



Darrell Elston

Improved play in recent Russian trip

Darrell Elston confident of his game

by Bill Kay
Sports Editor

Carolina backcourt ace Darrell Elston wasn't kidding when he said Russia lacked the luxuries commonly found in America.

"The gym floors in Russia were made out of wooden planks and at half time they would have to be nailed down," he explained. "The floors were painted red and our white uniforms would be covered with red paint after a game."

The Tipton, Indiana, native recently returned from a not-so-publicized trip to Russia where he played 11 games against Russian and Finnish competition. At first he was disappointed that the big names from the U.S. college ranks were not playing but after a few games realized the makeshift U.S. team was well represented.

Starting alongside Elston in the backcourt was Brian Winters of South Carolina fame and now the property of Los Angeles in the NBA; Leonard Robinson of Tennessee State at center; Leonard Gray and Roscoe Pondexter, both from Long Beach State, at the forwards.

"We lost two of our first three games in

Russia, but won the last five out of six," Elston recalls. "We spent three weeks in Russia and ended our trip by winning two games in Finland. After we started playing as a unit, playing well together, the Russians respected us."

So, the relatively unheralded U.S. squad finished with a fine 8-3 record. Elston averaged 11 points per game and gained the accolades of veteran observers.

Elston was amazed that every game was played in front of a packed house but was miffed at the behavior of the fans.

"The fans were totally quiet during the game except when a foul was called on us. They made hardly any noise, quite a difference from the ACC."

In a real sense, Elston expanded his consciousness during his experience abroad. "I was amazed to see the people work so hard, especially the women. Women were paving the roads when we arrived."

"I decided to go for the publicity since the NBA draft had been on the back of my mind for months and I felt getting some added exposure couldn't hurt my chances getting drafted," said Elston, a counselor at Dean

Smith's basketball camp along with George Karl and Dennis Wuycik. "I learned in Russia what I lost my sophomore year (sitting on the bench) at UNC. I've improved on my pressure defense and my ballhandling ability is smoother as I was the point guard."

The Russian experience has given Elston added confidence in his overall game. He considers Larry Brown, the U.S. coach, "a good friend who knows almost as much about basketball as Dean Smith, he's that smart." It so happens that Brown, the new coach at Denver in the ABA, holds the rights to Elston and wants him in his backcourt next year. Brown has offered Darrell a no-cut contract and the 6-4 guard will go to Denver unless he is offered a similar deal by the Atlanta Hawks, the NBA team with his rights.

"I respect Larry Brown as a man and a coach but my main objective is to play in the NBA," Elston said. "Larry realizes the NBA is the better quality league and the ABA might not last. It all depends on whether I get a no-cut agreement with Atlanta."

Coach Dean Smith, whom Elston considers the "best coach in America" and

has "helped so many players improve their game and get into the pros", is handling his contract negotiations with Denver and Atlanta. Smith is close friends with both Brown and Cotton Fitzsimmons, head coach at Atlanta.

Atlanta, which traded away "Pistol Pete" Maravich because he wasn't a team-oriented player, has Elston in their plans for guard next season. Atlanta must become more patterned offensively to be successful as they are trying to develop a team around young players.

Elston, possessing one of the prettiest and most accurate shots in the game, has the advantage of having played under Coach Dean Smith's team-oriented system at UNC and feels it will benefit him while trying to fit in with Atlanta, which will be trying to add the team dimension to its style.

This past season at Carolina the smooth shooting operator proved to be one of the most improved guards in the country. Averaging 16 points a game and shooting nearly 50 per cent from the floor, he took up the offensive slack when George Karl graduated last year. Despite the fact that his

shooting percentage fell the second half of the year, he maintained his value to the team with his team play and agile defense.

Unnoticed as a Carolina sophomore, Elston didn't play in the first half of any game all year. This is when he became determined to make a name for himself and play in the professional ranks.

Coach Smith describes Elston's "hard-nosed" attitude as a quality the pros are seeking. In addition, Elston possesses the natural physical characteristics (pure shooter, strong defensive ability, strength, size, 6-4, and deceptive quickness) the pros are looking for in a guard.

Elston feels the first year as a pro is a period of adjustment to a new level of excellence.

"I must take a wait and see attitude," he says. "I'll see what I must improve on, but if I didn't think I was going to make the pros I wouldn't try to go into it."

If Elston could solve the problem of dribbling a ball on those tricky Russian floors, he shouldn't find it too unaccommodating as a professional basketball player.

Bobby Jones signs with Rockets

Denver (UPI)—Bobby Jones, a 6-foot-9 defensive standout from North Carolina, has been signed to a multi-year contract by the Denver Rockets.

It was the first major signing for 1974 by an ABA team.

Terms were not disclosed but the pact is believed to be in excess of \$1.5 million for six years.

Official announcement of the signing was made Tuesday at a news conference.

Rockets owner Frank M. Goldberg called the signing "one of the most significant in

ABA and Rockets' history."

"We wanted Jones for better than a year," said Goldberg. "But he was already on Carolina's negotiations list and it was not until we hired Carl Scheer and Larry Brown, that we were able to obtain the rights to Bob."

Jones, a forward who averaged 16.1 points and 9.9 rebounds a game at North Carolina last season, was originally selected by the Carolina Cougars in a special 1973 draft.

He was chosen in the first round of this year's 1974 NBA draft by Houston, but

negotiations with Houston were terminated Saturday night.

Scheer and Brown were signed by the Rockets two weeks ago shortly after Alex Hannum was fired as coach following a 37-47 season. They were able to obtain rights to Jones in exchange for "future considerations."

"The confidence placed in me by Mr. Goldberg was a big factor in my coming here," Jones said at a news conference.

"Another factor was Larry Brown and his style of play—which emphasizes defense,

hustle and ball-hawking."

During his three year varsity career at UNC Jones averaged 13.7 points and 8.9 rebounds while shooting 60.8 per cent from the field, best in Tar Heel history and ranking him among the top five in NCAA career statistics.

He was a starter on the U.S. Olympic team in 1972 and was named to play in three major post-season games in 1974, including the Coaches East-West game.

Goldberg said when he purchased the Rockets franchise two years ago he learned that Denver had never signed a first-round draft choice. "We made a commitment to do that and to win a championship," he said. "We're 50 per cent along the road now."

"Bobby Jones is a winner. He's only been associated with teams and individuals that are successful."

Scheer said Goldberg has "shown a commitment to have a top contender in Denver. When I was made the Rockets general manager, he asked me who was the best coach. I said Larry Brown, and we went out and got him."

"Then he asked me who was the best college player behind Bill Walton, and I said Bobby Jones, and we acquired the rights to him. We're not happy with what's happened in the past, but we're committed to excellence. This is a big beginning."



Carolina drops two

Errors cost the Carolina Tar Heels their second consecutive game Wednesday night as two miscues in the fifth inning allowed Appalachian State to pull out a 2-1 victory.

The game was played before a throng of supporters attracted to Boshamer because of Merchants night, and the best thing to happen all night was the giving away of free gifts as the Heels sleep-walked their way to defeat.

UNC stranded 12 runners and collected only three hits off of two App pitchers. Aided by 10 walks the Heels were simply not able to push a run across until the eighth inning after a walk to Jim Baldwin, a two base hit by Greg Leighton and error by the Apps' third baseman.

The Apps scored all the runs they needed off starter and loser Mike Merritt in the fifth inning on two walks, one hit and two errors.

The Heels saw golden opportunities slip by as their bats betrayed them.

Mike Merritt hardly deserved to lose as he looked fairly sharp in going the route and scattered only six hits. He didn't help himself however when he walked two straight batters in the costly fifth.

In a game marred by eight UNC errors, yes your sight has not gone away, Campbell "eked" out a 14-13 victory in 12 innings.

The loss negated 17 Tar Heel hits. Twelve of Campbell's 14 runs were unearned.

When Early Jones blasted a grand slam home run in the sixth the Heels were up 7-2 and apparently had clear sailing.

But Campbell got four gift runs in the sixth to narrow the gap. Then Steve Rackley ripped a two-run homer for UNC and helped increase the lead to 11-7 before four more unearned runs sent the game into extra innings.

Jimmy Baldwin blasted a two-run homer in the 10th, but Campbell tied it on two doubles and a throwing error by Arrowood.



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