

The Torrid Trio

Add Jerry Stackhouse, Rasheed Wallace, Jeff McInnis to the Roster

BY STEVE POLITI
SPORTS EDITOR

Rasheed Wallace takes a pass, dribbles twice, slices through the defense and slams the ball through the hoop, shaking the backboard. He hangs onto the rim for a few seconds, screaming.

And the crowd roars.

Rasheed Wallace takes a pass from Larry Davis on a two-on-one breakaway and sees Davis breaking toward the basket for an easy layup. But Wallace throws the ball too

hard, zipping it between Davis' hands and out of bounds.

And the crowd groans.

Jerry Stackhouse steals the ball from Eric Montross at the top of the key, dribbles twice and with two hands jams the ball into the hoop.

And the crowd roars.

Jerry Stackhouse doesn't get back quick enough on defense, leaves his man open at the top of the key, allowing forward Pat Sullivan to do a similar dunk just seconds later.

And the crowd groans.

Wallace misses a key dunk. Wallace blocks an Eric Montross shot. Stackhouse delivers a no-look pass for an assist. Stackhouse moves the wrong way and loses the ball out of bounds.

The performance of UNC's freshman class — Stackhouse, Wallace and Jeff McInnis — in the Blue-White game Nov. 6 gave UNC fans a taste of the levels these players can reach.

The game also raised two of the most difficult questions facing UNC this season: How much of an impact can this Torrid Trio have on UNC? And how soon?

The answers: A lot. And very soon. The NCAA champions add to their team three of the most sought-after recruits in the nation.

"I think it's the best (class) in the country," said basketball analyst Barry Jacobs. "For a three-man group, it's probably one of the better ones anyone's every had."

"We have eight starters," coach Dean Smith says. "Conceivably, all three of the freshmen could be in that eight. It's far too early to tell. They're very talented, and that does help, obviously. But we also have to be a team out there."

Smith knows he can put the three freshmen on the court and watch them score baskets. But baskets don't make a North Carolina team. Smith isn't the least bit worried about his team's offense.

A UNC team is built around defense.

"Our defenses are the hardest things for our freshman to learn," Smith says. "And of course most freshmen haven't played much defense in high school."

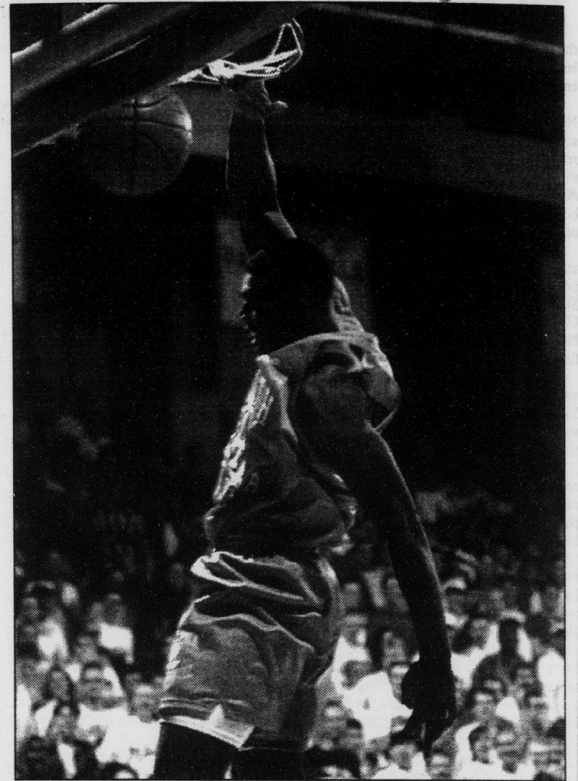
"Experience is a big factor in basketball, especially when you don't roll out the ball and say play."

So Smith will stop a practice and ask his freshmen what they should do in different situations. It's a pop quiz, in front of the team and the other coaches, right in the middle of a scrimmage.

"For the most part, they answer them correctly," Smith says. "They've even answered my trick questions."

Trick questions? This isn't easy.

"If they get down on themselves, they can pretty much forget about their whole freshman year," senior Pat Sullivan said.



SPECIAL TO THE DTH/GRANT HALVERSON

Jerry Stackhouse is the most talked about recruit to hit UNC since His Airness arrived in 1981. He's joined this season by Jeff McInnis and Rasheed Wallace.

Each newcomer has one of the best players in the nation at their position to watch and emulate. Wallace has to face Montross every day. McInnis has to practice against defensive stalwart Derrick Phelps. And Stackhouse can study slashing forward Brian Reese.

Jerry Stackhouse

Or maybe the last two should just exchange notes. Stackhouse already has repertoire of explosive moves and nifty passes. He is the most anticipated freshman to come to UNC since Michael Jordan and has immediately begun competing for a

starting spot.

"Stack" can bang with the big men inside or move with the fast players outside. He's got a smooth shooting stroke and excellent ballhandling skills. And, as noted by UNC fans who rose to their feet every time he had a clear shot at the basket, he can dunk. Stackhouse won the MVP award and the dunk contest at the McDonald's High School All-America game.

"Being a freshman and having the body he has and his strength is pretty amazing," Sullivan said. "Now I can see why he was

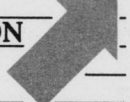
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