

THE BACKSTOP



With Will Cloyd

Tar Heels stumble early on

I can't look at the TV. I turn away and shake my head as my dad slumps on the couch.

The room seems to darken. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's men's basketball team just lost in overtime to the College of Charleston. They will go on to lose to Clemson, Georgia Tech, and Wake Forest, claiming a disheartening 12 wins and seven losses.

I can't believe this is happening. For seven years, I have put my faith in Head Coach Roy Williams to pull my Heels through thick and thin.

Williams works miracles at Carolina. He took a group of disparate players from a disheveled 2002 campaign and made them into a championship unit within a year.

Recently, Williams turned the overweight Sean May, the selfish Rashad McCants, the football-playing David Noel, and the scatter-brained Quentin Thomas into basketball players.

What's the matter with this group?

For Carolina, the problem begins and ends with guard play. UNC has a posse of productive postmen including senior Deon Thompson, sophomore Ed Davis, and sophomore Tyler Zeller. They lead the team in scoring and all shoot better than 50 percent from the floor.

UNC's three main ball handlers, sophomore Larry Drew II, first-year Dexter Strickland, and first-year Leslie McDonald, however, do not have the experience to run a team in the Atlantic Coast Conference yet. With experience I have no doubt that each will grow into a fine floor general. But, for the time being, their inexperience has led to 101 turnovers between the three of them in the first 19 games.

Senior guard Marcus Ginyard and junior guard Will Graves simply don't have the skill to make up for the cast of inexperienced underclassmen. Each shoots above 40 percent from 3-point range, but neither has made more than 20 3-pointers this season.

Despite the current state of affairs, worry not Tar Heel faithful, the drought will not last long. Next year, Carolina welcomes a stacked class of freshman ballers who, along with current players, will take UNC back to the Promised Land.

Forward Harrison Barnes, arguably the best player in the 2010 draft class, along with pass-happy point guard Kendall Marshall, and man-child of a shooting guard Reggie Bullock all bring their skills to Chapel Hill. Their arrival offsets the departure of Davis, Thompson and Ginyard and will blend nicely with the returning players.

Stand together, Carolina nation. UNC has a posse of productive post-men. This year only makes us stronger and the inevitable nectar of victory sweeter.

First-years take to the court

By Andrew Kelley
STAFF WRITER

As the women's basketball team (9-7, 6-5) prepares to head down the final stretch of the season, a strong finish is essential to the Quakers' tourney dreams.

In the midst of competing for crucial Old Dominion Athletic Conference tournament seeding, the Quakers are receiving major contributions from first-years who Dick Vitale, college basketball announcer, would call a few real "diaper dandies" — in other words, "sensational freshmen."

Brittany Atwater, Brenda Hayes, Vanessa Johnson, Morgan Weeks, Shelly Barker, Jessica Brown, and LeAnne Birdsall make up this year's cast of rookies.

"Even though we've never had four seniors, I still expected this freshmen class to step in the way they have," said Head Coach Stephanie Flamini.

With so much experience coming from seniors Jasmine Wood, Ann Seuffer, Alexa Williams and Joclyn Terry, Flamini went on to say, "Having seven freshmen on the team gives us much-needed depth. We have a freshman to fill every position."

This talented group of first-years is head-

lined by the play of Atwater and Hayes who have combined for 121 points, 72 steals, and 32 assists this season.

The Quakers are coming off a recent win where Atwater had 12 points and 3 assists.

"I expected to be a contributor on the team this year," said Atwater. "That was one of the main reasons I came here."

According to Flamini, Atwater has received praise for her athleticism and extremely aggressive defensive play.

"She goes really hard to the basket," Flamini commented.

Hayes is another guard who the coach described as "very skilled with a lot of quickness."

Averaging three points and 11.8 minutes a game, her distinctive Mohawk-like hairstyle is almost as flashy as her quick moves around defenders.

Giving first-years substantial minutes early in their careers can often do one of two things: pressure a player to where they try to play above their abilities, resulting in sloppy play, or give an already cocky freshman an even bigger ego. Flamini insists that neither case is true when it comes to her first-years.

"The upperclassmen have really taken this young group under their wing," said Flamini. "We don't really even consider them freshmen anymore because of that extended playing time."

Accompanying Atwater and Hayes are Birdsall and Barker. Birdsall is a pure post player, which can be unusual for a first-year. Birdsall and Barker have combined for 85 rebounds and 51 points this season.

Flamini said Birdsall has greatly improved this season, and has outstanding box-out skills. According to Flamini, Barker has also improved despite changing positions during season. Flamini credits Barker's improvement to her intelligence on the court and her hard work in practice.

With seven of the Quakers' last nine games on the road, the girls will have to be clicking on all cylinders in order to end the regular season on a high note.

"I like our chances the rest of the way a lot," said Atwater. "We have a chance of being one of the top teams and I know we can do it."

With the madness of March looming in coming weeks, the future looks all too bright for this year's group of first-years and the women's program.



CLOYD GAMBEL/GUILFORDIAN

First-year **Brenda Hayes** springs up for a shot in the Jan. 15 women's basketball game against Randolph-Macon.

QUAKER QUICK STATS

COMPILED BY PATRICK CHILDS

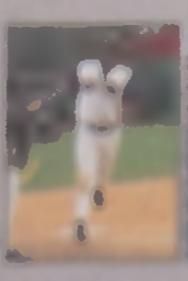
14

Softball players returning from last year's 26-win season (school record) for 2010. The women are 19 days away from their season-opener, at home, against Greensboro College.



.541

Batting average, .588 on-base percentage, 71 hits and 51 runs batted in are 4 of the 6 conference-leading stats that helped earned junior baseball player Kyle Wooden Pre-season All American honors for 2010.



58

Total points scored by senior Clay Henson in men's basketball's games last week. The stretch in which Henson shot 22/36 from the floor and 14/24 from 3-point range earned him ODAC Player of the week.



59

Straight wins by UConn's women's basketball team. After a perfect championship season last year (41-0), the team is 20-7 in 2010. Their last loss: Feb. 5, 2009, to Rutgers.

