
Richmond Times-Dispatch

WASHINGTON -- The University of Richmond survived a tour of Handcheck Hell yesterday.

Ryan Butler's 3-pointer from the left corner with 26 seconds left (:03 on the shot clock) broke a tie and elevated the Spiders to a 62-57 Atlantic 10 Conference victory over George Washington in a game that included 52 fouls and 49 free throws.

Before 3,298 at the Smith Center, the Spiders (4-2, 15-6) captured their second league road win in three tries by hitting jumpers down the stretch, Butler's being the biggest. In the final 5:49, Richmond made four 3-pointers and a shot from just inside the arc. Of those five baskets, Kevin Anderson (21 points) was responsible for three.

"Anderson is probably the best guard in the league," said GW coach Karl Hobbs, whose Colonials (1-4, 11-7) were picked to finish 13th in the A-10. Anderson had hit 4 of 10 going into the last 5:49, then made 3 of 4.

UR was 7 of 13 from 3-point distance in the second half after going 2 of 7 on 3-pointers in the first half. "We wanted to run our offense and I think in the first half, we didn't do as good a job of that," said Butler (eight points, three steals). "We talked about that at halftime, just continuing to run our stuff. I think that's what ultimately got us shots late."

The Colonials hit only two 3-pointers (nine attempts) and scored 10 fast-break points, low for them. Hobbs' teams always want to push the pace, and he said he was hoping for a game in the 70s.

"I would [guard] the ball, and then the big men would run back and stop their bigs, and we felt like we did a pretty good job with that," Anderson said of limiting GW's running opportunities.

Hobbs wasn't going to allow Anderson to hit the decisive shot. When UR took possession with the score 57-57 and 58 seconds left, the Colonials prevented Anderson from getting the ball. UR had called a timeout to set up a play for Anderson.

With him unavailable, David Gonzalvez drove along the right baseline and caused GW's defense to shift. Gonzalvez passed to Butler, who was open in the left corner.

"That's a senior throwing the ball to a senior in a big situation on the road," UR coach Chris Mooney said. "Those guys have worked very hard to feel the euphoria of that moment."

The game was close throughout and didn't carry rhythm because of all the fouls. Neither team had a proficient post scorer, so much of the afternoon was a series of slashes to the basket and accompanying handcheck calls.

"Personally, I think that's the best way to deal with a game like that," Mooney said. "Blow the whistle and make sure they stop fouling, and if they keep fouling, keep blowing the whistle. I thought there were a lot of fouls that we committed and that they committed."

Fans often yell "Call it both ways!" The three-man crew did: 26 personals on each team.

With all of the whistles, the talking point for many of those leaving the Smith Center was the absence of a whistle near the end. After Butler's 20-footer gave UR the 60-57 lead, GW's Damian Hollis got the ball near the top of the key, just outside the 3-point arc, with about 5 seconds remaining. He pump-faked. Richmond's Dan Geriot went airborne. He and Hollis bumped as Hollis attempted a 3-pointer. Hollis seemed to be the one creating contact. The shot missed. There was no call.

Hobbs said after the game that he hadn't reviewed the play and didn't know if Hollis was fouled by Geriot.

With 1.7 seconds left, Anderson hit two more free throws an appropriate ending for a game with so many foul shots.

The Spiders don't have a weekday game this week. Saint Louis plays at the Robins Center on Saturday at 2 p.m. The Billikens beat the Spiders 63-58 in St. Louis on Jan. 9.

UR seeking more consistency from talented Justin Harper

By John O'Connor
January 22, 2010
Richmond Times-Dispatch

An NBA scout attended the University of Richmond's game Wednesday night to evaluate a couple of players. Justin Harper was one of them, the scout confirmed in a pre-tipoff conversation.

Harper, a 6-10 junior from Meadowbrook High, then demonstrated why. He scored 24 points, hit 4 of 5 from 3-point distance, got to the free throw line six times, grabbed six rebounds, dished out three assists, blocked three shots and made a steal. Harper's 36 minutes couldn't have been much better, though UR fell 71-59 to Charlotte.

"He shows every once in a while how talented he is," said Richmond coach Chris Mooney.

Sense a touch of frustration?

Harper, before the Niners' visit, was averaging 9.7 points in an up-and-down season that resembles the up-and-down year he experienced as a sophomore (9.2 ppg). Mooney isn't calling for 24 points a game from Harper, but the Spiders' coach has made it clear on many occasions that Harper's size and ability could translate into more than he has provided.

"Everyone knows what I can do. I know what I can do," said Harper, a 225-pounder. "It's just a matter of me having the mindset of going out there and being able to do it every night."

Against Charlotte, Harper used his quickness to get past big men and to the basket. He shot jumpers when defenders backed off to protect against the drive. Three or four times last season, and a couple of times this season, Harper has put it all together. He showed what Mooney frequently sees in practices.

"Hopefully, [that] was the kind of game that can be a catalyst for him to develop a little bit more consistency, because when he's out there [vs. Charlotte], he looks like he's the best player on the floor," said Mooney. His Spiders (3-2 in the A-10, 14-6) play tomorrow afternoon at George Washington (1-3, 11-6).

Richmond occasionally runs plays for Harper early in games, trying to get him on track. Sometimes, that works. Sometimes, it doesn't. In six games, Harper has scored six or fewer points. Part of the problem is foul trouble. Harper has fouled out four times. And part of it may be that the Spiders are guard-centric, built around Kevin Anderson (18 ppg) and David Gonzalvez (13.2 ppg). But most of the inconsistency, Harper acknowledges, is related to his mental approach.

"It's just coming out and attacking the game. Don't lay back and let the game come to me," Harper said. "I have to go out and get it."

Spiders playing? Expect a close game

By John O'Connor
January 20, 2010
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Finishing force sent the University of Richmond to a 3-1 start in the Atlantic 10 Conference and a 14-5 overall mark.

Heading into tonight's visit from Charlotte, the Spiders have played league games decided by 5, 7 and 4 points. The seven-point win was an overtime defeat of Massachusetts. Richmond's only A-10 contest decided by more than seven points: a 12-point win at Duquesne, and that game was tied with 12:30 left.

Ten of UR's past 14 games were decided by eight or fewer points. In them, Richmond is 7-3.

"If that's the way it is, then that's the way it is," UR coach Chris Mooney said of his team's trend of close games. "We feel like we're veteran enough to be able to handle that."

Why has UR played so many tight ones?

•Generally, Richmond's games are relatively low-scoring and, therefore, more likely to be close. Possessions take longer than usual for both teams because the Spiders play a match-up defense that forces opponents to probe for shots, and Richmond (68.2 ppg) rarely pushes tempo. •Scoring spurts that can make games one-sided are often the result of transition hoops or 3-point runs. UR allows few quick conversions -- 19 fast-break points in four league games -- and has held opponents to 29.5-percent shooting from 3-point distance. Why has UR won many of its close games, including résumé-builders over Mississippi State (63-62), Missouri (59-52) and Florida (56-53)?

Good direction by experienced players who hit clutch free throws. Each of Richmond's starters has been a regular for at least two seasons, and all but junior forward Justin Harper are threeor four-year starters.

"They make the right pass. They're wonderfully coached," La Salle coach John Giannini said after his Explorers fell at UR 67-63 last Saturday. "Because they're veteran, even the situation doesn't make them uncomfortable."

Most instrumental in late-game success have been ball-handlers Kevin Anderson and David Gonzalvez. Together, the guards have 201 games of college experience. They take most of UR's crunch-time free throws, and the Spiders have made 79.4 percent from the line in the last five minutes of wins.

Charlotte (2-1, 12-5) doesn't do close games, for the most part. The Niners have double-digit wins in nine of 12 victories and double-digit losses in four of five defeats. Each of the past four games involving UR and Charlotte was decided by seven or fewer points. The Spiders won them all.

UR’s Brothers moves into the mix

By John O'Connor
January 19, 2010
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Three consecutive University of Richmond first-half possessions against La Salle on Saturday resulted in three buckets for freshman guard Darien Brothers. Boldness is not a problem for the Benedictine High graduate.

"That's always been my game. I try to attack the rim," said Brothers.

He played a season-high 16 minutes in that 67-63 Spiders win, and they were solid: no turnovers, 3-of-4 shooting, an assist. This rates as a highly encouraging development for UR (3-1 A-10, 14-5), which plays Charlotte (2-1, 12-5) tomorrow night at the Robins Center.

Richmond depends heavily on its veteran guards, junior Kevin Anderson (37.3 minutes per game) and senior David Gonzalvez (34.1). Another reliable backcourt component could firm up this team that's gunning for the program's first NCAA tournament bid since 2004.

Patience is commonly the most difficult requirement for freshmen, and given the presence of Anderson and Gonzalvez, it figured that Brothers would demonstrate plenty this season.

"I expected to come in and play maybe three or four minutes, just in case one of the guards needed a breather or two," Brothers said. "Just come in and play good defense, mostly."

That was his role through the season's first half. But in practice lately, Spiders' coach Chris Mooney has worked in Brothers with the regulars more often, and against La Salle, the 6-3, 195-pounder received his most meaningful opportunity as a collegian. Brothers' scoring spurt gave UR the lead midway through the first half, and the Spiders never trailed again.

"When he came in, he was assertive. He was aggressive. He had energy," Mooney said. "I hope that's a little bit of a sign of things to come. Hopefully, we can continue to get him minutes because I think he's going to be a very good player."

Brothers is one of three Richmond-area players who are Spiders, along with 6-7 senior forward Ryan Butler (Douglas Freeman High) and 6-10 junior forward Justin Harper (Meadowbrook High), both starters.

"Our most important recruiting area is Richmond, Virginia," Mooney said.

Brothers, who transferred to Benedictine from Monacan High, has been a Spiders' fan for a decade. He said there wasn't much doubt since his sophomore year in high school that he would sign with UR if he had the opportunity, though Richmond had experienced guards and his chance to contribute might be delayed.

"His pull-up [jumper] is great. He can drive to the hole. He's explosive," Anderson said of Brothers. "I know every night, if he gets in the game, he can do the same things he did [against La Salle] and have the same impact on the game."

Richmond Sophomore Revels in Rejections

By Hank Kurz
Associated Press
January 17, 2010

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — It only took one remarkable game for the Richmond sophomore Darrius Garrett to go from a blip in an opponents’ pregame preparation to a major cause for concern.

Garrett, a forward, seemingly came from nowhere and blocked 14 shots Wednesday night in the Spiders’ overtime victory against Massachusetts, tying for the second most in N.C.A.A. history. In Richmond’s first 18 games, the 6-foot-9 Garrett had accounted for 39 rejections.

Now, teams will expect him to be lurking near the basket in the Spiders’ matchup zone defense, prowling and protecting the rim with his long arms.

“All of a sudden you put him in there, and then it’s like that much more difficult to prepare for,” Spiders Coach Chris Mooney said of a defense that other teams tend to think is complicated. “I think it’s going to change the way that teams prepare for us.”

So does Garrett, who says he welcomes the challenge of facing expectations.

“I think it’s going to be a big change,” Garrett said. “I think it’s going to throw off some scouting reports on some teams. They’re going to be aware of me down there now so they’re going to try to draw fouls against me, so I’m going to have to be aware of that.”

Garrett’s total set Richmond and Atlantic 10 Conference records, and was two blocks shy of the N.C.A.A. record set by Alabama A&M’s Mickell Gladness against Texas Southern in 2007.

Garrett also grabbed 13 rebounds and scored 8 points, just missing a triple-double.

Minutemen Coach Derek Kellogg, who played for the University of Massachusetts with Marcus Camby, a great shot blocker, said he told his players to keep attacking and try to go into Garrett’s body, but it did not work. He called the performance one of the most dominating he had ever seen.

“There were three or four times where I thought we had easy layups and he came up with a block,” he said.

Garrett said he was surprised that the Minutemen just kept driving into his reach. “But they kept taking layups, and I kept taking the blocks,” he said.

The Spiders say they plan to take more advantage of Garrett’s abilities.

“He gives you the opportunity, A, to not commit fouls because you know you’re never really beaten,” Mooney said, “and then also probably to take a chance or two because you know he’s back there protecting the rim. I think the more and more we play with Darrius in there, the more we’ll get used to that even more.”

Garrett arrived from Raleigh, N.C., last season with more complete skills on defense than offense, Mooney said, and seeing him break out in an important league game was promising.

“To have such an incredible game like that as a sophomore, historic in the A-10, it’s just amazing,” Mooney said before practice Friday. “You hope it not only helped us win that game but, going forward, that it just does incredible things for his confidence.”

He added that Garrett seemed smart about not being suckered into bad fouls.

“He has a very good defensive instinct beyond blocking shots,” he said, as well as a good sense of his need to bring energy to the team on defense.

Last year against St. John’s, Mooney said, Garrett went in the game and quickly blocked two shots on one possession, then made a diving save of a ball headed out of bounds. The Spiders, who were being hammered early, rode that energy and came back to win, 75-69.

Effort plays, however, are not as energizing as blocks, his teammate Justin Harper said.

“It’s such an uplifting thing if you’re in a slump or see someone with a wide-open lane to the basket, and he comes from the weak side and throws it into the third row,” Harper said.

La Salle’s size advantage doesn’t fluster Spiders

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 17, 2010

The University of Richmond's match-up defense periodically forces 6-0 Spider Kevin Anderson to look way up. He regularly dealt yesterday with La Salle players several inches taller. They tried to take advantage of Anderson in the lane area, sometimes with positive results.

In the last five minutes of UR's 67-63 win, when the Explorers abandoned their wide zone defense and went man-to-man in catch-up mode, Anderson gained revenge. On switches, those long La Salle players tried unsuccessfully to handle Anderson. He scored Richmond's last 10 points on a variety of quick moves.

"It worked out for me, it worked out for the team," said the junior from Atlanta.

Anderson scored 21, and the Spiders outscored the Explorers 21-3 from 3-point distance in the Atlantic 10 Conference game played before 4,641 at the Robins Center. La Salle didn't hit a 3-pointer until the last-second attempt by 6-10 freshman Aaric Murray swished.

Anderson's late-game scoring tells only part of why he stood out down the stretch. UR (3-1, 14-5), which is 9-0 at home, led 57-54 with five minutes left. Anderson reached around dribbling Explorer Jerrell Williams for a steal, which led to Anderson's transition layup.

Anderson then repeated the defensive move, reaching around La Salle guard Parrish Grant and poking the ball away. That was Anderson's fourth steal of the day. UR had 11 in a game that matched Richmond's speed and 3-point shooting against bigger La Salle's interior scoring.

This is the kind of match-up that used to favor Richmond opponents, but through recruiting and physical development, the Spiders were not overwhelmed by a team that started four players 6-7 or taller and grabbed 15 offensive rebounds.

"We have guys who are physical and fast and strong, too," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "It wasn't our best defensive effort today, but at key times, we were able to get stops, and that's probably been the most common thread through our season.

"Defensively, we're pretty good."

Darrius Garrett, the 6-9 Spiders sophomore who had a schooland league-record 14 blocks against Massachusetts Wednesday, had three blocks yesterday. UR committed only nine turnovers.

The Explorers (2-2, 9-8), picked to finish fourth (behind UR) in the preseason A-10 poll, played without injured starters Kimmani Barrett (13.3 ppg) and Ruben Guillandeaux (9.5 ppg), senior forwards with foot problems.

Richmond stayed ahead for the last 31minutes, though never had a comfortable cushion. UR's advantage increased to 10 with 13:20 left, then slipped to two four minutes later and stayed around six points the rest of the way.

"These veteran players have probably been playing with the same concepts for a long time, so it's almost impossible to make them uncomfortable with anything you do defensively," La Salle coach John Giannini said of the Spiders. "They're just skilled, veteran players that make good decisions.

"Sometimes they miss shots, because everyone does. But it's hard to force them into bad situations."

Shot-blocking Garrett shooting for offensive expansion

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 16, 2010

The University of Richmond's basketball program attracted Darrius Garrett because Spiders' coaches didn't tell him how great he was. They illuminated areas in which he needed work, and promised improvement opportunity.

Garrett collected a UR-record and Atlantic 10 Conference-record 14 blocks in a Wednesday win over Massachusetts.

The volume is remarkable -- "They kept shooting layups, and I kept taking the blocked shots," Garrett said of the determined Minutemen -- but the 6-9, 210-pound sophomore has been deflating shooters for years. He led the state of Georgia in blocks as a high-school junior.

And for years, Garrett has been dunking. As best as he can recall, Garrett threw down 64 jams as a prep senior. His offensive game, with rare exceptions, consisted of two components.

"Catch and dunk," Garrett said.

To many college recruiters, Garrett's package was acceptable. They projected him as a shot-blocker, rebounder and screener. UR recruiters offered a new frontier. One day, Garrett was told, he would shoot jumpers, pass, and maybe even dribble.

"Our standards are so high," said Garrett, a sophomore from the Atlanta area. He is expected to get his first college start today against visiting La Salle. "Most college big men, [coaches] just want you to catch and rebound. That's all they want you to do is stand under the basket and rebound.

"Coach [Chris] Mooney wants you to do everything on the floor. That's the best thing about this program."

Richmond drew Garrett, too, because the Spiders already had guard Kevin Anderson, an Atlanta-area resident and a year ahead of Garrett. They played in the same AAU program, the Atlanta-based Worldwide Renegades. At UR, "I knew he'd take care of me and I'd take care of him," Garrett said.

Garrett's knack for rejection takes care of all Spiders.

"When you have somebody like that back there, he gives you the opportunity to not commit fouls because you know that you're not ever really beaten," Mooney said, speaking of Garrett (39 blocks in 18 games). "And also, you probably can take a chance or two because you know he's back there and protecting the rim."

This just in: Garrett tried a 17-footer from the left corner against UMass. He didn't hit, but the stroke looked solid, which qualifies as a step forward in his offensive expansion plan.

"If I watched a tape of the first day I got here [to UR], I might laugh for 10 minutes straight," Garrett said. "I was a totally different player. Very unskilled, just a regular high-school center who rebounded, blocked shots and dunked."

Garrett sets A-10 Record as Spiders down UMass

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 14, 2010

Massachusetts kept taking the ball inside. Darrius Garrett kept sending it back.

The University of Richmond's 6-9 sophomore set a school and Atlantic 10 Conference record with 14 blocks -- two fewer than the NCAA record -- as the Spiders won 70-63 last night in overtime. The volume of the Robins Center crowd of 4,019 grew with each rejection by Garrett, a resident of Atlanta who hasn't started a college game.

That's likely to change soon. Garrett, a 210-pounder, also pulled in 13 rebounds and scored 8 for the Spiders (2-1, 13-5). Together, they collected a school-record 17 blocks.

"I think it intimidates the other team a little bit, and drags them down," Garrett said of shot-blocking.

UR's veteran guard combination of Kevin Anderson (19 points) and David Gonzalvez (16) carried the scoring along with 6-10 Justin Harper (12).

But the night belonged to the quick-jumping Garrett.

"It's such an uplifting thing for your team if you're in a slump and you see [the opponents] who look like they have a wide-open layup to the basket, and this man just comes from the weak side and just throws it into like the third row," Harper said of Garrett.

One of Garrett's blocks ricocheted off the shooter's head.

"That's the most amazing stat that I've seen on a stat sheet probably since I've been coaching," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "You might see seven 3s in a game, or 30 points in a game, but 14 blocks is really an amazing thing."

UMass (1-2, 7-9) had the final possession of regulation, but Anderson's defense on Ricky Harris, a high-quality A-10 guard, led to overtime. Gonzalvez started OT by hitting a 22-footer, and after a Garrett block, Anderson hit a pull-up jumper to put UR ahead 58-53. The Minutemen were scrambling the rest of the way and never really got back into it.

Garrett was not charged with a foul in his 32 minutes. His defensive impact was even greater than the incredible number of blocks. In the estimation of UMass' coach Derek Kellogg, Garrett changed "six or seven shots" that he didn't block. Also, Garrett's defensive presence forced a couple of walks.

Shooters get into rhythm. Garrett said he is a shot-blocker who does. He had 25 blocks in 17 games before last night, when the Minutemen were told by Kellogg to keep going at Garrett.

"Once the first two or three come, they all kind of fall in place after that, and it gets a little easier," Garrett said. He estimated that "very few" of his blocks came on the player he was covering. The rest were the result of Garrett helping on other Minutemen.

The Spiders "kind of force [opponents] toward me a little bit. They know my ability," Garrett said. "I help them out. They help me out."

Richmond took 33 first-half shots and 20 of them were 3-point attempts (five hits). The Spiders' reliance on long-range shots -- and their failure to hit many of them -- allowed UMass to score the last 11 points of the first half. UR led 28-25 at intermission.

"We have good 3-point shooters on our team and that's a big part of our offense," Mooney said. "But we're much better when we're shooting [two-point shots] 70 percent of the time, which I think we're probably close to statistically.

"We're better when we're attacking the basket."

The Spiders did so in the second half and in OT, attempting only seven 3-pointers. They made none of them, but had Garrett on the other end of the court to repel the Minutemen.

"He really changed the game on the defensive end of the floor," Kellogg said. "There were three or four times I thought we had easy layups and he came up with a block."

Spiders settle in for some home cookin’

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 13, 2010

Justin Harper prefers home cooking but he's not speaking of agreeable officiating. The University of Richmond's junior forward from Meadowbrook High wants to eat what he prepares when his stomach growls.

That can be accomplished when the Spiders play home games. When they're on the road, Harper and his teammates eat what the hotel serves, at a predetermined hour.

Ryan Butler celebrates a break from buses and planes. When UR is on the road, the senior forward from Douglas Freeman High sometimes feels as though he is in perpetual motion: bus to plane, bus to hotel, bus to arena for shoot-around, bus to hotel, bus to arena for game, bus to airport for the homeward-bound plane.

"All that travel that you don't have to do at home, it's so much better," Butler said.

Added Harper: "It takes its toll on you, and a lot of people don't realize that."

Tonight, the Spiders play Massachusetts to begin a stretch that includes three consecutive home games and five of seven. The only road game UR plays from now until Feb. 3 involves a tame motor-coach journey to George Washington. The extended home stay feels fair to Harper, who said "It seems like Harper, who said "It seems like we've been on the road all season."

UR's last four games, and nine of its last 12, were played away from the Robins Center. Richmond (1-1 in the A-10, 12-5) is 7-0 at home. Otherwise, they've played in Texas (twice), South Carolina, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania (twice), and Missouri.

"Playing on the road and traveling on the road, it's not as easy as being at home, for sure," Mooney said. "I think maybe this could be an opportunity for us to really concentrate one game at a time, but look at these three games as an opportunity to really establish ourselves in the conference.

"It's long, long season, but this stretch here could be important for us."

UR collected non-A-10 victories over Mississippi State, Missouri, Old Dominion and Florida. UMass coach Derek Kellogg projects the Spiders as "one of the teams that's an NCAA tournament team out of our league."

Geriot's input "makes all the difference" for UR

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 9, 2010

Dan Geriot scored seven of the University of Richmond's first 15 points at Duquesne on Wednesday night. What difference does it make that the Spiders' 6-9 center did so?

"It makes all the difference in the world, because when he's scoring inside, it just opens everything else for everyone else," said UR guard David Gonzalvez.

The Spiders converted a season-high 13 3-pointers in an 80-68 victory in their Atlantic 10 Conference opener. Afterward, UR Chris Mooney praised Geriot's passing and the insight he brought to huddles. But Geriot's early production seemed to set the evening's tone and give him a shot of confidence.

Geriot led Richmond in scoring and rebounding as a sophomore, missed last season with a knee injury, and was averaging 7.9 points and shooting 35.9 percent before hitting 5 of 7 and scoring 11 at Duquesne.

"You were saving it for conference [competition] so you can get the conference player of the year," UR guard Kevin Anderson told Geriot in the visitor's locker room. Added Anderson: "He came out and did outstanding, like the old Dan. Post moves, rebounding, hitting 3s, finishing."

The Spiders (1-0, 12-4) will look for input from all available scorers in today's A-10 game St. Louis (0-0, 9-5). The Billikens hold opponents to an average of 57.4 points and 26.6-percent shooting from 3-point distance.

"I've been working hard to get out of this funk, or whatever. I just wasn't scoring as much," Geriot said. "I think I'm trying to adjust to a different role on offense, and I think that was it."

Geriot's "different role" is complementary. When he played two years ago, the Richmond offense needed to run through him, because there were no other dependable scoring options. UR has progressed since, particularly because of the improvement of Anderson and Gonzalvez.

"We're so much better now that the ball doesn't have to go [inside]. I don't have to get touches all of the time," Geriot said. "I get touches throughout the whole game at different points."

Comfortable with his part in a winning operation, Geriot viewed Wednesday's tip-off of the A-10 season for Richmond as his fresh start. His A-10 goal: "Go out there and prove I'm one of the best big men in this conference," Geriot said.

Spiders win A-10 opener

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 7, 2010

PITTSBURGH -- Balanced scoring from 20 feet -- and beyond -- made the University of Richmond hard to guard last night at Duquesne.

Seven Spiders hit at least one 3-pointer, and Richmond made 13 of 26 from beyond the arc to down the Dukes 80-68 in the Atlantic 10 Conference opener for both teams. Each UR starter scored in double figures. Guard David Gonzalvez (19 points) had five 3-pointers, and forward Ryan Butler (14 points) made three.

"Certainly we shot the ball well tonight, and any time you shoot the ball well, you go from good to great, or average to good," said UR coach Chris Mooney.

Before 2,523 at the Palumbo Center, Richmond beat Duquesne for the 13th consecutive time. UR is picked to finish third in the league, with DU projected to come in fifth.

The Spiders (1-0, 12-4) received early-game scoring from Gonzalvez and center Dan Geriot, then a second-half push from guard Kevin Anderson, who scored 16 of his 18 after the break. Richmond trailed 36-33 at that point. Anderson has been most productive in second halves this season.

"I don't really think anyone can shut down Kevin. I think he can shut down himself," Gonzalvez said. "I just think that in the first half sometimes, maybe he's not concentrating as much. But when he wants to turn it on, nobody can guard him."

Before halftime, Anderson missed 5 of 6. After halftime, he made four of six, and most of those were difficult runners in the lane.

In the second half, UR was 7 of 12 on 3-pointers, with Gonzalvez and Butler most involved. Thirteen 3-pointers were a Richmond season-high.

"Not only are they good shooters, they're good deep shooters," said Duquesne coach Ron Everhart. The range of Gonzalvez and Butler shocked Dukes' defenders, added Everhart, a former Virginia Tech guard.

Richmond committed only four turnovers in the second half, maintaining composure as Duquesne (0-1, 9-6) went to full-court pressure after falling behind. The Spiders led 50-49 with 10:35 left. Five minutes later, they were up by 10.

"It's all about our defense," said Geriot, who played one of his finest games of the season. "And when we're securing clean rebounds, I think we're hard to play against."

The intensity of league play became obvious late in the game, when UR center Darrius Garrett and Duquesne guard Sean Johnson started wrestling while battling for a rebound. Each player was assessed a technical foul.

"We're trying to win on the road, and that's always hard, and they're trying to defend their home court," Geriot said. "There's physicality."

In the last 10 minutes, the older team (UR) emerged as more purposeful, more poised. Mooney suggested the difficult early season schedule Richmond played helped the Spiders in this one, and Everhart agreed.

"There's not any doubt we lost to a good ballclub," he said. "They've got older kids, they're experienced, they've been through the wars."

Spiders will have support in A-10 opener at Duquesne

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 6, 2010

The Palumbo Center is Duquesne's home court and the site of tonight's Atlantic 10 Conference opener for the University of Richmond.

The Spiders, however, will have a significant rooting presence in the Dukes' 5,358-seat arena. Jerry Butler, the uncle of UR forward Ryan Butler, is leading a group of about 60 who will back the visitors. "We're hoping to make a difference," said Jerry Butler, 50.

A rented bus will transport Richmond's cheering section from Jerry Butler's home in Greensburg, Pa., about a 45-minute drive from Duquesne and downtown Pittsburgh. Each member of that group will be wearing a white Spiders' shirt.

A comparable group was present for UR's visit to Duquesne in February 2008, and its members comprised the loudest section in the building during the Spiders' 69-66 win. With the uncommon road support, Richmond (11-4) will try to carry momentum from its eye-catching performance in nonconference activity.

"We think we've competed in every game and certainly have come away with some big wins," said UR coach Chris Mooney, whose team defeated Mississippi State, Missouri, Old Dominion and Florida. "If we could play the defense that we've played, I think we'll give ourselves a chance in every game."

Richmond holds opponents to 37.7-percent shooting and forces an average of 16.5 turnovers. Mooney concedes "there's room for improvement" on offense. Consistent scoring from Spiders other than guard Kevin Anderson (18.5 ppg) is the key, he added. Richmond's players are capable of providing that, in the opinion of Ron Everhart.

"They've gotten their program to a point where they're very deep and very talented," the fourth-year Duquesne coach and a former Virginia Tech guard, said of the Spiders. "They're one of those teams that, in my estimation, there's no question they're as good as anybody in our league. They can beat anybody, as they've shown in the nonconference schedule."

Melquan Bolding, a 6-4 sophomore who was among the top A-10 rookies last season and a member of the league's all-tournament team, broke his wrist in the Dukes' opener and hasn't played since. Bolding, who scored 25 in 36 minutes before suffering the injury, may be available tonight.

"You take a scorer like Bolding out of anybody's lineup, I think it affects you," said Everhart. "I think that's been our big problem, trying to manufacture ways to score, especially from the perimeter."

Spiders' support for Anderson a priority heading into A-10 play

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 5, 2010

Based on the high level at which Kevin Anderson is playing, this seems counterintuitive. But the University of Richmond's staff wouldn't mind getting less from the 6-0 junior.

Fewer minutes and fewer points from Anderson may improve UR in the long run, assuming those gaps productively are filled by others.

Anderson was named Atlantic 10 Conference player of the week after averaging 27.6 points during the Spiders' past three games. That hot spell included a career-high 31 in an overtime loss at Wake Forest on New Year's Eve. Anderson played 39 or more minutes in eight of Richmond's last 10 games.

About halfway through the regular season, UR coach Chris Mooney acknowledges concern regarding the load Anderson carries into Atlantic 10 competition, which Richmond (11-4) begins tomorrow night at Duquesne (9-5).

"I'm not fatigued at all, or anything like that," Anderson said yesterday.

But Mooney considers long term. Can the Spiders continue to rely so heavily on their point guard and realistically expect him to remain as effective through mid-March?

Anderson leads UR in minutes (36.7 mpg), scoring (18.5 ppg), free throws (about 5 attempts per game) and steals (2.3 spg). He is the team's primary ballhandler, too. Anderson, who weighs 175 pounds, absorbs more of a physical pounding than any other Spider as a result of his acrobatic drives to the basket. He scores on 3-pointers and midrange jumpers, too.

Point guards inherently compete with larger roles than players at other positions, Mooney said, and "There's even more responsibility on [Anderson] than most point guards. So I do worry about that, and I think it's our responsibility as coaches, and our guards, to help those other [players] help us.

"We have to do that to take some of the pressure off Kevin."

League opponents know far more about league personnel than nonconference opponents. Duquesne, coached by former Virginia Tech guard Ron Everhart, would be expected to defensively target Anderson tomorrow, and Saint Louis likely will do the same when the Spiders play there Saturday. If passing more and scoring less makes sense in response to defensive attention, Anderson says he has no objection.

"As long as we keep winning, whatever I have to do to win, I'll be willing to do," he said.

Spiders facing quick turnaround against Bucknell

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 2, 2010

Nothing screams "Trap game!" like the University of Richmond's visit to Bucknell today.

The Spiders lost 74-68 in overtime at Wake Forest on Thursday night and play this afternoon at 2 against the Bison. UR (10-4) goes from its only regular-season date vs. an ACC opponent, which it met in front of 10,210 at Joel Coliseum and a national TV audience (ESPNU), to a 4,000-seat Patriot League arena that probably will be about one-third full.

And next for Richmond is Wednesday's Atlantic 10 Conference opener at Duquesne.

"It's not set up perfectly, but these are the kinds of things you go through during a season," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "We've tried to bill it to our guys as another challenge, another thing we have to look forward to overcoming."

Bucknell (5-9) is forecast as the third-place finisher in the Patriot League behind Holy Cross and Lehigh. It was 7-23 last season. The Spiders are clearly the favorites, but they played 45 minutes Thursday night in a highly physical game in which 61 free throws were attempted and three UR players fouled out.

"It's definitely going to be a challenge," Richmond guard Kevin Anderson, who scored a career-high 31 points at Wake Forest, said of today's game. "But I'm sure we're going to get it together, get a players' meeting, be ready to play, and take care of business."

Bucknell fell at the Robins Center 79-57 last season.

The Spiders took a charter flight late Thursday night from Winston-Salem, N.C., to Lewisburg, Pa., and practiced at Bucknell late yesterday.

"We need a big win to get the momentum going again for the conference," Spiders' forward Ryan Butler said. "So I think we'll be prepared to play."

Thursday, Richmond completed its five games vs. BCS schools, beating Mississippi State, Missouri and Florida on neutral courts, and losing at South Carolina and Wake Forest.

"We've played very well against all of these big-time teams," Mooney said. "We feel confident that we can play with anybody."

Wake Forest outlasts UR in overtime

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
January 1, 2010

WINSTON-SALEM. N.C. -- The University of Richmond experienced difficult dealing with Wake Forest's size and depth inside. Outside, the Spiders dominated, with guard Kevin Anderson scoring a career-high 31 points.

Wake beat up UR on the offensive glass and scored 29 points from the free-throw line to prevail 74-68 in overtime last night.

One huge shot also had a major impact on Richmond's 17th straight loss to Wake Forest, picked to finish sixth in the ACC.

With Wake ahead 68-66, Demon Deacons' freshman forward Ari Stewart hit a 3-pointer from the top of the key with two Spiders running at him at :19 in overtime and with a few seconds on the shot clock. Stewart was zip for 4 from 3-point distance before delivering the dagger that sent a crowd of 10,210 into early-celebration mode on New Year's Eve.

"It's tough to come away with this loss because we felt we should have won," said Anderson, who UR coach Chris Mooney recognized after the game as "one of the best guards in the country."

Anderson, a 6-0 junior, hit 12 of 21 attempts, had three steals, and made a pair of 3-pointers. He also was UR's primary ballhandler. Demon Deacons coach Dino Gaudio seemed baffled by what to do with Anderson.

Wake switched 6-4 L.D. Williams, one of the ACC's finest defenders, onto Ander-son early in the first half. Didn't help much.

"It seems like teams try to prepare for [Anderson] and nothing really works," said Spiders' forward Ryan Butler. "He finds a way to score. He just makes us go, and he's been doing that all year."

UR hit four of its first eight attempts from 3-point range to go ahead 20-12, and led 27-19 with 7 minutes left in the first half. But the Spiders lost their touch from 3-point distance as the evening developed.

Winning when shooting poorly from the perimeter "is always going to be difficult when you're playing a team of this caliber," Mooney said. But the overall effort was so strong that Mooney added "I couldn't be prouder of my team even if we had won the game."

The Spiders (10-4) were outrebounded by 16, and outscored at the free-throw line 29-14. Richmond converted more 2-point field goals and 3-point baskets, but didn't have interior defensive remedies for Wake's big bodies. Three Spiders --6-9 Darrius Garrett, 6-10 Justin Harper, and 6-5 Kevin Smith -- fouled out trying to keep Wake Forest (10-2) away from the basket.

"They are so big and so physical, that the foul shots that they shot came as a result of the second shots, I think," Mooney. "I think we played great defense tonight. I don't think it was necessarily poor defense that led us to fouling guys."

The Deacons used 7-0, 245 Chas McFarland (13 points, 12 rebounds), 6-11, 250-pound David Weaver, and 6-11, 245-pound Tony Woods, and also hit UR with 6-9, 215-pound Al-Farouq Aminu (16 points, 8 rebounds), who scored half of Wake's 12 OT points.

"It's hard when they keep bringing in guys so big," said Butler. "But I thought we battled."

This began a four-game road swing for the Spiders. Richmond plays at Bucknell tomorrow afternoon, then tips off its Atlantic 10 Conference season Wednesday at Duquesne and follows that with a weekend game at Saint Louis.

Veteran guards help UR replace panic with poise

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
December 31, 2009

UNC Wilmington led 59-51 at the University of Richmond with about three minutes left Monday night. Here's what may have happened in previous seasons.

"I take some bad 3s. We don't get the stops and rebounds. We're arguing with each other in the huddle," said UR senior guard David Gonzalvez.

In Monday's challenging situation, Spiders' full-court pressure forced a turnover, then Richmond made steals on the three subsequent Seahawks' possessions (two by Gonzalvez). UR went to the basket, and as a result, in the last 2:53 made nine trips to the free-throw line (all by Gonzalvez and Kevin Anderson, Richmond's other starting guard). The Spiders won 66-64.

"Mainly it's on me and Dave, the guards," Anderson said. "If we panic, then the rest of the team is panicked. We've got to stay calm."

He then recalled similar late-game situations during the past two seasons, and said, "We panicked a lot."

For the most part, panic has been replaced by poise. Richmond (10-3), going back to March's College Basketball Invitational, is 7-1 in games decided by seven or fewer points (5-1 this season). Last season through the Atlantic 10 Conference tournament, the Spiders were 5-9 in games decided by seven or fewer points.

"Losing those games last year helps us this year," Gonzalvez said.

In the estimation of UR coach Chris Mooney, the difference is the "seasoning" of the 6-4 Gonzalvez and Anderson, a 6-0 junior. "They infuse the other guys with confidence and energy down the stretch," said Mooney, whose team plays at Wake Forest (9-2) tonight on ESPNU.

Said Gonzalvez, speaking of Anderson: "We've been playing together three years now. We've been in the close ones. We lost the close ones. We've battled together in practice. We know what it takes to win. We both believe in each other. We both encourage each other to be aggressive all the time."

Anderson (17.1 ppg) and Gonzalvez (14.1 ppg) have carried a team that still searches for consistency from interior players. Tonight wouldn't appear to be the time Richmond gets rolling inside. Dan Geriot, a 6-9 junior, has a shoulder problem (he is probable for the Wake Forest game) and the Deacons had a school-record 16 blocks in a 75-60 win over UNC Greensboro Monday night.

Garrett’s air time enhances UR’s interior defense

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
December 28, 2009

Conditioning was the first order of business Saturday night when the University of Richmond's basketball players returned to practice following a three-day holiday break.

The Spiders repeatedly ran weaves, passing the ball three times to the usual conclusion: a lay-up. Darrius Garrett finished differently, with authority, a steady stream of dunks that seemed effortless.

Division I teams commonly have a guy or two with eye-catching lift-off. But not many of them transfer the quick-leaping ability to the defensive end as Garrett does.

The 6-9 sophomore leads UR (9-3) with 16 blocks, though he averages only about 10 minutes. No other Spider has more than eight blocks.

"He jumps vertically without any space incredibly well," Richmond coach Chris Mooney said of Garrett, who lives in Raleigh, N.C. "Without any room, he can just kind of catapult himself into the air."

Garrett's timing then comes into play. He says he gets defensive help on his man from teammates in the Spiders' match-up. That enables him to slip over to drivers and other interior shooters. Most of Garrett's rejections are performed on players he isn't covering.

Games often change following Garrett's entry, and not just on Richmond's defensive end.

"The blocks he has just energize you a little bit, so that really helps," said Mooney, whose team faces UNC Wilmington (4-6) tonight at the Robins Center.

The Garrett Effect occurred last Tuesday against UNC Greensboro, which Richmond beat 89-63. Garrett blocked three shots in 10 minutes. UR surged when he was involved.

"I think [opponents] become more tentative. They kind of notice me down there," said Garrett, a 210-pounder. "It alters their shots. Even if I don't get a block, sometimes I may change their shots, make it a more difficult layup."

Garrett, who emerged late last season as a Spiders' factor, is one of several reserves who have made UR more difficult to handle. Dan Geriot, a 6-9 junior and former starter, has come off the bench with quality results in the past two games. Francis-Cedric Martel, a 6-6 sophomore, and 6-5 junior Kevin Smith are other non-starters contributing productive minutes, particularly as defenders.

Richmond's bench was responsible for 31 points in the win over UNCG. Garrett, who shot only once, didn't score. But his impact -- he contributed five rebounds and a steal in addition to his three blocks -- was obvious.

"The more and more time he can get himself on the floor, the more and more we'll see," Mooney said.

9-3 run tough, but OK for UR

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
December 26, 2009

The University of Richmond's ambitious 2009-10 basketball schedule was released in August, and Jamal Brunt, the Spiders' assistant who played a role in formulating it, quipped, "Some coaches might say you never want to schedule yourself out of a job."

UR looked as if it might have over-scheduled and agreed to too many games against top-level competition outside its 16 Atlantic 10 Conference obligations. But the Spiders went on a three-day holiday break satisfied that they had achieved what they wanted so far with the schedule that could be the toughest in program history. UR (9-3) is in the mix for an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament, which could also be reached by winning the A-10 title.

"We have put ourselves in a position where we can just move forward. We don't have to regret any games in the past," said Richmond coach Chris Mooney. "If we want to accomplish some of the things we've talked about, we're in position right now."

The Spiders haven't qualified for the NCAAs since 2004.

Of 347 Division I teams, UR ranks in the 30s or low 40s, according to respected rating systems. The Spiders have been recognized in the AP poll, among others receiving votes outside of the Top 25. Their status rose based on the six-game stretch that started Nov. 27 and concluded Dec. 19. UR went 4-2 playing Mississippi State (W) and Missouri (W) in the South Padre Island Invitational, Old Dominion (W), VCU (L), South Carolina (L) and Florida (W). Only the ODU game took place at the Robins Center.

Richmond's other loss came at William and Mary (8-2), the state's biggest surprise so far.

"There are some big wins in there. Obviously South Padre was great, and Florida," said Spiders center Dan Geriot. "But there's still some work to do. We dropped a couple that we think we're better than."

UR has three non-league games UNC Wilmington (4-6) Monday night at the Robins Center, at Wake Forest on New Year's Eve, and at Bucknell Jan. 2 before beginning its A-10 schedule.

The Spiders' success so far is linked to a pair of Ds: depth and defense. Ten Spiders average eight or more minutes. "They're getting something from every position and the bench," said UNC Greensboro coach Mike Dement, whose team was defeated 89-63 by Richmond Tuesday.

UR is allowing an average of 60.2 points, and opponents have shot 37.8 percent. Dement noted that the Spiders' match-up defense makes interior scoring very difficult.

"We think it's mostly our defense that has won us these games, and that has lost [three]," said Geriot, a fourth-year junior. "So, that's different than when I first got here. It was more offensively driven. The mentality was more offensive. From player one to player 16, it was 'Let's score.'

"Now, scoring just kind of comes second nature. We realize to be good, and to even be great, we have to play defense. We've shown some glimpses of that, I think, in the wins."

No holiday homecoming for UR's Australian Duinker

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
December 25, 2009

The University of Richmond's basketball players, with one exception, departed for home after Tuesday's noon game against UNC Greensboro. They get a three-day break before resuming practice.

Some drove. Some flew. One wasn't in a rush to leave the Robins Center following the Spiders' 89-63 win.

Josh Duinker, a 6-11 sophomore, lives in Sydney, Australia. Getting home for the holidays isn't an option.

"It's all good. I'm still going to enjoy Christmastime," Duinker said.

He'll spend the break with a friend who lives in Chesapeake. Duinker (pronounced Dunker) could have accompanied one of three Spiders' players who are Richmond-area residents -- Ryan Butler, Justin Harper and Darien Brothers -- or gone out of town with another teammate. But part of the break's mental value is separation from hoops and those with whom you interact daily.

Duinker, naturally, would prefer to be home with family and his Australian friends. This is, after all, summertime in Sydney, and the beach is 20 minutes from his front door. But he has gotten used to not being able to body-board in December, as he was accustomed. Duinker arrived at UR in January 2008. Since then, he has returned to Sydney once, for three weeks.

"Obviously I miss home, but then again, I love Richmond," Duinker said. "Coming here, I knew I wasn't going to be home very often. It's just something I can't make happen this time of year."

Even if Duinker only wanted to get home long enough to say "Ho! Ho! Ho!" and check his stocking before heading back to the airport, he might not have returned to Richmond in time for tomorrow's evening practice.

"The whole trip [one way] is about 24 hours," said Duinker. "The first time I flew here, it took 30 hours. I stopped in Tahiti, then L.A., then Minneapolis, then Richmond."

Mailing presents from Sydney to Richmond and from Richmond to Sydney is expensive, so his exchange of gifts will be postponed for several months. Just keeping in touch with family is challenging because of the 14-hour time difference. When Duinker is free to do so, and his family members are also on line, he participates in video chats.

Duinker showed occasional signs last season of being a Spider who could become very productive. He was limited in the lane because he weighed only 210 pounds. Since, Duinker gained 20 pounds through weight-lifting. He seems a bit more comfortable and assertive on the court this season.

Duinker has started the past two games for UR (9-3), which plays UNC Wilmington (4-6) at the Robins Center Monday night. He averages about nine minutes, three points and 1.5 rebounds. Spiders' coach Chris Mooney loves Duinker's potential, and recognizes improvement, hence his increased involvement. Duinker continues to acclimate to the physical nature of Division I basketball, and says he likes being in Richmond nearly full-time because that allows him to work out at UR and build his body.

"I'm so far away from home, there's really no point in missing it, thinking about it much, because I know I'm not going back until next summer," Duinker said.

10 blocks, 15 steals fuel UR romp

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
December 23, 2009

Kevin Anderson, the University of Richmond's 6-0 junior guard, blocked a shot 10 seconds into yesterday's matinee against UNC Greensboro. Anderson collected two more blocks, had four steals and hit a pair of 3-pointers. The manner in which he contributed typified the Spiders' overall effort in an 89-63 win before 3,127 at the Robins Center.

UR (9-3) finished with season highs of 10 blocks (three shy of the school record) and 15 steals (five shy of the school record) in overpowering the Spartans (2-8), members of the Southern Conference. Richmond also hit 11 3-pointers, tying its season high.

"It helps when you make shots," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "And our defensive pressure, I thought that was the biggest thing. To have 15 steals and 10 blocks in the same game, they're really unusual stats."

The Spiders, who trailed 6-0 after missing their first five attempts, took control of this one the same way they have in previous victories: by turning up the defensive pressure in half-court sets and in the open court. Richmond's defensive activity led UNCG coach Mike Dement to conclude his players exhibited "loose hands."

The Spartans committed 10 turnovers in each half. When UNCG took the ball to the basket, their shots were repeatedly rejected. Darrius Garrett, UR's 6-9 sophomore reserve, had three blocks in 10 minutes. He leads Richmond this season with 16 blocks, though he averages only 10 minutes.

"It's kind of like a mindset and kind of a confidence I go into a game with," Garrett said. "It's also my teammates, they help me a lot with help defense so I can play off my man a little bit and help others.

"And it's also a little bit of luck. Once I get one block, the next few blocks just come."

Senior guard David Gonzalvez led UR with 25 points. He chipped defensively too, with three steals. The three 3-pointers he sank came at times when the Spartans appeared to be stabilizing.

"Gonzalvez, he knocks it down, he knocks it down, he knocks it down," said Dement. "Each time we left one of their guys open, they seemed to hit the three. Each time we made a little bit of a run, they came back and hit the three."

Dan Geriot, the 6-9 Spiders center who missed last season with a knee injury and started slowly this season, played more confidently and more composed for the second consecutive game. Geriot hit 4 of 5 shots and scored nine points in Saturday's 56-53 win over Florida. He had 13 on 4-of-9 shooting yesterday against the smallish Spartans. He came off the bench in both games.

"The pressure is off a little bit. It's more mental than anything," said Geriot of the new role he prefers. "I'm able to just relax and play. There's no forcing anything, I feel like. I think against Florida, I tried not to force anything and I was able to let the game come to me. Same thing here [yesterday].

"I'm playing better, so I hope this continues."

NEXT: The Spiders take a six-day break from game competition. They play again vs. UNC Wilmington on Monday night at the Robins Center. Then, UR doesn't play at home again until Jan. 13.

Spiders mix unusual defense with full effort in upset

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
December 21, 2009

Being unusual worked for the University of Richmond again Saturday night.

The Spiders played their match-up zone, not a common defense, and mixed in some 1-3-1 zone, also uncommon. Florida, ranked 13th, was averaging 75.4 points, but couldn't maintain offensive continuity against Richmond, which pulled off a 56-53 upset in the Orange Bowl Classic in Sunrise, Fla.

"When we're playing great defense, like we were [Saturday] night, we're tough," UR guard Kevin Anderson said.

Intense defense in those uncommon packages also pushed the Spiders (8-3) to wins over Mississippi State (63-62), Missouri (59-52), and Old Dominion (67-60). In each of those games, UR's match-up and occasional 1-3-1 setup caused offensive breakdowns.

"I'm not sure if they're confused," Anderson said of Richmond's opponents. "Because they've attacked it before and won like that."

VCU scored 45 second-half points in a 65-57 win over UR two Saturdays ago, then South Carolina scored 52 in the second half during a 76-58 win over the visiting Spiders last Wednesday. Against Florida, "We knew that we had to play a complete game," Anderson said.

The Gators led 32-19 late in the first half, and 32-24 at the break. Then UR's defense cut off inside opportunities and Florida floundered. The Gators shot 25.9 percent in the second half, during which they missed 8 of 9 from 3-point distance.

UR guard David Gonzalvez hit a 25-footer when the score was tied at 49 with 1:34 left, and Anderson (16.5 ppg) converted four of five free throws in the last 23.5 seconds to secure Richmond's third win against a ranked team in three years. UR beat No. 16 Dayton two years ago, and No. 17 Xavier last season.

The Spiders play UNC Greensboro (2-7) tomorrow at noon at the Robins Center. Then it's all about rest for Anderson during a six-day holiday break from game competition. He played 40 minutes at VCU, 40 at South Carolina, and 39 vs. Florida.

"My legs feel fine," he said yesterday. "But it will be good to get off my feet for a while."

Spiders Drop No. 13 Florida

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
December 20, 2009

SUNRISE, Fla. -- The University of Richmond's matchup defense and 3-point shooting frustrated 13th-ranked Florida last night in the Orange Bowl Classic at the BankAtlantic Center, and the Spiders sprung the upset 56-53.

Guard Kevin Anderson missed the front end of a one-and-one with 23.5 seconds left, then hit both ends with 5.4 seconds left to give UR a 54-50 lead. UF's Erving Walker hit a 3-pointer with 1 second left, and Anderson answered with two more free throws.

Richmond (8-3) topped a ranked team two seasons ago (No. 16 Dayton), and last season (No. 17 Xavier).

The Gators (8-2), down 52-50, missed a 3-pointer at :09, then missed a follow. Anderson made a steal with 5.4 seconds left.

The Spiders trailed by 13 (32-19) with 2:41 left in the first half, but gained momentum with its unusual defense and David Gonzalvez 3-pointers. During the next 11 minutes, UR outscored UF 27-5, with 18 of those UR points coming on 3-pointers. Richmond led 46-37 with 11 minutes left.

But the Spiders on their next nine possessions missed seven shots and turned it over twice. Florida cut the lead to 47-46 with 4:23 left, tied it at 48 with 3 minutes to play, and took a one-point lead with 2:33 remaining.

Gonzalvez hit a 25-footer to put UR ahead 52-49 with 1:34 left.

Richmond changed its starting lineup for the first time this season. Josh Duinker, a 6-11 sophomore from Australia, started in place of 6-9 redshirt junior Dan Geriot, who has struggled after missing last season due to a knee injury (torn anterior cruciate ligament). Geriot, who led the Spiders in scoring (14.3 ppg) and rebounding (5.5 rpg) two years ago, this season was averaging 8.5 points and 6.0 rebounds. He was shooting 37.3 percent, and had missed 12 of 14 attempts from 3-point distance.

"The idea behind it was nothing punitive for Dan. I think that Josh has been playing well," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "Dan's a very cerebral player, very bright, very thorough in his analysis of the game. That hurts a player sometimes."

Mooney added that he wanted Geriot to "just go out and compete, just go out and try to get every loose ball and every rebound."

Geriot provided a lift off the bench, scoring eight first-half points on two in-the-paint moves and two jumpers. Increased interior scoring was a priority for UR, which had been relying heavily on guards Kevin Anderson (16.8 ppg) and Gonzalvez (13.0 ppg). Heading into this game, Richmond scored fewer than 60 points in its last two games, and in three of its last four.

Florida, getting more interior opportunities, led by 13 with 2:41 left in the first half. But the Spiders cut that deficit to 32-24 at halftime.

This was Richmond's third and final game of the regular season vs. Southeastern Conference teams. The Spiders handled Mississippi State in the semifinals of the South Padre Island Invitational, whose title UR captured. Richmond fell at South Carolina 76-58 Wednesday.

Florida hadn't played since suffering its first loss, 85-73 to Syracuse, 10 days ago.

Miami defeated Florida Atlantic in the first game of the 16th annual Orange Bowl Classic, a double-header played in the home of the NHL Florida Panthers.

NEXT: The Spiders face UNC Greensboro Tuesday at the Robins Center at noon. The unusual starting time was arranged to allow players from both teams to get home a bit earlier for holiday break.

UR’s Geriot looking to relocate groove

By John O’Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Dec. 19, 2009

RICHMOND, Va. -- In the South Padre Island Invitational last month, Dan Geriot lunged for a loose ball and his head hit an opponent's knee. Blood dripped onto the court from a cut near Geriot's eye. Bandaged, he returned to the game a few minutes later.

That's the season form so far for the University of Richmond's redshirt junior. It's been a rough ride, but Geriot carries on.

The 6-9 center led UR in scoring (14.3 ppg) and rebounding (5.5 rpg) as a sophomore, then missed last season with a right knee injury (torn anterior cruciate ligament) that required surgery.

He was medically cleared for all basketball activity in July, about a year after he was hurt during a summer-league game in Philadelphia. Offensively, the resident of Springfield, Pa., continues to seek his old self.

Geriot (8.5 ppg, 6.0 rpg) is shooting 37.3 percent, and hasn't exhibited the same quickness on around-the-hoop moves that were effective two seasons ago. Additionally, Geriot has missed 12 of 14 shots from 3-point distance. He made 40 percent from beyond the arc as a sophomore. Geriot hasn't blocked a shot in UR's 10 games.

UR coach Chris Mooney says that Geriot is healthy. He hasn't been withheld from practice time because of the knee.

"I don't think it's is an issue at all," Mooney said. Nor does Mooney believe the 20 pounds the 255-pound Geriot gained through weight-lifting during the redshirt year is a factor.

"I think he's moving OK. I think he's doing fine. He's playing hard. He's defending well," said Mooney, whose Spiders (7-3) meet 13th-ranked Florida (8-1) this evening in the Orange Bowl Classic in Sunrise, Fla. "He just hasn't made as many shots as he would like, or we would like. I think that's all it is. I don't think it's any more than that."

After a year away from competition, Geriot may just be working off rust, Mooney suggested. Geriot has been trying to do so against the demanding list of opponents Richmond faced (William and Mary, Mississippi State, Missouri, Old Dominion, VCU, South Carolina). Many of those teams feature athletic big men, and the Spiders will deal with more tonight. Three Florida starters are 6-8 or taller.

"That's probably not the easiest way to return from a year off," Mooney said of UR's early-season schedule. "I think we're going to look back and say, '[Geriot] had a great year.' I think certainly anybody would take a little bit of time coming back from a year off."

The Spiders are hoping for increased offensive production inside against Florida. Through the first month of the season they've relied heavily on guards Kevin Anderson (16.8 ppg) and David Gonzalvez (13.0 ppg). Such was also the case last season when Geriot was unavailable.

Mooney said Richmond's staff might call for more plays that set up interior players as a way to prime the pump.

"Also, sometimes you manufacture on your own with offensive rebounds and tip-ins, by the way you scrap on a play that's not perfectly executed," Mooney said.

In Year 5, Mooney has Richmond dreaming of a return to NCAAs

By Andy Glockner
SI.com
Dec. 14, 2009

In September 2007, while discussing his surprising decision two years earlier to leave nouveau chic Air Force after just one season to take over at Atlantic 10 also-ran Richmond, Chris Mooney let slip that he had always considered coaching the Spiders "his dream job."

After hearing that, and confirming that the school had not moved 150 miles or so southwest to either Durham or Chapel Hill, N.C., the immediate follow-up question was, "Why?"

Richmond, despite a solid academic reputation and relative proximity to multiple hoops hotbeds, has been mostly irrelevant nationally since Dick Tarrant's 1990-91 Spiders became the first No. 15 seed to knock off a No. 2 in the NCAA tournament. The program's giant-killer reputation forged in the '80s under Tarrant through NCAA tourney wins over Charles Barkley's Auburn squad and defending national champion Indiana quickly gave way to almost two decades in which the Spiders notched only one tournament win in 1998 (albeit as a 14 seed over third-seeded South Carolina), when Richmond was still in the Colonial Athletic Association.

Also, even with the flagship programs in Virginia struggling in recent years, the state is loaded with strong mid-major programs like Old Dominion, VCU and George Mason. Heck, even Hampton and leg-pumping coach Steve Merfeld had 15 seconds of fame since the last time Richmond resonated.

The Spiders' relative anonymity might not last much longer. Now in his fifth season in charge, Mooney's recruiting has crafted a roster full of talent and experience, and Richmond was picked to finish third in the rugged A-10. Off to a 7-2 start (with a South Padre Island sweep of Mississippi State and Missouri, and a win over CAA favorite Old Dominion) that has seen Richmond receive votes in both top 25 polls, Mooney's dream is starting to mesh with reality.

"[At the beginning], you're always hammering home little pieces of the vision," Mooney said. "It all runs together because you're doing it every single day. You're worried about wins and losses, but you're striving toward the big picture, and the big picture means creating this program that you have in your mind and you're trying to change the behavior of anything that conflicts with that vision.

"Now we have four classes of good guys ... and we're more worried about [things like] how our first home stand sets up and what kind of signature wins we can get -- more tangible things instead of the intangible things we've been hammering home for so long. We're able to do that because we have the talent now."

In truth, this breakout season may be a year late. The Spiders had some under-the-radar buzz last fall before center Dan Geriot (pronounced jeh-ROH), who averaged 14.3 points and 5.5 rebounds per game as a sophomore, tore up a knee in the preseason and was lost for the year. Without its top low-post option and defensive anchor, Richmond became guard-wacky, leaning heavily on the shooting arms of then-junior David Gonzalvez and sophomore Kevin Anderson, and getting hurt on the glass.

While Richmond did make the postseason CBI for a second straight year, it was the late-season practices with Geriot as glorified scout team member that gave the Spiders a taste of what could be.

"I think we missed Dan's leadership out there on the floor [last season], Gonzalvez said. "The center is such a key part of our offense, we really need the center to be talking and get things moving. Then he was out there in practice dominating and we wanted him back [immediately], but he wasn't ready to go."

Spiders handle Monarchs 67-60

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Dec. 3, 2009

David Gonzalvez cut inside for a three-point play. Ryan Butler hit a 20-footer. Dan Geriot swished a 10-footer. Justin Harper had a tip-in before Butler struck again from 3-point distance.

Those five possessions early in the second half greased the University of Richmond's squeaky offense, and the Spiders went on to a 67-60 win over Old Dominion last night before 4,130 at the Robins Center.

Richmond's 7-1 record ties for the second-best Spiders' start since 1954. UR coach Chris Mooney labeled this a "gutsy win," because of the offensive resurrection that buried the Monarchs (4-3), favorites in the Colonial Athletic Association.

UR scored 22 points in the first half, 45 in the second.

"We didn't come out focused," said Spiders guard Kevin Anderson.

Before halftime, Richmond lacked movement on offense, blocked out with minimal conviction, and missed five of seven 3-point tries.

"Me, I know personally I was just throwing it to the wing and standing up top," Anderson said.

Greater energy meant improved scoring for UR, which placed all five starters in double-figures. Harper, 6-10, scored 14 by making 10 of 12 shots (4 of 6 from the field, 6 of 6 from the free throw line). Guards Gonzalvez and Anderson, and forward Butler (three 3-pointers) each scored 13 for the Spiders.

They solved the 3-2 zone that slowed them in the first half. The Spiders went 10 minutes between field goals, missing all nine shots and committing four turnovers. ODU went ahead 26-15.

Said Mooney: "We're dependent on our guards, and so that's a little bit easier against a man-to-man defense."

ODU led 31-22 at halftime.

"We had played real good basketball and were in position to do some real good things," said Monarchs coach Blaine Taylor, whose team has lost three consecutive.

"The tables turned early in the second half. They started making some shots, the foul count got out of whack, and we're trying to make baskets and they've got a parade to the free throw line."

As the Spiders went from nine down at halftime to 12 ahead with six minutes left, they shot 12 free throws and made 11. During that stretch, ODU shot two free throws. The Monarchs seemed to pick up most of those fouls because they were a step slow as the Spiders accelerated their cuts and drives.

A veteran team knew how to get itself out of a funk, Mooney suggested.

"This time of year, everybody is kind of trying to find themselves," Taylor said. "They're a team that is very experienced, and not only experienced in the fact that it's juniors and seniors, but it's juniors and seniors who have been playing since their freshman year, basically, every night out. And I think you can see that."

Mostly, Richmond's growth since last season is seen inside. Essentially the same Monarchs' team outrebounded UR 39-25 in a 65-62 ODU win early last December. This time, Richmond was outrebounded by four, and beat the Monarchs on the glass in the second half.

"That's a great win because I think that's an NCAA team," Mooney said of the Monarchs.

NEXT: The Spiders are off until a week from Saturday, when they play at VCU.

Spiders try to build on strong start, AP poll recognition

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Dec. 1, 2009

They left Virginia last Wednesday an unremarkable 4-1 and came back 6-1 stars-on-the-rise, among "others receiving votes" in the latest Associated Press poll.

The University of Richmond Spiders began the season by handling Lehigh, VMI, Chattanooga and Longwood at the Robins Center, and falling at William and Mary. Last weekend, they won the South Padre Island (Texas) Invitational by knocking off Mississippi State and Missouri on back-to-back nights.

"I think it solidifies things for us in our minds because we all talked about how good we were going to be this year, but then winning those games, it kind of proved to us that 'OK, we are good,'" said senior guard David Gonzalvez. "Now, we just have to handle business every day."

UR was last mentioned in the AP poll in late January 1986. The Spiders started that season 16-1, including wins over Providence, Wake Forest, Stanford and Virginia, and were ranked No.20. UR lost two consecutive (Old Dominion, Virginia Tech) after appearing in one poll.

Tonight, CAA favorite ODU (4-2) visits Richmond, another opportunity for the Spiders to show they could be in for a special season, primarily because of these two factors:

Quality guards. Junior Kevin Anderson, a three-year starter, and Gonzalvez, a four-year starter, "are two of the very best guards in the A-10 [Conference], if not the country," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "They've been in a ton of college basketball games and been in a ton of situations. Their decision-making, their understanding of the game, their defense, all of those things have been very, very good."

Anderson was named tournament MVP, and Gonzalvez also made the all-tournament team after the Spiders came from five down with two minutes remaining to beat Mississippi State 63-62, and held off Missouri's charge 59-52 in the title game. The Tigers rallied from a nine-point deficit in the second half, taking the lead with 4:30 left.

Said Gonzalvez: "We showed toughness late in those games, which is something that hasn't been consistent for us [in past years]."

Experience, physical maturity. Fourth-year junior Dan Geriot (6-9, 260 pounds) is back after missing last season because of a knee injury. Junior Justin Harper (6-10, 225) has in spurts asserted himself, as have a pair of sophomore reserves, Josh Duinker (6-11, 230) and Darrius Garrett (6-9, 210).

"All of the hard work they have done in the weight room has really paid off," Gonzalvez said.

In the past several seasons, the Spiders regularly collected fewer rebounds and blocked shots, and attempted fewer free throws than their opponents. Through seven games, UR is ahead in each of those categories.

"Guys are out there and can play defense better without fouling," Mooney said. "We have guys out there who are more aggressive offensively. It also speaks to our depth and athleticism."

Men’s basketball: Gonzalvez, Anderson lead Spiders to tourney title

By John O’Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Nov. 29, 2009

No matter what else happens this season, the University of Richmond can claim a basketball championship.

The Spiders beat Missouri 59-52 last night in the final of the South Padre Island Invitational, overcoming foul trouble and the Tigers' constant defensive pressure. This victory mirrored UR's 63-62 win over Mississippi State in Friday's semifinals. Richmond gained a lead, withstood an opponent's comeback, and finished strong behind the ball-handling of junior guard Kevin Anderson, who scored 14 points and was named tournament MVP.

Spiders guard David Gonzalvez and forward Ryan Butler were also named to the all-tournament team. "In the second half, it was so close," said Gonzalvez, who scored a game-high 18 points. "So, in that time, you just want to be aggressive."

Richmond (6-1) outscored Missouri 13-4 in the last four minutes, with Anderson primarily dealing with the Tigers' defensive heat. Gonzalvez scored seven of those 13 points.

"You want to have the ball in the hands of the right guys at the end of the game," said Gonzalvez. "And KA is Mr. Clutch for us . . . That left a lot of other guys open because they were so focused on him."

The Tigers (4-1), picked to finish seventh in the Big 12 Conference, defeated Old Dominion 66-61 here Friday night and are coming off a season in which they won a school-record 31 games.

"This is a tournament that attracts teams from some of the best conferences in the country, and for us to come out as champions, to have won back-to-back nights over two [quality] teams, is really outstanding," said UR coach Chris Mooney.

Richmond (6-1) turned it over 14 times, a low number given the full-court defense applied by Missouri, which was causing an average of 25 turnovers. The Spiders' offensive discipline and match-up defense allowed them to take a nine-point lead early in the second half. But Missouri began wearing down UR with the defense that makes the Tigers tick. Missouri went ahead 45-44 with 5:40 left. Friday, Mississippi State rallied to lead the Spiders by five with two minutes remaining.

In both games, Richmond relied on the ball-handling of Anderson as much as possible, and he helped guide the Spiders through the last few minutes.

UR led 54-52 with 8 seconds left. The Spiders inbounded to Gonzalvez, who was intentionally fouled while sinking a layup. He converted both free throws. Center Dan Geriot added a free throw with 2 seconds left.

"We lost so many close games last year and the year before and we really work on that in practice, we really work on situations," Gonzalvez said. "At the end of the games now, we really try to concentrate on keeping our focus."

Geriot, Butler and forward Justin Harper were in foul trouble for much of the game. Missouri's depth is its strength, but Richmond combated that with bench players who were instrumental in UR maintaining composure down the stretch.

"One of things we like very much about our team is we feel that we're deep," Mooney said. "I think that depth showed for us tonight. Everybody played very, very well who went into the game."

Anderson Heroics Lead Spiders Past Mississippi State

By John O'Connor
Richmond Time-Dispatch
Nov. 28, 2009

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Texas -- The University of Richmond's Kevin Anderson didn't make a splash until the last 1:50. Then he dominated.

The junior guard hit a jumper, made a steal that resulted in an easy hoop, then dropped a 17-footer from the left wing with 9.8 seconds left that gave Richmond a 63-62 win over Mississippi State last night in the South Padre Island Invitational.

"When we put together this schedule, we were excited about some of the teams we'd have an opportunity to play," said UR coach Chris Mooney. "Mississippi State was certainly the first one we were looking forward to playing. This is a great win."

In the tournament final tonight at 8, the Spiders face either Old Dominion (4-0) or Missouri (3-0). They met later last night. The final will be televised by Fox College Sports.

Richmond (5-1) got a career-high 19 points from senior forward Ryan Butler, who Mooney said "had the best game of his career. I thought he was terrific." UR started hot from 3-point range and took a 21-7 lead over the Bulldogs (3-2), picked to win the SEC West and the defending SEC champions. MSU came back and led 62-57 with two minutes remaining. That's when Anderson delivered UR's counter punch.

"He is so poised when he plays, I think that really has an effect on everybody on the floor," Mooney said.

MSU, up 62-61, missed a pair of free throws with 28.6 seconds left. Anderson came off a screen, was left alone and hit the game-winner. The Bulldogs missed a 3-point try at :03.

"I was actually looking for Dan [Geriot] on the roll or Butler on the kick-out," Anderson said of the decisive jumper.

But he noticed 6-9 Bulldog Jarvis Varnado was backing off on the play, and Anderson pulled the trigger.

"No question that's the guy we want to have the ball in his hands late in the game," Butler said of Anderson (12 points), who was averaging 19.8 points. "He came through big for us again."

Mississippi State was ranked No.18 in preseason. The Bulldogs, however, lost their opener 88-74 at home to Rider. They return five starters from a 23-13 team that won last season's SEC championship.

Richmond went ahead 21-7 with five 3-pointers and the match-up defense that confused the Bulldogs, who missed 10 of their first 12 shots.

"We wanted to make it hard for them from the beginning, and I think that's what we did," Butler said.

Offensive rebounding and 3-pointers got MSU back in contention. The Bulldogs took their first lead with 7:36 left. But Butler helped UR stay in it, and Anderson emerged when required.

"I thought when we really needed to, our defense really stepped up and was good," Mooney said. "We played very poised down the stretch and were able to make some big plays down the stretch, especially Kevin Anderson."

The Spiders defeated Chattanooga and Longwood at the Robins Center in their first two games in the fifth annual South Padre Island Invitational.

UR crushes Chattanooga

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Nov. 23, 2009

The newest 1,000-point scorer at the University of Richmond may be the club's most entertaining member. Kevin Anderson, a 6-0 junior, became the 38th Spider to surpass the 1,000-point mark with 23 points in last night's 75-49 win over Chattanooga.

Before 3,185 at the Robins Center, Richmond's shortest regular regularly scored in the paint on acrobatic drives and pull-up jumpers, as he has for three seasons. He also hit a couple of 3-pointers.

"He doesn't shoot it great and he makes shots," Mocs coach John Shulman said of the 175-pound Anderson. "You know what those are called? Those are called winners. And that's what he is."

With Anderson and forward Ryan Butler leading the way, the Spiders (3-1) scored the game's first 14 points. They led 30-12 after 13 minutes. Butler made a steal and missed a two-handed dunk attempt later in the first half. He got the rebound and scored.

That's how it went for the Spiders. Even though they didn't shoot well (39.7 percent), they were never threatened. UR coach Chris Mooney applauded his team's consistent defensive effort. The Spiders led at William and Mary 8-0 and 21-8 Thursday, then experienced defensive lapses on the way to a 78-71 loss.

Anderson's quickness again caused problems for UR's opponent. The depleted Mocs couldn't stay with him.

"The offense is easy. I get a lot of screens," Anderson said. "Teams really don't know how to defend it and my teammates do a great job of finding me. [The shots] may look hard, but it's a lot easier because my teammates look for me and they know what I can do."

Chattanooga (2-1)helped UR with ball insecurity. Poor passing, and Spiders in the passing lanes, led to 23 turnovers. The Mocs won the Southern Conference championship last season but lost five starters and are without four players (two starters) now because of injuries and an academic issue.

"At Chattanooga, there are no excuses," Shulman said. "We came up here to win a basketball game. That's what you do at Chattanooga."

Dan Geriot, UR's 6-9 junior center, missed 6 of 7 shots but had 10 rebounds. He went 6 of 8 in Richmond's 103-59 win over VMI, and is 7 for 24 in the Spiders' other three games. Geriot, Richmond's top scorer as a sophomore, sat out last season because of a knee injury.

"I worry about a lot of things. I don't worry about Dan Geriot scoring. I think he's going to be fine," Mooney said. "He's certainly probably pressing a little bit, trying to get last year back, to a certain degree. But I don't worry about that. I think that we want to throw him the ball every time we can on offense, and I think that's going to be effective, and he's going to wind up the season with good numbers and a great year."

Notes: This game was part of the South Padre Island Invitational, as is tomorrow night's UR game vs. Longwood at the Robins Center. Then the Spiders head to South Padre Island, Texas, where they will face Mississippi State on Friday night and Missouri or Old Dominion on Saturday.

UR scores early knockout of VMI

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Nov. 17, 2009

The 3-on-2 drill, usually seen only in practices, made an extended appearance last night at the University of Richmond.

Before 3,802 at the Robins Center, the Spiders sliced through VMI's defensive pressure and finished at the ring in a 103-59 romp. UR (2-0) shot 71.4 percent in the first half (20 of 28), during which it outscored VMI 20-0 in a six-minute segment.

"If we're putting on pressure and doing what we're supposed to do, we're pretty good," said Keydets' coach Duggar Baucom. "But when we're a step slow, we're pretty ugly. And tonight, it got ugly quick."

The Spiders last rang the 100-point bell when beating George Mason 105-91 in 1996. That Mason team emphasized defensive pressure, 3-point-shooting and hyper-tempo, as does VMI (1-1).

"I'm more surprised that we held them under 60 than I am that we scored 100," UR coach Chris Mooney said.
Richmond made a school-record 31 assists. Dan Geriot, 6-9, grabbed 17 rebounds and had 17 points. Justin Harper, 6-10, scored 21. That they are UR's top interior players is relevant, since VMI's tallest starter was 6-6. Geriot and Harper combined to make 16 of 22.
"Coach definitely stressed that to us in practice, saying 'Use our size to our advantage. Pound the ball inside as much as we can,'" Harper said. "That was our main priority."

Richmond outscored VMI 60-14 in the paint. After leading 14-11, the Spiders went on a 26-2 run, and 21 of those UR points came on layups or free throws. UR led 50-29 at halftime.

"We had no answer," Baucom said. The Keydets' starters missed 27 of 33 shots, 15 of 18 from 3-point distance, and had eight rebounds.

The key to handling VMI's defensive heat was "attacking their pressure with our pressure," according to Richmond point guard Kevin Anderson (eight assists). With the ball in his hands, UR was purposeful, quick but not rushed. The Spiders didn't wear down because quality depth appears to be a strength of this team.

"Everyone can fill a role," said Ryan Butler, a fifth-year senior forward.
When these teams met last New Year's Eve in Lexington, the Spiders couldn't hold a seven-point lead in the final three minutes. VMI won 73-70. This season, the Keydets are without 6-4 twins Chavis and Travis Holmes and 6-6 Willie Bell, a trio responsible for a per-game average of 50 points.

To compensate, VMI is trying to accelerate its pace. It led the nation in scoring offense (93.8 ppg), 3-pointers (13.7 per game), and steals (14.2 spg) last season.

"Credit them," Baucom said of the Spiders. "They came out and forced their will upon us."

Spiders pull away from Lehigh with second-half surge

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Nov. 14, 200

The University of Richmond spent most of last night's game vs. Lehigh looking for combinations that could score. The winning combination was Kevin Anderson and the ball.

The 6-0 junior guard scored 14 of his 16 points in the second half as the Spiders overcame 38.6 percent shooting and won 65-53 before 4,139 at the Robins Center.

Also pivotal in UR's season-opening success was a stretch midway through the second half during which the Spiders turned up the intensity of their half-court defense and caused turnovers on seven consecutive Mountain Hawks possessions.

"It was definitely our defense tonight. Our offense struggled," said Anderson. "It was just the first-game jitters. Everybody was just anxious to get out there."

That defensive stand by UR changed the game. The score was tied at 41 with 11:50 left. Lehigh couldn't cleanly handle the ball, and Richmond went up 47-41. Then Anderson used his quickness to get to the basket as the Spiders pulled away.

Lehigh, picked to finish second in the Patriot League, didn't have the physical strength of Richmond, and it showed in the free throw comparison. The Spiders shot 25 foul shots to Lehigh's 13, and UR outscored Lehigh 36-20 in the lanes, though the Mountain Hawks outrebounded UR 40-36.

The game marked the return of Dan Geriot, UR's 6-9 junior center who missed last season because of a knee injury. Geriot, who led the Spiders in scoring (14.3 ppg) and rebounding (5.5 rpg) as a sophomore, looked as if he was re-acclimating to game speed and contact.

"At times, it was a little choppy," Geriot (11 points) said of his performance.

Anderson, a preseason first-team all-Atlantic 10 Conference choice, averaged 16.6 points last season. But he struggled to get into rhythm, as did most of the Spiders.

"I think each guy just was trying to create a spark, whether it be from the 3-point line, or a drive, or in transition," UR coach Chris Mooney said.

Richmond missed 12 of its first 14 shots, and finished 2 of 16 from 3-point distance.

NEXT: UR entertains VMI on Monday night at 7.

Experienced Spiders open season with busy stretch

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Nov. 13, 2009

Twenty days. Eight games.

That's the stretch the University of Richmond begins tonight with its season-opener vs. Lehigh. For an inexperienced team, that pace could be an issue. Five Spiders' starters return -- if you count junior center Dan Geriot, who missed last season with a knee injury -- as well as several experienced reserves.

"I wouldn't necessarily say it's good, but I don't think it should hurt us. Let's put it that way," Chris Mooney, entering his fifth season as Richmond's coach, said of the opening three weeks. "When you're experienced, that should be one of the things that can help you get through a stretch like that."

Following tonight's test from visiting Lehigh, UR will deal with VMI's defensive pressure and three-point shooting Monday night at the Robins Center. Thursday, UR plays at William and Mary. In the season's first week, and through early December, the Spiders' depth could be a factor.

"Some people would say eight games in 20 days might be a little too much, but I think we've got plenty of guys who are ready to go, ready to get the season started right," said fifth-year senior forward Ryan Butler.

Improved defense and rebounding are two of Richmond's goals, and senior guard David Gonzalvez believes reserves Francis Cedric-Martel (6-6), Kevin Smith (6-5) and Darrius Garrett (6-9) will be assets in those areas.

"They bring a toughness and a quickness and athleticism. Kevin Smith brings the toughness and intangibles we need, too," Gonzalvez said. "I think that will definitely help us early."

Geriot led Richmond in scoring (14.3 ppg) and rebounding (5.5 rpg) as a sophomore. The 6-9 junior now weighs about 260 pounds, roughly 25 more than he carried before his knee injury. The weight increase is the result of concentrated weight lifting during rehabilitation. One of tonight's revelations will be what kind of impact Geriot can make after a season away from game competition.

"Obviously, I'm hungry," he said.

Mooney reports that Geriot has exhibited no knee problems. "Right from the very first drill [of preseason], he's been the guy," Mooney said. "He's been very good in practice, and in every kind of setting."

Lehigh was picked to finish second in the Patriot League, behind Holy Cross. UR is projected as the third-place finisher in the Atlantic 10 Conference. "We've been around here so long now, the older guys, that we know that if you don't come to play, any team can beat you," Butler said.

Spiders' basketball no longer at a loss for players

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Oct. 30, 2009

Four seasons ago, true freshman walk-on guard Duncan McLean averaged 13 minutes and led the University of Richmond in 3-point field goal percentage. McLean arrived at UR intending to play soccer, which should tell you something about the state of Spiders' hoops in 2005-06.

Things are now considerably different from that season in which McLean was a key figure and Richmond had only seven scholarship players for January and February because of injuries and attrition. Junior center Dan Geriot recently noted "almost a little bit of a swagger" in the Spiders' program, and fifth-year coach Chris Mooney is trying to settle on a rotation among a dozen scholarship players, 10 with Division I experience.

ROTATION COGITATION: The Spiders, picked to finish third in the Atlantic 10 Conference, return four starters and plug in Geriot after he missed last season with a knee injury. Guards Kevin Anderson and David Gonzalvez and Geriot figure to be three constants in the lineup. From there, Mooney could go a number of ways.

"We think those 12 guys can play and contribute," Mooney said. The Spiders' 13th scholarship player, senior forward Kevin Hovde, broke his ankle early in preseason practice. "Playing 12 would be very, very difficult, but we think we might be able to get up to nine or 10," Mooney said. "We have some ideas on how to try to do that."

CAN-DO CANDIDATES: UR's roster includes several candidates who appear to be deserving of court time. Even 6-9 sophomore Darrius Garrett, who participated in only 12 games last season, became a significant factor for Richmond in March. Helping Mooney sort out his personnel was last weekend's closed scrimmage at N.C. State and this weekend's closed scrimmage vs. East Carolina.

"Coaching a veteran team is much more fun, and there can be much more progress made quickly with a veteran group," Mooney said. "There's not as much review. There aren't as many mistakes. There isn't as much stopping to correct mistakes."

RANKED FOE ON HORIZON: The Spiders open two weeks from tonight, vs. Lehigh. Richmond will have played five

games when it faces Mississippi State on Nov. 27 in South Padre Island, Texas. The Bulldogs, with five starters back from a 23-13 team, are ranked No. 19 in the USA Today/ESPN Top 25 Preseason Coaches' Poll. Also ranked, at No. 22, is Dayton, one of UR's A-10 rivals.

UR Basketball Notes

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Oct. 22, 2009

Hovde breaks ankle, may miss 10 weeks
University of Richmond senior Kevin Hovde broke his ankle during a recent Spiders workout and is expected to miss at least 10 weeks, according to UR coach Chris Mooney.

Surgery was performed.

Hovde, 6-6 and from Kennett Square, Pa., played in 24 games last season for the 20-16 Spiders, averaging 5.8 minutes.

"It's so disappointing because of how hard he works and how much he cares about this program," Mooney said. "For a guy who was a walk-on and became a scholarship player, it's just terrible luck for him in his senior year that that would happen."

Mooney said a medical redshirt year for Hovde is a possibility. "I'm going to let Kevin bring that up to me, and we'd be extremely open to that," Mooney said.

Experience is additive that's new to group
The fifth year of the Chris Mooney Era includes 13 scholarship players. All but freshmen 6-3 Darien Brothers and 6-5 Greg Robbins have at least 12 games of college experience. In Mooney's first year, the Spiders had seven healthy scholarship players during the season's second half. The next year, freshmen were the team's top four scorers.

In 2007-08, UR had 10 freshmen and sophomores.

"When I first got here, the veterans on the team were just a year older than I was," said Kevin Smith, a 6-5 junior forward. "A lot has changed from then."

The Atlantic 10 Conference will announce its predicted order of finish today. UR, coming off a 20-16 season, likely will be projected third, behind Dayton and Xavier.

"We're not sneaking up on anyone, and we know that we're not sneaking up on anyone," Smith said. "So you have to come in with the mindset that you're a dangerous team, and you have to be willing to take on dangerous teams yourself."

Coach expects more physical play on glass
The Spiders were outrebounded by an average of about five boards last season, and that continued a trend.

Because UR uses a variation of the Princeton offense depending on big men who can pass and shoot, "Rebounding has been something for us that has been difficult," Mooney said. "We go out and recruit these guys who are skillful, and if you went to a playground, the most skillful kid probably doesn't get the most rebounds."

Mooney hopes the return of 6-9 center Dan Geriot, now 255 pounds after missing last season with a knee injury, and the improvement of 6-9, 225-pound Justin Harper will help.

Also, returning Spiders focused on strength gain during the offseason for this reason:

"When we've taken the court against some of the very best teams we play, including Wake Forest, Xavier, and Dayton, we feel we're just as fast and just as skilled, just as good as basketball players," Mooney said. "The one thing is, we're just a little bit thinner."

Increased strength should help in rebounding and, said Mooney, improved "ability to match a team a team for entire 40 minutes physically."

Spiders starting with respect of A-10 opponents

By John O'Connor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Oct. 15, 2009

The Atlantic 10 Conference media day for men's basketball is a week from today, after which the University of Richmond officially will be recognized as a championship contender -- at least on paper.

UR probably will be handicapped as the 14-team league's third-place finisher, behind Dayton and Xavier. In four previous seasons with Chris Mooney as coach, the Spiders never have been so respected in October.

Four starters, including guards Kevin Anderson (16.6 ppg) and David Gonzalvez (16.0 ppg), return from a 20-16 team. Dan Geriot, a 6-9 junior who led Richmond in scoring (14.3 ppg) and rebounding (5.5 rpg) as a sophomore, is back after missing last season because of a knee injury.

UR begins practice tomorrow. Yesterday, Mooney talked Spiders basketball as his team begins work toward a schedule that includes Mississippi State, South Carolina, Florida, Wake Forest, and perhaps Missouri, in addition to Xavier, Dayton, Virginia Commonwealth and Old Dominion.

. . .

Does the general perspective that the Spiders are equipped to finish near the top of the A-10 affect the way they approach the season?

"It's been what we've been building towards, so I think it's good that there's some recognition on the outside. But I don't think it changes, necessarily, how we've gone about our business. We've felt that we've been improving a lot over the last couple of years, and I would hope that we have the best sense of where we are."

. . .

After some rebuilding years caused in part by attrition, UR has classes balanced, with three seniors, four juniors, four sophomores and two freshmen. How does that help the operation?

"That was one of the things that was a chief concern of mine, trying to get these classes balanced, though it would have been impossible to do that [immediately]. I do think it's important in this day and age in college basketball to have [class] balance so that everybody can kind of see a clear picture in front of them . . . That's been very important. Very difficult to mend, but I think we're in a pretty good spot."

. . .

Is your practice planning influenced by the team's experience?

"Absolutely. When you're introducing your style, both as a coach and to new players, there's a certain way to go about it. Certain things are going to be important to get your program on track. When that's been done, when you feel confident, when you've improved, then I think it's a little bit more tangible results driven. 'These are the teams we're playing. This is why we need to be better than we've been in the past.'"

. . .

You have three local players on the roster: senior Ryan Butler (Douglas Freeman High), junior Justin Harper (Meadowbrook High) and freshman Darien Brothers (Benedictine High). Is that planned, or pieces just came together in their situations?

"I would say it's definitely planned. I think our most important recruiting area is Richmond. We recognize that there's talent in this area. We want to have as many of those guys on the roster as possible. We feel fortunate to have the three that we do."

Do you feel that Dan Geriot will be limited in any way because of the knee injury?

"No."

Mooney then reached to the table in front of him and knocked wood.

Richmond’s Mooney Set To Alter Perception

By Jeff Goodman
FoxSports.com
September 15, 2009

Chris Mooney will finally dispel the notion this year. You know, the one in which the Richmond coach and former Princeton standout has his team run backdoor cut after backdoor cut as the 35-shot clock whittles away.

No one will accuse the Spiders of milking the clock this season - not with a team built around athleticism and one that will likely push the tempo and run as much as possible.

And not with guys like Kevin Anderson at the point and Justin Harper up front.

"We're an athletic team," Mooney said. "We have speed and length - and our athleticism is our strength."

Mooney's teams in the past - whether it was at Air Force or even in the first couple seasons at Richmond - were built around skill and intelligence.

The Spiders averaged just 52 points per game in the A-10 during Mooney's rookie season. However, don't be surprised if this year's team is commonly scoring 70-plus points.

"We think we can score in the mid to high 70s," Mooney said. "We're a fairly explosive offensive team, and a real emphasis will be to score in transition."

This group is both smart and athletic. The Spiders not only return Anderson, Harper and David Gonzalvez from last year's 20-win team, but they also return their best player from two seasons ago in skilled 6-foot-9 big man Dan Geriot.

Geriot averaged 14.3 points and 5.5 rebounds per game as a sophomore in 2007-08 and also led the team in scoring as a freshman. Mooney was excited about the possibility of having Anderson, Gonzalves and Geriot to build around for last season.

But Geriot tore his ACL in the summer and was forced to sit and watch the entire season.

"I'm 100 percent right now," Geriot said.

"He looks great," added Mooney. "He's added weight and is so much stronger. He also has an added perspective and motivation after missing last season."

Geriot was cleared in July and said he hopes everyone has forgotten about him.

"We have so many options now," Geriot said. "We feel like we're right there with all the top teams in the league now, but we've got to go out and prove it."

Mooney said that getting Geriot back will help with his primary concern - rebounding and physical play. It's an area that Mooney and his staff have emphasized as much as anything in the offseason.

Geriot was raving about Anderson, a 5-foot-11 floor leader who has managed to sneak under the national radar despite leading the team in scoring (16.6) and earning second-team all-league honors.

"He's got terrific poise, and he's able to finish over 6-foot-10 guys," Geriot said.

"He's a special player," Mooney added. "He has the ability to score in different ways and is good at every part of the game. He picks things up so quickly, it's amazing."

*Mooney on the 6-foot-9 ½ Harper, who had 29 points in a win against URI and 20 in a victory over Xavier last season: "I think he's a legitimate NBA prospect. He's a legitimate 6-foot-9, 230 pounds and is a very good athlete. He's one of our top two or three shooters on the team, and his body's terrific. What I like most about him is his skill - he can shoot and pass and that's what sets him apart at his size."

*Only four teams in the A-10 have finished in the top five each of the last two seasons: Xavier, Temple, St. Joseph's and Richmond.