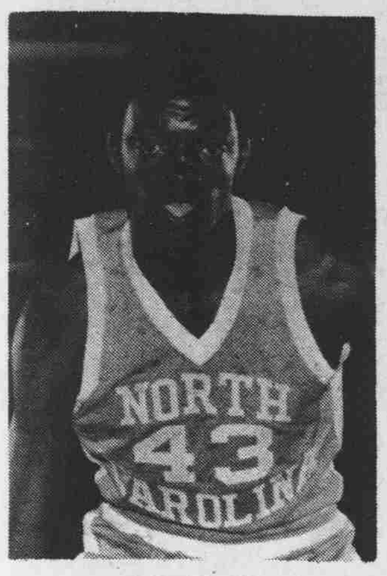
Virgil isn't complaining because of lack of playing time



John Virgil

by Pete Mitchell
Staff Writer

A challenge to basketball trivia buffs: Who was the leading scorer of the UNC rookies in the Nov. 13, 1976 Blue-White game?; how many points did he score?, and what is he doing now?

It's not difficult to remember freshman John Virgil's 25-point performance after the homecoming football game against Virginia. But as for the third part of the question—well, until very recently, John had been seeing considerable action during pre-game layup drills, and that's about it.

"If you look at it like a depth chart in football, John Kuester would be in the number two position followed by (Tom) Zaliagiris," Tar Heel Coach Dean Smith said following the North-South Doubleheader. "Then Virgil would be next."

Apparently, North Carolina's best high school player of a year ago still has some things to learn. But he's the first to admit that and the last to complain about his limited play.

"I think I've made progress since the beginning of the season," he said. "It's been a lot harder for me to adjust than it's been for the other freshmen on our team. I'm sure they played the same position in high school as they play now. I played center high school, and I'm playing guard.

"I'm not used to handling the ball so much and working with picks and screens," the 6-foot-5 Virgil said. "My defense is what Coach Smith is working with me most on. I think it's getting better, though."

Virgil's trouble with the smaller, quicker guards makes one wonder if he wouldn't be better off as a forward, in the "swingman" position Walter Davis would be vacating after this year.

Offensively, he does resemble Davis with the shooting touch, good spring in his legs and what some observers have described as an uncanny ability to lose his man on the wing or along the baseline.

Defensively, of course, there's no comparison at this stage, but Smith is gaining confidence in the Elm City rookie as the season progresses. He's used him in the last three games when the score has still been close.

At Clemson, Virgil was inserted in the second half in hopes of sparking the overwhelmed UNC cagers. He hit his first shot, missed his second attempt and quietly returned to the bench.

Virgil played five minutes in both North-South games in Charlotte over the weekend, collecting a flying slam dunk against each opponent and then donning the warm-up jacket once again.

"You saw that dunk he made tonight," Smith said after the Georgia Tech game Friday, "but you probably didn't see his man get two baskets on him."

After the romp over Furman Saturday, Smith compared Virgil's growing pains to those experienced by departed UNC center Mitch Kupchak.

"He's progressing a lot like Mitch was as a freshman," Smith explained. "He needs to learn a lot still, but once he does, I think he'll keep adding to it."

Still, however, those who saw Virgil in pick-up games with Robert McAdoo, Kupchak and others before official practices began and witnessed his play in the two Blue-White games find it hard to believe that he's played in only 14 of 19 Tar Heel games and attempted just 16 shots from the field.

"Scoring those points in the Blue-White game was a big boost to my confidence, because I knew I could play in the ACC," Virgil said. "Still, I was just shooting, you know, not really moving with the ball or handling it much."

Against N.C. State, Wake Forest, Clemson and even in the close victory over Maryland, a hot shooter coming off the bench would have been hunky-dory. Bruce Buckley, Zaliagiris and Dudley Bradley have filled in adequately but have hardly touched off the offensive holocaust that a "sixth man" ideally supplies.

"Being a sixth man, that appeals very much to me," Virgil said. "I'm not the one who decides who plays and who doesn't, though. Last year, when I thought about where I'd fit in with the team, I just wanted to contribute in any way I could. If it's in a reserve role, that's okay; I'm very happy here. The year of learning was worth it.

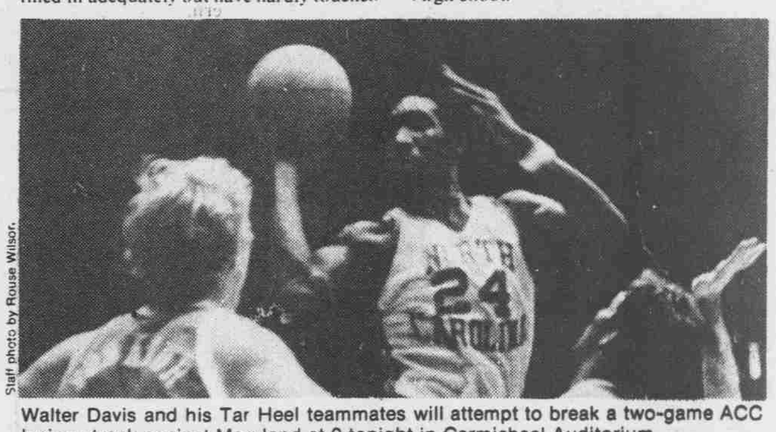
"Right now, defense is my problem, but I hope I'll be given more chances like in the Clemson game the rest of the year," he said.

It was anything but a frustrated, disenchanted player who talked about his "year of learning." He scored 25 points in the game Phil Ford could do nothing right in two seasons ago. It's safe to say that Ford has made reasonably good progress since then, and probably a pretty good bet that in the near future, Tar Heel ticket holders won't have to come to Carmichael early to see Virgil shoot.

UNC rated 12th

NEW YORK (UPI) The United Press International Board of Coaches' college basketball ratings with won-loss records through the games of Sunday, Feb. 6, and number of first place votes in parentheses:

Team	Points
1. San Francisco (31) (23-0)	396
2. UCLA (8) (18-2)	361
3. Louisville (1) (16-2)	230
4. Michigan (17-2)	228
5. Kentucky (1) (16-2)	211
6. Wake Forest (1) (18-2)	**179**
7. Marquette (14-2)	104
8. Nevada-Las Vegas (15-2)	87
9. Alabama (17-2)	86
10. Tennessee (16-3)	82
11. Cincinnati (15-3)	68
12. (tie) NORTH CAROLINA (15-4)	**51**
(tie) Arkansas (19-1)	51
14. (tie) Arizona (16-3)	45
(tie) Minnesota (16-1)	45
16. Providence (18-2)	26
17. Utah (16-4)	18
18. Missouri (17-4)	13
19. (tie) Syracuse (18-2)	**9**
(tie) Clemson (17-3)	**9**



Staff photo by Rouse Wilson

Walter Davis and his Tar Heel teammates will attempt to break a two-game ACC losing streak against Maryland at 9 tonight in Carmichael Auditorium.

Tar Heels seek victory against Turkey, Terps

by Grant Vosburgh
Sports Editor

Thanksgiving has long since passed. But in College Park, Md., where Lefty Driesell and his Terrapins have not had as much to be thankful for this season as they might have liked, turkey is once again the meal of the day.

The turkey in residence at Maryland is James "Turkey" Tillman, and Saturday, the 6-foot-4 forward was served to the Duke Blue Devils, who were hungry for a conference win. Unfortunately for the crowd at Cameron Indoor Stadium, this particular snack was prepared with all the fixings.

Tillman was suspended from the team three weeks ago for refusing to leave the bench after Driesell had told him to check into the game. He was reinstated just in time for the Terps' clash with Duke and he responded with Maryland's last eight points to hand the Blue Devils a 65-64 overtime loss.

Tillman and the Terps bring their winning ways to Chapel Hill tonight to face the Tar Heels at 9 p.m. The game will be televised on channel 5.

For the Tar Heels, it is a must Atlantic Coast Conference win, as are all of UNC's remaining league games.

The Terps hope to avenge a Jan. 22 loss, when the Heels pulled out a narrow 71-68 win at rowdy Cole Field House. Leading the attack will be smooth Brad Davis at guard and stocky forward Steve Sheppard, who has been suffering Achilles tendon problems.

But surprisingly, it's a parade of supporting actors like Tillman who have been providing heroics for Lefty's act. Other names that have experienced a fleeting moment in the bright lights are guards JoJo Hunter, Billy Bryant and Brian Magid, and front-court men Lawrence Boston, Mike Davis and Larry Gibson.

The problem lies in lack of consistency. But if the "Turkey" and his Terps are able to make everything fall in place at once, they're liable to make even the best team around eat crow.

JVs meet Frederick

Carolina's junior varsity basketball team, which collected its initial win of the season last week at Duke, hosts Frederick Military Academy at 6:55 p.m. Wednesday in Carmichael Auditorium.

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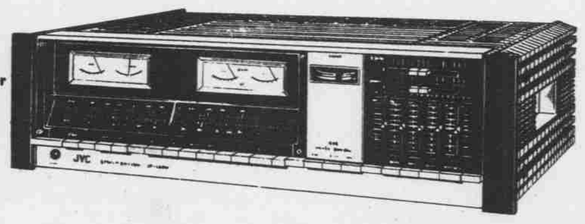

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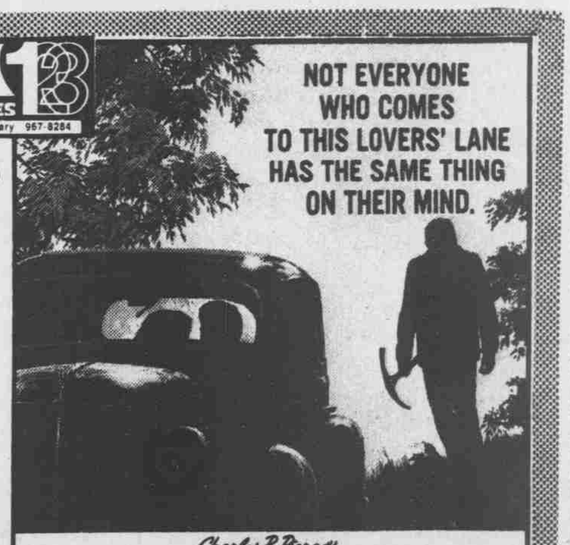

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