

Atlanta on Their Minds

Several UNC students and faculty members are training hard for upcoming Olympic trials, in the hopes that this summer they'll be competing among the best at the Centennial Olympics.

BY JESSICA BANOV
STAFF WRITER

Georgia. Atlanta. 1996. That's the final destination — the pinnacle of an athlete's career — and it's where several Olympic hopefuls from UNC hope to compete.

Not only is UNC a hotbed of collegiate sports standouts, but there are several students and faculty, past and present, who are training to compete on an international level, headed for the Olympic trials to represent the U.S. team.

UNC athletes are giving their all in events ranging from swimming to track to soccer to field hockey.

And the fact that the Olympics are held on the home turf of Atlanta makes the desire and the experience of the Olympics all the more sweet.

"Holding the Olympics in Atlanta, that's just icing on the cake because you have so much support," said Tony McCall, who is training for two track events. "You might pull off a better performance."

However, with all the sweat and energy come discouragement and sacrifices. Some hopefuls even take time off from school to devote themselves to preparing for the trials.

For example, junior Cindy Werley redshirted this field hockey season to train with the U.S. National field hockey team, and Ken Hamden returned home to Florida to take advantage of the optimal training weather.

Several alumni also appear to be strong contenders for the Olympics. David Rosenberg, a 1995 graduate, is working toward the fencing competitions, and former UNC women's soccer players Mia Hamm and Tisha Venturini are bringing their talents to the U.S. Olympic team.

Each athlete must have the drive and determination to go for the gold.

Tony McCall, track and field

According to McCall, he is on the last long road to his final goal — the Olympics.

"Everything I've learned throughout the years is all going to be utilized to get me on the team," McCall said. "Going into the trial, I have what it takes to make the team. Now I just have to put it together and do what it takes."

And doing what it takes on the day of the trials is only half the battle. The other half involves drastic changes in lifestyle and attitude.

"My training hasn't changed, but the intensity and my attitude have," said McCall, who is training for the 100- and 200-meter dashes in track. "I put more into it. But I know I shouldn't treat it any differently because I've had success."

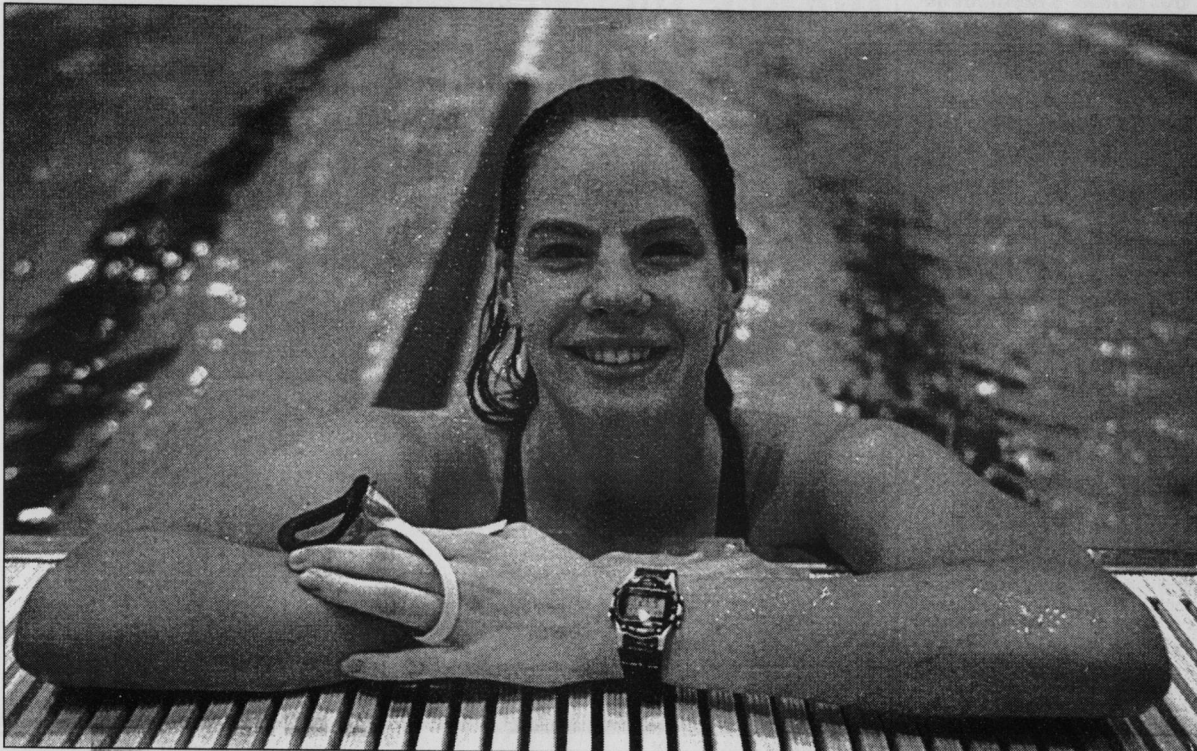
McCall said he had known for the past few years he was going to work toward training for the Olympics.

"It's just a feeling that I wanted to be there, or eventually be a part of the (Olympic) atmosphere," McCall said. "Now I've improved drastically. I'm at my peak, a climax of hopefully a long career."

The trials, to be held in June, sometimes cause more anxiety than the Olympics themselves, McCall said.

"I've heard it is very stressful emotionally," he said. "You feel it becomes an obsession, that you must make the team. There is no tomorrow."

"If I didn't make it, I would probably be



Kari Haag is training for the 50- and 200-meter freestyles. Haag went to the Olympic trials in 1992 as a high school senior, and now practices more than 20 hours a week with two other swimmers, Jeff Weiss and Trevor Runberg. The trials will be held in March.

near a nervous breakdown. This is not just a one-year thing. I want it real, real bad."

But McCall said he could accept the fact that it might not be his time — because of his age he would likely have another opportunity in 2000.

McCall, who started training in September after a meet-filled summer, said working toward the Olympics took a lot out of him physically and emotionally.

"Many days, you feel it's not worth it," McCall said. "Then you realize, this all I've ever done since the third grade, to run competitively. This is it."

McCall also said there were many sacrifices he had to make, things other students might otherwise take for granted. Weight considerations and social life aspects were two sacrifices he cited.

"It's been hard," said McCall about his inability to indulge in pizza or go out and party. "You have to think of the consequences. Will this hurt me? Once I go to the trial, I don't want to have any regrets. It takes a whole lot of self-discipline."

But above all, this self-discipline can be the driving motivation for an athlete.

"It's the commitment alone in saying, 'I want to make the Olympic team,'" McCall said. "I've put in hours on top of hours for practice and concentration from day one in attempting this goal."

Additional motivators include family, coaches and friends. "Me making the team would accomplish something for myself, but for others too," McCall said. "I should want it more for me, but I just want it for those that helped me get to where I am

today."

Marion Jones, track and field

For Jones, 1996 is a second chance. She was an alternate in the 1992 Olympics but chose not to go. Now, the '96 Olympics are within her grasp.

"I wouldn't have had as great a chance at age 15," Jones said. "But it makes me want to get there more now, because I've tasted it and want to experience it in full."

Jones, who competes in the long jump, the 200- and the 400-meter dashes, said opting not to go to Barcelona was just one of the sacrifices she had to make in her career.

Known also for her stellar performances on the basketball court, Jones has redshirted this season to concentrate on track. However, in the grand scheme of things, she said all athletes made some sacrifices.

"Everyone has a goal, and you have to give up some things to get what you want," Jones said. "Ever since I've been small, the Olympics have just been a goal that every year (I've worked toward)."

She said she had received incredible support with her decision. "Everyone understands it's an opportunity of a lifetime, not to pass up," Jones said. "I miss my basketball family, but I also have a track family that has accepted me."

Jones said several factors spurred her on, and her long-term goal of the Olympics influenced her as well.

"I've never won an indoor or outdoor title, and that's motivation enough," she said. Jones, who recovered from a broken

foot, said she had been training for track overall — collegiate indoor, collegiate outdoor, and then finally, the Olympics.

And because the competition is in Atlanta, there is additional pressure to make the team. "It's the dream of every American athlete to compete in front of family and friends," Jones said. "Right down the street is more motivation, too."

The community in general also had been very supportive, Jones said. "Everyone says, 'Good luck, hope to see you in Atlanta,'" she said.

Eddie Pope, men's soccer

While other students go home to relax on their vacations, Eddie Pope has been training for the opportunity to be on the U.S. men's soccer team.

"In other countries, the players are professionals, but we're in school," Pope said. "So every chance we get, especially holidays, we train with the team. On Spring Break, while others are on vacation, we train. And we don't have much of a summer."

Despite foregoing the chance to see his family, Pope, a senior from High Point, said he had enjoyed his practices. "That's the kind of sacrifice we have to make," Pope said. "But this is what we want to do. The fact that we'll have this opportunity, a once in a lifetime experience."

Pope and three other UNC men's soccer players — Temoc Suarez, Carey Talley and Kerri Zavagnin — are still in the team selection process. With the arrival of a new coach, the situation is ambiguous.

"Cutdowns upon cutdowns have been made," Pope said. "Nobody really knows where they stand until they get that phone call."

Until they get that phone call, the four players will continue to drill themselves in the hopes that one, or all, will make the team. All four plan to take the spring semester off to train for the team.

"You want to do the best," Pope said. "But none of us are fighting for the same position. We look out for each other."

Pope described his path to the Olympics as a process. "I've been playing for the national team, and then all of a sudden, it's there," Pope said. "It doesn't fall in your lap, but it's in the back of your mind. You know it's coming. You see the Olympics growing up as a kid, and then it's tangible."

Even though Pope is currently in a frustrating limbo stage, and he missed out on his Thanksgiving break, his philosophy remains optimistic.

"Everyone has a bad day," Pope said. "You just keep chipping away at it. Don't try to put your whole life on it. Not too much pressure. Just go out and do your best and hope that that's enough."

Kari Haag, swimming

Last spring, Haag didn't think she was seriously going to train for the upcoming swimming trials. But after a successful post-season, her coaches sat her down.

now," Haag said. "I've been pretty tired."

She said it was added support to have two other swimmers practicing with her. "It's really encouraging because they know it's tough," Haag said. "I'm not doing this alone."

Haag said she had been able to balance her rigorous practice with her academics, but it had become a little tougher.

"If I'm up until 11:30 or 12 studying, and then I have to get up early for practice, it's hard," Haag said. "I need Sunday for a total recovery day. Overall, all athletes and students need to balance their time."

Haag said one sacrifice she had made was her social life, but it didn't bother her.

"I have the rest of my life to do these things — staying up late, eating what I want," Haag said. "If I want to do what I want to do, I need to take advantage of it. After March, we'll see. Until then, keep making sacrifices."

Lynda Lipson, track and field

"My body, I always feel like I'm in pain, and that's a pain," Lynda Lipson said.

Understandably, Lipson, the strengthening and conditioning coach for non-revenue sports and football, is training for the javelin trials.

"I do something six days a week," Lipson said. "I lift four days a week, swim four, do cardio one, sprints two, plyo two, technical two and throw two."

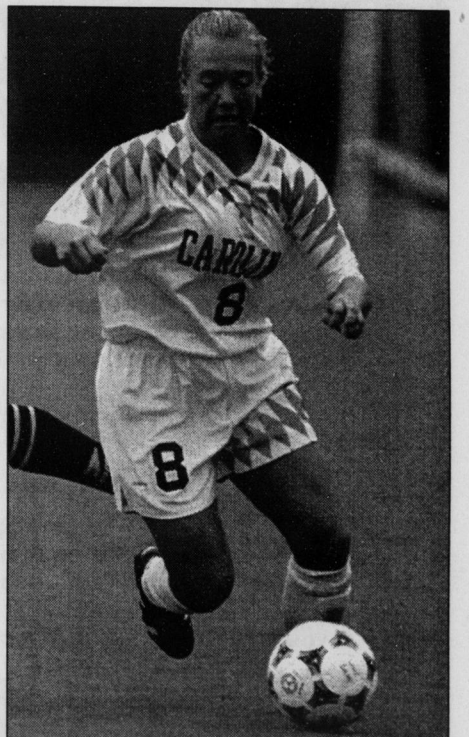
So, what does she do otherwise? "I work," Lipson said.

Sounds tough, but Lipson, a 1993 UNC graduate, said balancing practice and work had not really been a problem.

"I've had a lot of help," she said. "My boss has been great, and the swim and track coaches make it easier for me."

Lipson said she had maintained a positive attitude about her training. "On days when things don't go well, I just try to stay positive," Lipson said. "Stay on plan and things will eventually happen."

She said she used to get angry if things didn't go well, but she learned this approach wasn't conducive to practice. "Negative energy zaps out the positive,"



Debbie Keller and four other UNC women's soccer players appear to have a shot at heading to Atlanta this summer.

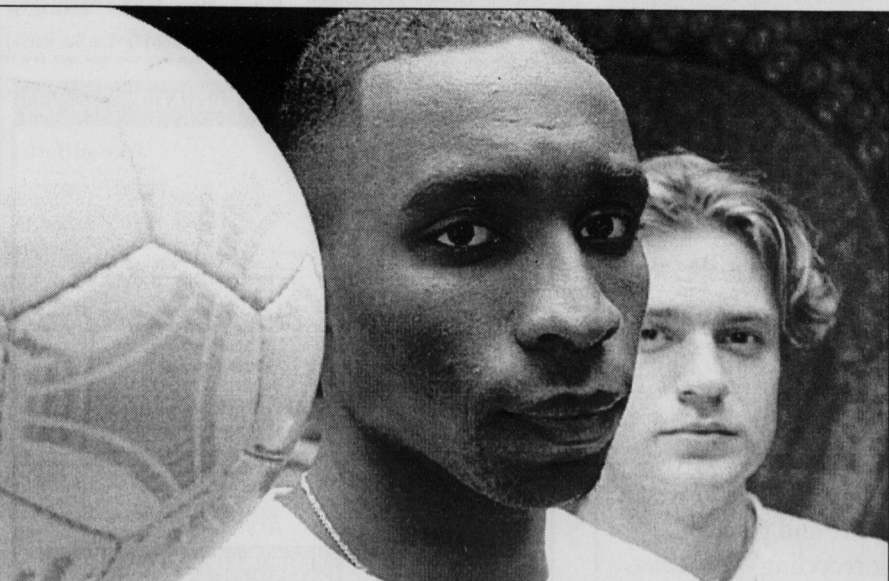
said Lipson, who also competed in the 1992 Olympic trials. "I try hardest to do my best. I have as good a chance as anyone else."

Lipson said reaching the Olympics had been a goal of hers growing up. "I was always, 'I'm going to make the Olympics in something,'" she said. "And then came track and field."

Lipson started competing in track and field as a student at UNC, and is used to giving up certain perks as an athlete.

"Socially, you miss out on some stuff," Lipson said. "You get out what you put into it. I don't mind sacrificing."

Lipson's sacrifices will continue until the qualifying rounds in June. "June 17, that date will determine the rest of my life," Lipson said.



Eddie Pope and Carey Talley are two UNC soccer players who are taking next semester off with Temoc Suarez and Kerri Zavagnin to take part in the ongoing U.S. team selection process.