

Williams ready for semifinal

By David Droschak
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHAPEL HILL — Shammond Williams likes to spend time alone. He did plenty of that after his Final Four performance last year.

North Carolina's career 3-point leader was 1-for-13 from the field in a loss to eventual national champion Arizona in the 1997 semifinals — the worst game of his four-year career.

The senior vowed not to let it happen again as the No. 1 Tar Heels (34-3) return to the national spotlight in San Antonio on Saturday against Utah with four straight double-digit wins in the NCAA tournament.

"Last year was a tough road for me," said Williams, who was 1-for-8 from 3-point range against the Wildcats. "I felt like I didn't capitalize on the situation and the opportunity I had. I felt like if I would have done those things, maybe we would've had an extra game."

Williams was reminded of his poor shooting game Monday when he turned the television on, then several hours later when reporters grilled him on the subject.

"Actually, ESPN was playing the 1997 Final Four (highlights) and in the middle of the thing they were like, 'Well, it wasn't a good semifinal game for Shammond Williams' and they showed me missing some shots."

What was Williams' reaction to the TV commentary?

"It was the truth, so there is nothing I can say," he said. "But

Arizona loss not far from mind

now having an opportunity to go back, hopefully I can turn it around and play my style of basketball.

"That (game) has been on my mind, but it hasn't been a feeling to the point that it will keep me from playing the way I'm capable of playing," he said. "I just try to put it in perspective and understand where I've come from."

He has responded with a stellar senior season. Williams is the team's second-leading scorer at 17.0 points per game, shoots 41.3 percent on 3-pointers, and his 131-for-144 (91 percent) free-throw effort this season is the best in school history.

However, like last year's Final Four performance, it hasn't all been positive.

Three days after scoring a career-high 42 points in a 107-100 double overtime victory at Georgia Tech last month, Williams left the bench in tears after a disagreement with coach Bill Guthridge. He returned, but didn't play in the second half and scored just one point.

Both parties said the incident, which was captured live by ESPN, was quickly buried and forgotten.

Still, Williams is uncomfortable discussing his actions.

"I don't regret it at all," Williams said Monday. "I feel bad that things went that way, but I felt like being the person I am, I handled it the best way I could. I was never disrespectful or anything like that to my coaches."

Most would agree that without Williams, the Tar Heels would not be playing Utah (29-3) on Saturday in the program's 14th Final Four appearance.

He scored 32 points in an overtime victory against UNC Charlotte in the second round of the NCAA tournament, then added 18 and 19 points in the East Regional semifinals and finals in Greensboro this past weekend.

"He's a tireless worker and if someone says he can't dribble with his left hand very well then he'll work on it and work on it until he can do it," Guthridge said of Williams. "He has made himself into an excellent player."

And one of the main go-to guys in crunch time on a team full of offensive stars.

Williams has scored 35 points in North Carolina's last 20 minutes of overtime, including 10 in the Atlantic Coast Conference tourney semifinals against Maryland and nine against UNCC in the NCAAs.

Williams' teammates have little doubt he'll rebound from last year's Final Four shooting slump.

"I think he is going to be more relaxed than anything because he's been in this situation before," All-America Antawn Jamison said.

"In the last situation he had the worst performance he could ever have, so I'm expecting him to go out there and have the best performance he's ever had."

Top high school talent will be on display in Pro-Am classic

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Charlotte Pro-Am High School All-Star Classic will showcase some of the area's top seniors in their final high school game.

The game, scheduled for April 4 at Owens Athletic Center at Queens, will feature players such as South Carolina two-sport signee Keith Matkins of West Charlotte; Western Carolina's Cory Largent (Freedom); American's Bobby Thompson (Victory Christian) and UNC Greensboro's Luke Boythe (Charlotte Christian). Several uncommitted players will also show off their talents for recruiters, including Independence's Tony Barrett and Clifton Washburn of Shelby.

Tip-off is 2 p.m.

In addition to basketball, the players will serve as community ambassadors to area elementary students. The athletes will appear at Dilworth Elementary and Calvary Christian Academy April 3 to sign autographs and

speak.

Bershan Thompson of Victory Christian and Bobby Jones of Charlotte Christian will coach the West team, while Garinger's Rick Lewis and Richard Spasoff of Providence will lead the East.

Tickets are \$5 in advance and \$7 at the door. They can be purchased April 2 at Owens Athletic Center at Queens from 6-8 p.m.

More information can be found on the Pro-Am's website: www.gocarolinas.com/community or by calling 577-3823.

Participants in the Charlotte Pro-Am High School All-Star Classic April 4 at Queens College:

East — Greg Copeny, Ramon Marshall, Tony Futrell and Jesse Crawford (Garinger); Joe Everette and Jarrell Nobles (Providence); Kenny Carver and Tony Barrett (Independence); Prandon Rowell (Providence Day); Ryan Shands and Leon Bingham (East Mecklenburg); John Carter (Greensboro Day); Jonte Harrell (Charlotte Latin); Matt Schafermyer (South Mecklenburg). Coaches: Rick Lewis (Garinger) and Richard Spasoff (Providence).

West — Cortney Nesmith, Eric Jones and Luke Boythe (Charlotte Christian); Bobby Thompson and Aureice McCain (Victory Christian); Clifton Washburn (Shelby); Cory Largent (Freedom); Deshon Howie (West Mecklenburg); Keith Matkins (West Charlotte); Marlon Byers (Kings Mountain); Ryan O'Malley and Lorenzo Johnson (Charlotte Country Day); Adrian Strong (Harding); Jake Blau (Providence Day).



PHOTO/KELLY OWEN

Victory Christian's Bobby Thompson will suit up for the West in the Charlotte Pro-Am High School All-Star Classic April 4 at Queens.

Coaches: Bershan Thompson (Victory Christian) and Bobby Jones (Charlotte Christian).

Cuban players want asylum

By Jessica Robertson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASSAU, Bahamas — Begging for the right to live freely and condemning "unjust detention" in the Bahamas, four Cuban baseball stars and five friends appealed Monday for asylum in Costa Rica.

Bahamian defense forces, meanwhile, rescued another 10 Cuban boat people and took them to the detention center, where dozens of refugees protested the special treatment given to the Cuban players.

More than 100 Cuban men and women began a hunger strike Monday to demand equal treatment with the ballplayers, detention camp director Arthur Rolle confirmed.

"One hundred and seven didn't eat breakfast or lunch, they refused it," he said. Lunch, he said, had been a traditional Bahamian meal of peas and grits with lamb chops.

Rolle said he had brought in more officers to increase security at the camp, where there have been occasional riots.

Lazaro Santana, a spokesman for ordinary Cuban refugees at the camp, said, "We are happy

because they (the ball players) have saved their lives. The problem is that we Cubans here want to have the same opportunities as our brothers who play baseball. ...

"We don't want to go back to Cuba."

He called for the governments of the United States, Canada, Venezuela and Costa Rica to intervene on their behalf.

The ballplayers told The Associated Press they were not joining the strike.

"Conditions at the camp are bad: bad provisions, bad food. I don't have a bed to sleep in," said Angel Lopez, 25, who like the others spent the night on the floor.

"We beseech your cooperation and help in permitting us the right to live in a country of total freedom where human rights are respected," the players said in a letter sent Monday to Costa Rican President Jose Maria Figueres. They asked him to immediately grant them "humanitarian visas."

The letter said they were being "unjustly detained" in the Bahamas, which regularly sends Cuban refugees back home. The letter was given to a reporter by Cuban-American sports agent Joe Cubas, who has instigated an

international effort to release the players.

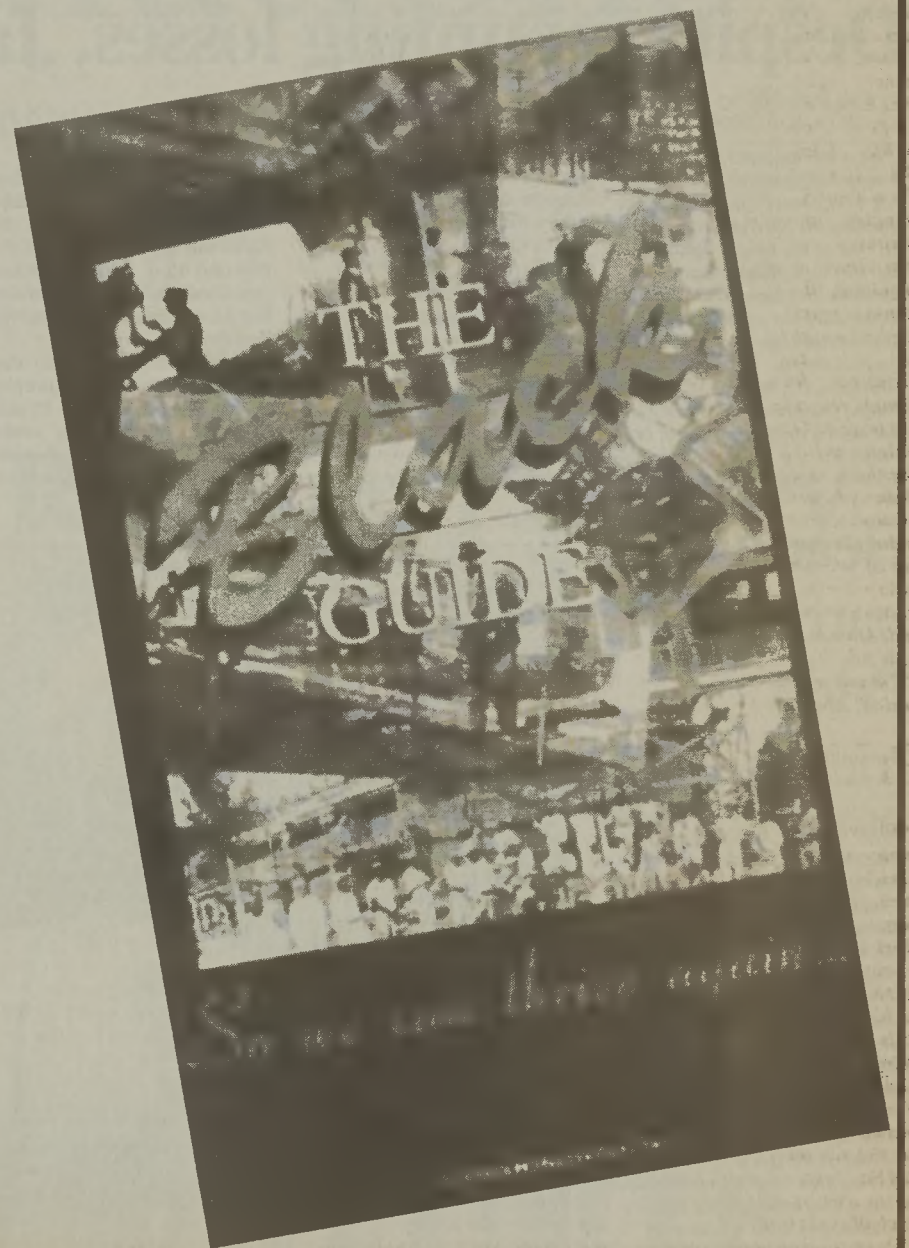
"Our fear is that we will be deported back to Cuba where we know that, simply for being baseball players who have decided to abandon the country, we can expect grave consequences," the letter said.

The players left their hometowns in central Cuba on March 10, then remained locked in a safehouse for 10 days before setting out to sea Friday. They drifted into a Bahamian fishing boat 17 1/2 hours later, according to the players, and were turned over to Bahamian authorities at Ragged Island, a tiny fishing outpost about 80 miles north of the Cuban coast. The players included Jorge Luis Toca, 23; Jorge Diaz, 23; and Michael Jova, a 17-year-old player from Cuba's junior Olympic team along with Enrique Chinea, 41, a pitching coach.

All five were banned from Cuban baseball last year because authorities suspected they were planning to defect.

Bahamian officials were unlikely to deport the celebrities, despite an agreement with the Cuban government to return all refugees.

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