

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI Men's Basketball Roster Released for Upcoming AmeriCup Qualifiers

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The Virgin Islands Men's Basketball Team has announced its eleven-man roster and coach for the upcoming FIBA AmeriCup qualifiers. The USVI will have to play three games in four days as the team looks to secure one of the top three positions in Group C and a spot in this summer's 2021 AmeriCup.

The Virgin Islands beat Cuba in the first qualifying game of the tournament but lost the rematch against Cuba, and fell to the Dominican Republic to give them a 1-2 record in the qualifying tournament.

The team for this window of games will feature nine former Division 1 basketball players and one former NAIA Athlete. The roster is: Walter Hodge, LaRon Smith, Deon Edwin, Xavier Richards, Trivante Bloodman, Ivan Aska, Romani Hansen, Jason Perry-Murray, Kyle Clarke, Jalal Johnson, and Leo Castillo. The team will be coached by Donald Bough.

Coach Bough described his coaching style as "very animated; I really push for effort," he said. "Effort must be given at all cost."

Hodge, Smith, Edwin, Richards, Bloodman, Aska, Hansen, and Perry-Murray all have professional international experience, according to the VI Basketball Federation.

Hodge won two NCAA titles in Florida, led the team in scoring in the first two FIBA AmeriCup Qualifiers with 22 points in the first game, and 23 in the second. He had at least four assists and seven rebounds in the games during the Virgin Islands qualifying campaign.

Smith played at Georgia State, Bethune-Cookman and Auburn during his collegiate career and is one of the team leaders on the defensive end of the floor. He leads the Virgin Islands with 6 blocks over the first three games of the qualifying campaign.

Edwin played his college basketball at Kent State where he scored 18 points in an NCAA tournament game against UCLA. He did not play in the first two qualifiers but played almost 14 minutes in the team's most recent game against the Dominican Republic.

Richards played at Tennessee State and has averaged 9.3 points in the first three games of the qualifying tournament.

Bloodman played his college basketball at Mississippi State and scored four points in just over 14 minutes in his lone appearance during the FIBA AmeriCup Qualifiers.

Aska played at Murray State and didn't play in either of the match-ups against Cuba. He had 18 points and 8 rebounds in the game against the Dominican Republic.

Kyle Clarke, who played at Kennesaw State and made an appearance at Paradise Jam during his time at the university, played a combined 12 minutes against Cuba in the first two qualifiers.

Perry-Murray, who played Grambling State University, played briefly in the loss to the Dominican Republic in the second qualifying window of the tournament.

Castillo made the roster all three times but only has 1:13 of court time during the qualifiers.

This is the first time Hansen, who played collegiate at the University of Albany, and Johnson, who played Lindenwood University NAIA, made the roster during the AmeriCup qualifiers.

The Virgin Islands will play 19th ranked Canada at 8 p.m. on February 17 in the first game of the third qualifying window. They will have the 18th off before playing the 21st ranked Dominican Republic at 2 p.m on the 19th and then close out play at 11:30 a.m

with a rematch against the Canadians . All times are A.S.T.

In the second qualifying window, the Virgin Islands lost to the Dominican Republic 89-75. In the VI's last match up with Canada, the team fell 97-69 on July 2, 2018 while attempting to qualify for the 2019 FIBA World Cup.

The Virgin Islands will go into the final window ranked 51st in the world and third in Group C.

While Cuba and the USVI are tied in the standings, Cuba owns the tiebreaker between the two sides after beating the Virgin Islands by 11 more points than the Virgin Islands beat Cuba by in the two match-ups between the teams last February.

The VI's best chance of qualifying is having Cuba lose all their three games which would allow them to qualify with just one win in three games.

Another route to the AmeriCup for the Virgin Islands would be to upset Canada in one of their match-ups. Then the tie breaker would come down to a point differential between the matchups next week between the two teams. This means the VI would need to beat Canada by more points than Canada beats them if the teams split the two games. If the VI upsets Canada twice, the VI would qualify.

The Virgin Islands team began training on Monday on St. Croix before they head to Puerto Rico next week.

Cuba will play Canada on Feb 18 at 8 p.m.; The Dominican Republic on Feb 20 at 2:30 p.m., and will close out their AmeriCup Qualifying schedule against Canada at 7 p.m on the 21.

It will be a basketball-filled week in San Juan as Puerto Rico will also host Group D. Group D action will see Mexico play the host at 9 p.m., and the Bahamas play the USA at 5:30 on the 19th. On the 20th Mexico will play the USA on 6 p.m., and the Bahamas vs Puerto Rico at 9 p.m.

Former NBA Players Isiah Thomas and Joe Thomas will be on the team USA roster for these qualifiers, while Puerto Rico will have former NBA player J.J Barea on its roster.