

Paige out with broken right hand

Written by Aaron Beard, Waterloo Courier
Wednesday, 04 November 2015 22:40 -

Top-ranked North Carolina has lost senior guard Marcus Paige, a former Linn-Mar standout, to a broken right hand for three to four weeks.

The school announced Paige's injury Wednesday, saying the preseason Atlantic Coast Conference co-player of the year broke a bone in his non-shooting hand during Tuesday's practice.

Paige, a 6-foot-2 guard from Marion, Iowa, has missed one game through his first three seasons. But the recovery time would sideline him for next Friday's opener against Temple in Annapolis, Maryland, and several games beyond — possibly including his homecoming game at Northern Iowa on Nov. 21.

A roughly four-week absence would have him close to returning for the big Dec. 1 matchup with No. 3 Maryland in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

Paige has led UNC in scoring in each of the past two seasons. Team spokesman Steve Kirschner said in an email that Paige won't require surgery to repair the injury, which came a day after the Tar Heels were voted No. 1 in the Top 25 preseason poll for a record ninth time.

"I hate it for Marcus," Coach Roy Williams said in a statement. "He's such a wonderful young man — one of the most outstanding people I have been lucky to coach. I know he'll handle this with the same level of maturity and responsibility that he does everything else.

"Our team will certainly be challenged in his absence. We will need everyone up and down the roster to step up their games and take care of each other and our team until he gets back."

The Tar Heels at least have some depth to deal with the injury to Paige, who is primarily a point guard but has played both guard positions during his career.

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UNC has nine of its top 10 scorers back from a 26-win team that played in the ACC Tournament title game and took eventual NCAA finalist Wisconsin to the final minutes of a Sweet 16 loss. Junior Nate Britt and sophomore Joel Berry II would likely assume the bulk of work at the point, while 6-foot-8 sophomore Justin Jackson — whose strong final weeks helped spark UNC's late-season surge — would need to provide more perimeter scoring to make up for Paige's absence.

UNC plays an exhibition game Friday against Guilford.