



Coach and players

Although the public dispute between UNC lacrosse coach Paul Doty (left) ended six weeks ago when he offered reinstatement to the players he earlier dismissed, troubles still simmer. Doty notes the change in his relationship with his players, while Joe Yevoli (42 at right) and Randy Gilbert (hugging Yevoli) say morale problems are still severe. Staff photos by Scott Johnston.



'It's broken our backs'

Lacrosse dispute technically over, but problems remain for Tar Heels

By FRANK SNYDER
Staff Writer

Six weeks ago the UNC lacrosse team was involved in a player-coach dispute that threatened the existence of the team for the rest of the spring.

The players weren't satisfied with the job head coach Paul Doty and his assistants were doing.

Doty said some of the players had "negative attitudes."

The dispute was publicized, and lacrosse fans saw a series of negotiations fail, options dropped, and finally 13 players were dismissed. Technically, the dispute ended when all but two of those players returned to the team a day later. Lacrosse was lacrosse again and coaches and players returned to business.

That was six weeks ago. Since then, the Tar Heels have won five of their last seven games, losing to Maryland and Hofstra, and currently are ranked ninth in the nation. Although their playoff hopes are still alive, Carolina must win its final two games — against N.C. State (ranked No. 12), Saturday in Raleigh and Navy (No. 4) May 13 in Chapel Hill, in order to be considered for an NCAA playoff bid.

That kind of pressure was not expected this season; the Tar Heels felt confident of an NCAA bid. They set their goals higher — like a national championship. That was before the team realized, however, that a dispute was inevitable.

"I saw what was going on," attackman Joe Yevoli said. "I felt that he (Doty) was hurting too many people, and that something needed to be done."

As a result, the players voiced their grievances against Doty with the hopes that some kind of change would be made. However, since the dispute, things have not improved, and the kind of unity that is needed for a national championship in lacrosse is desperately lacking on the Tar Heel squad.

According to the players, the frustration is still there.

In fact, the gap between players and coaches has grown even wider.

To date, four more players — Bret Steidle, Dave Yingling, Mike Melamerson, and Bob Volker — have either voluntarily withdrawn themselves or been dismissed from the team, in addition to the original two — Marty Sutton and Chuck Wenzell — who chose not to return. Wenzell, a freshman defenseman, would like to play next year, but only if a change is made.

"If there is not a new coach here, then I'm gone — I'm transferring," he said.

Melamerson, also a freshman, feels the same: "I don't hold any personal grudges against Doty, but I certainly couldn't play for him next year. I don't respect the man."

That leaves Carolina with a current roster of 29 players, who all have been hurt in some way by the dispute. "It's broken our backs," Yevoli said. "We were looking forward to a great season, and now this happens. It's really hard to get into games."

Middle Randy Gilbert, a tri-captain, feels that the emotion against Doty has intensified since the dispute. "It's hurt our concentration," he said. "There's not as much enthusiasm anymore."

The players aren't the only ones to have been affected by the dispute, however. Doty

SPORTS

- Men's golf in Southern Intercollegiate in Athens, Ga.
- Women's softball at home vs. ECU, UNC-G, 2 p.m.
- Baseball at home vs. Wilmington, 2 p.m.

critics the dramatic change in his relationships with players whom he once considered his friends.

"It's very disappointing that people you thought you knew — you didn't," he said.

"It's affected my relationship with everybody on the team," he said. "I hold more respect for some of the players the way they handled themselves in the situation. For others — less."

As a coach to his players on the field, Doty

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said that he conducts his practices in a much more "businesslike, professional" manner than before the dispute. "I am no longer as friendly," he said. "There's not the fun that there used to be."

Consequently, the scars of the dispute are slow in healing, and a "cold war" atmosphere continues to exist. "I think everyone's let their personal feelings affect the way they reacted to the situation," Gilbert said, "especially the coaches, by kicking the players off. It wasn't a personal thing to begin with, but it has become so."

"The way it is now, no one is playing for the coaches at all," Yingling said, who voluntarily withdrew from the team two weeks ago. "They're doing it for themselves."

Among the players, there is no longer the tension that forced a split for and against Doty during the dispute. "All the players that were really discontented are no longer on the team," Gilbert said. "I think the rest of us just want to win as many games as we can and get the whole thing over with."

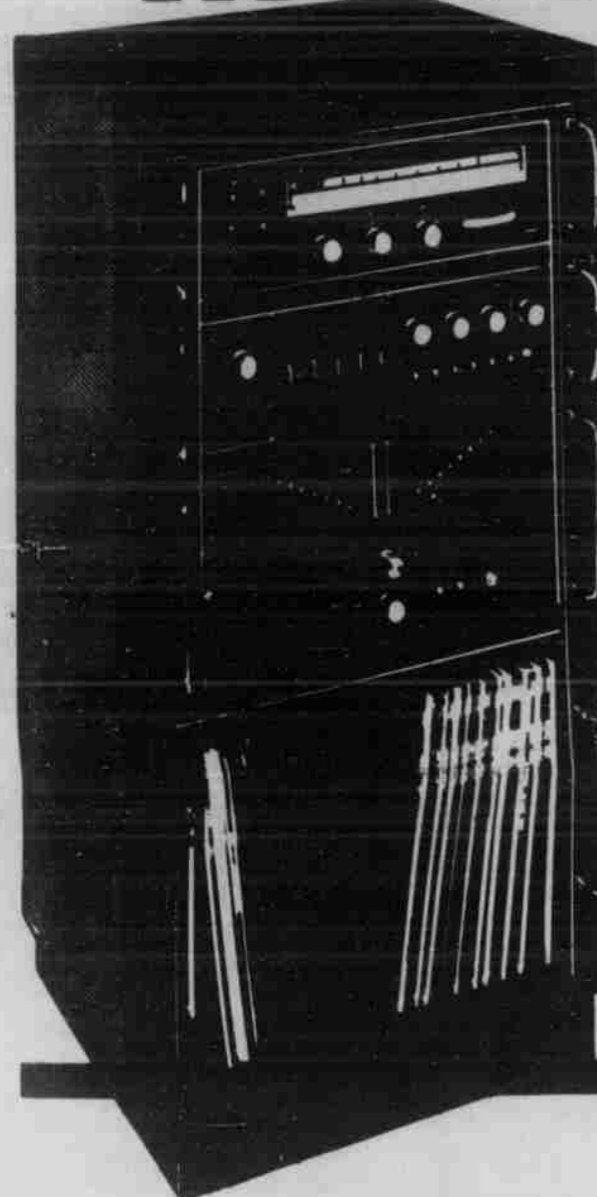
Thus, the season continues for Carolina — not necessarily in dismal fashion, but certainly far short of preseason expectations. As for the future, no one is sure what will happen. Rumors circulate from day to day in speculation of Doty's status, but even he abstains from a definite decision right now.

According to several of the players, however, there is only one choice to make. "I think he'd (Doty) be smart to resign," Yevoli said. "The situation here — the discontent — will be the same next year unless Doty is gone."

Gilbert agrees: "I don't feel Doty has the ability to coach a major college team. He doesn't command respect, he doesn't administer discipline, and he doesn't know how to motivate his players."

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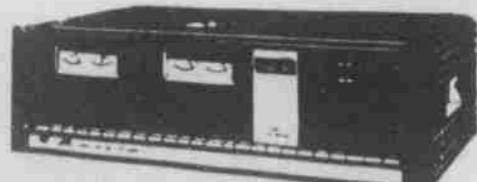
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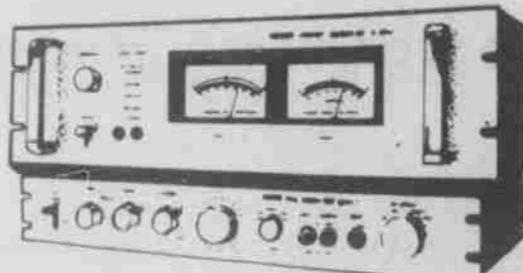
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