The basketball season has barely opened, yet already it is apparent that North Carolina Coach Dean Smith has accentuated the situation within the Atlantic Coast Conference.

The Dean of ACC coaches likes the league to the Big Eight in football. "There is no known margin and some poor records," Smith warned a couple of weeks ago at Operation Basketball. "It is always a good thing to be balanced.

Balanced football cost the Big Eight any chance for a high rating in the polls. Perhaps the best example of this is the fact that five Big Eight schools that probably deserve to be rated in the first dozen national teams had not a single team ranked at the Top Ten. Because the Sooners' 8-2 record was the league's finest, one can see what has happened already in the ACC, the same thing may happen there in basketball.

The league's three pre-season picks have all lost. North Carolina, an overwhelming choice to win the conference and No. 3 in the nation, fell in overtime to Wake Forest in the Big Four finals as the Deacons won that title for the third straight year.

Maryland lost at home, also by a point and also in overtime, to Notre Dame. It was just Maryland's second non-ACC home loss in four seasons. The Terps were No. 8 in the country. N.C. State, No. 14 in preseason, now 0-2, a loser to UNC and Duke in the Big Four.

You can take your choice. Either Carolina, Maryland and State were over-rated in Wake Forest and Duke were vastly underrated. The two teams were picked for sixth and seventh in the ACC. Wake has lost to Duke by a single point in the Big Four opener.

Meanwhile, Clemson was showing awesome power in winning the AIAV championship, scoring 104 and 108 points in decisive victories over Florida and Florida State, the latter a strong foe. Clemson must be considered a genuine threat to the title. The Tigers return everybody from an 18-4 year, including 7-1 Tree Rollins. If Rollins reaches his potential, and Stan Rome puts up his consistent ability after giving up football, the Tigers will be hard to cage.

Virginia won its own invitational tournament in a 55-50 struggle against the Southern Conference champions from VMI. The Cavs gave evidence that they once more will have the best defense in the ACC. They played an exceptionally sticky man-to-man against VMI and keyed the Roosters into some bad shots.

Most impressive were three newcomers, guards William Napper and Garland Jefferson and forward Mike Owens. Napper and Jefferson shared duties and held VMI's Ron Carter to just four field goals, only one in the second half. The play of Jefferson, the former Covington star, was especially pleasing to Coach Terry Holland, since he is making the transition to guard after playing inside during his high school days.

"Jefferson has been progressing rapidly," said Holland. Jefferson played the entire stretch run, and he and sophomore Bobby Stokes didn't have a single turnover against VMI's pressure defense. The Keydets were up in the one-on-one, and UVa held the ball for four minutes without taking a shot. However, putting up possession against Virginia may need that defense to carry it throughout the year.

VMI's zone defense did a good job of shutting off the Virginia attack, which was bolstered by forward Dave Koesters regains his eligibility late next month.

Virginia needs desperately is a good medical report on the twisted knee of center Otis Fulton. If Fulton is sidelined for any lengthy period, the Cavs will be in trouble. They went with three guards, and often four, against VMI. They had expected to do that against towering ACC teams.

Fulton will be needed when Virginia opens with Penn, Pitt and another game against Danny Monk's Charleston Baptist team, which was 2-24 a year ago.

VMI also has some problems. Guard John Krovic hurt his knee late in the title game, but will be needed at full strength for the game at East Carolina this Saturday.

The Keydets appear to be hurting for defense. The team has no new faces but a court sub at the moment, and apparently the heralded sophomore, Jeryl Saliner, won't be ready to make a contribution in the front line.

Salmond played very briefly in the tournament, where VMI went mostly with six men. Veteran George Borovjek, who joined the team two weeks ago, and that isn't enough. If Salmond can come along, Coach Charlie Schuman can use Rice on guard in most situations.

As it stands now, Krovic and Kelly Lombard give VMI no speed at guard, and that could prove a factor in conference play.

Nobody can be certain what to expect at Virginia Tech. The Hokies opened with a breath of fresh air as they have another one tonight against Danny Monk's Charleston Baptist team, which was 2-24 a year ago.

The Hokies get their first big test Wednesday at Morgantown against a West Virginia team that surprised in winning the Hall of Fame tournament over Syracuse. Tech also plays at home Saturday against Ohio State.

Coach Mario Moro got a good test at his bench against Marietta, Tech avoided a needless flowering for the Big Eight in a 58-56 win.

The Hokies play the percentage game, with small forward Willie Wayne Robinson in the game and guard in junior college transfer Ron Bell.

They were just two of the new faces of '76. Others who had had excellent varsity debut were North Carolina's Enurlen Strother, Yale's Don C. N.C. State's Clyde (The Glide) Austin and Hawkeye Whitney, and Wake Forest's Frank Johnson.

After another predictable mediocre football campaign—except for bowl-bound Maryland and North Carolina, which had good bowl ball back. The season is bound to be interesting, and certainly the Hokies will be even more strange than usual. The upsets of the first weekend are likely to continue right until the Ides of March.