

O'Koren

Freshman flash lasts a career

"...O'Koren chipped in 16, including two on a devastating dunk and two on a baseline drive which was so perfectly executed it could have been used for a coaching film..."
—DTH Sports Editor Grant Vosburgh describing the 1976 Blue-White game

When Tar Heel fans got their first glimpse of Mike O'Koren on Nov. 13, 1976, it might have been the first time any North Carolinian had fallen in love at first sight with a Northerner speaking Brooklynese by way of Jersey City.

He was just one of six Tar Heel freshmen that year. Dave Colascott, Steve Kraficis, John Virgil, Jeff Wolf, Rich Yonakor and O'Koren comprised the country's best rookie class. And they all went to the NCAA finals in 1977. Kraficis moved to Iowa, but the other four join O'Koren in closing out strong careers.

O'Koren started his first game, becoming only the second freshman (after Phil Ford) to do so. And his last home game against Duke might just go down in the history books, too—for noise levels. "That last game against Duke was probably the highlight of my career," O'Koren said this week while waiting to play a pick-up game in Woollen Gym.

But there are other remembrances, like that trip to the national finals and playing "with guys like Phil (Ford), Walt (Davis), (Tommy) LaGarde, Dudley (Bradley). I've had a good career, made a lot of friends. And I think I played the best ball I can."

O'Koren's name will be high in the Carolina record books: seventh in points, seventh in rebounds, fifth in assists. Only Larry Miller joins O'Koren in the Top 10 of all three.

"Mike's had a tremendous career," UNC head basketball coach Dean Smith said. "He made (at least) one first team All-American team in each of the last three years. He personified the team player during his four years." Tack on All-Atlantic Coast Conference honors in his sophomore and his senior seasons, too.



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But there's more to Mike O'Koren. "He's done so much for so many people," Smith said. "He seldom said 'no' to charitable organizations. He visits children at the hospital. He works with the Newman Center."

The future looks good for O'Koren. "I'm proud of the fact that I'm graduating," he said. "Come May 11th, I'll be walking—with my mom in the crowd." And after graduation? "I'll go in the first 10 (NBA draft) picks, it looks like...I'd like to play in New York (the Knicks) or for the (New Jersey) Nets." That way mama Rose will get to enjoy what we have since that Blue-White game.

—REID TUVIM

Yes, Carolina athletes are a little bit special

They come to Chapel Hill from faraway places like Jersey City, N.J., and Montgomery, Ala., from tiny towns like Burgaw and Sylva, from cities right in the backyard of the University, like Durham and Sanford.

They arrive on campus like any other student, anxious to see how much Mr. or Ms. Roommate has in common with them, apprehensive about college classes and the social scene.

But they come with another purpose: They are athletes. They are athletes who are students, or, as they are more often called, student athletes, folks who happen to excel at football, basketball, baseball, gymnastics, volleyball, track and field, tennis or any of a number of other sports.

They hit the line, bat the ball, do the flips, run the mile, set up a spike or make a dunk. They're good at what they do, or they wouldn't be playing their sport at Carolina. Often they were the best at their sport during Little League, junior high and high school, but when they arrive on campus on a hot August day of their freshman year, all that changes.

Like the high school smartie who discovers at the University he is not the only calculus whiz around, the athletes find out there are others around who are just as good as they.

Life becomes more complex. Four years later, when the wary freshman is a wise senior ready to collect a diploma, life is still complex.

Was four years—sometimes five years, if an athlete was red-shirted—of practice time and sweat worth it?

Most athletes who leave Carolina would say the time spent was worth it, whether the result is an A.B. and a six-figure contract or a B.S. and a \$15,000-a-year job. But, for those athletes that get neither, the time can be a hiatus between being a kid and growing up—and a time for trouble to brew.

Skip Wise, who left the Clemson basketball program after his freshman season a couple of years ago, is an example of the worst that can happen to a college athlete. After being named All-Atlantic Coast Conference his rookie year, Wise chose to turn professional and signed with the Baltimore Claws of the now-defunct American Basketball Association.

The Claws—and the ABA—folded before the Clemson star ever put on a Baltimore uniform. The next anyone heard of Skip Wise, he was in prison on drug charges.

Wise was named to that all-star team ahead of a fellow freshman named Phil Ford.

There aren't any Skip Wises among this group of Tar Heel seniors. They've completed successful collegiate athletic careers in their respective sports at North Carolina's first state university.

And that's something playgrounds full of kids from the coast to the mountains dream about doing someday, kids who spend their afternoons on city park tennis courts and backyard dirt basketball courts working to someday become a Tar Heel athlete.

It is athletes like these seniors who fuel their dreams. For that reason, if for no other, they are saluted.

—BILL FIELDS



Rouse

Sports just fun to J.R! J.R! J.R!

When James Herman "Jim" Rouse hangs up his No. 22 Carolina baseball jersey for the last time when this season ends, he'll have a long career in both football and baseball to remember.

"Athletics is just so much fun for me," Rouse said. "You can come out here and run around and enjoy yourself. I think it's great."

Rouse, a native of Wilmington, was a part of Carolina baseball when Walter Rabb, who was head coach for 31 years, retired and present coach Mike Roberts took over. Rouse said the change brought quite a few differences.

"Coach Roberts scheduled so many more games, we became so much more competitive," Rouse said. "He scheduled 50 or 60 games and that takes a lot out of you, especially at a university so fine academically as this."

But Rouse has not forgotten Coach Rabb. "He's like a grandfather to me," Rouse said.

When Rouse leaves, he will take with him the school's career stolen base record and the memory of one special moment from the spring of 1979—a home run off Ed Figueroa in an exhibition game against the New York Yankees. "That's one of the highlights of my life."

In comparing football and baseball, Rouse said while football can be more rewarding, baseball is more enjoyable. "Because you play so many games," he said, "you can get over a bad day quicker because you know you're going to play again tomorrow. If you have a bad day in football, you have to live with that for a week."



Rouse

Rouse said another fond memory from his Carolina years is the 1978 College World Series. He said he's not counting on professional baseball, but hopes a little and said he won't turn down an opportunity if it comes.

Rouse has been a crowd favorite in baseball and said he thinks he knows why. "Maybe," he said with a gleam in his eye, "they see that I'm having just as much fun as they are."

—DAVID POOLE

Taxman

Netter develops in UNC career

A young national tennis champion from Milwaukee, Wis., came to North Carolina four years ago. Now he leaves with a couple of Atlantic Coast Conference individual titles, a couple of ACC team crowns, a 76-21 record and a national ranking.

But more important to senior captain Gary Taxman is his development into a better person.

"In my four years at Carolina I've matured and developed," Taxman said. "The things I've learned as a Carolina student and a tennis player will be reflected in me throughout life."

Taxman came to Carolina from Milwaukee for several reasons: the weather, the campus, a former tennis circuit partner and UNC player, Cliff Skakle, and his head coach, Cliff's father Don Skakle.

Coach Skakle compiled a 416-51 record in 21 years before his death last Friday morning in Winston-Salem prior to the 1980 ACC championships.

"His (Skakle's) record speaks for itself," Taxman said. "I like his style and it's reflected through his players."

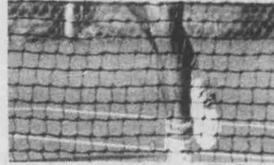
Taxman was the national junior doubles champion at 14 and was the No. 1 player in Wisconsin as a high school sophomore.

"I never liked the cold weather in Wisconsin so I knew I was going either West or South," he said.

At No. 6 singles as a freshman, Taxman immediately contributed with a league championship and a 17-3 record. "During my freshman year, qualifying for



Taxman



the NCAA's came a close second to winning the ACC as what I remember most over my career."

Playing No. 4 as a sophomore, Taxman had his most rewarding season. On top of an ACC championship tie with N.C. State, Taxman won the doubles title, was runner-up in singles competition and compiled a 25-4 record.

Taxman plans to enter the U.S. Tennis Association circuit after graduation and maybe in a couple of years law school in California. "But," Taxman said, "I will always have a part of Carolina and Carolina tennis in me."

—CLIFF BARNES

Kupec

Last season rewarding for QB

Some day, Matt Kupec hopes to be an athletic director. Today, he thinks about next week's National Football League draft. In the yesterday's of his North Carolina football career, Kupec thought quarterback. And two different Tar Heel head coaches thought a lot of him—with good reason. Kupec leaves the University after playing for both Bill Dooley and Dick Crum. He leaves with school career and season records for pass completions, attempts, touchdowns and total yards. In 1979 he threw 18 scoring passes, an Atlantic Coast Conference mark.

Mixed with the success was both physical and emotional pain. At times during his career, the Syosset, N.Y., native was injured, at other times he battled several quarterbacks for playing time, and sometimes he disagreed with coaching tactics and spoke out, later catching grief for it.

Through everything, he said he has learned. "I had an up-and-down career, that's for sure," Kupec said. "My football career was a growing experience. I learned a lot. This wasn't all glory. I've made mistakes and people learn from mistakes."

Kupec wants to give pro football a chance, and he said if he isn't drafted, he will try out this summer as a free agent.

But eventually, whether after a year off, or after a pro football career, Kupec wants to study athletic administration. He came to UNC surprised that the state universities in his home state didn't have big-time athletic programs. He'd like to see that change.

Kupec's career had several individual highlights, including being named Most Valuable Player in the 1977 Liberty Bowl and leading the Tar Heels to two last-minute wins over Duke.

He's especially fond of those Duke wins, but he said the Gator Bowl win over Michigan capped it all last December.

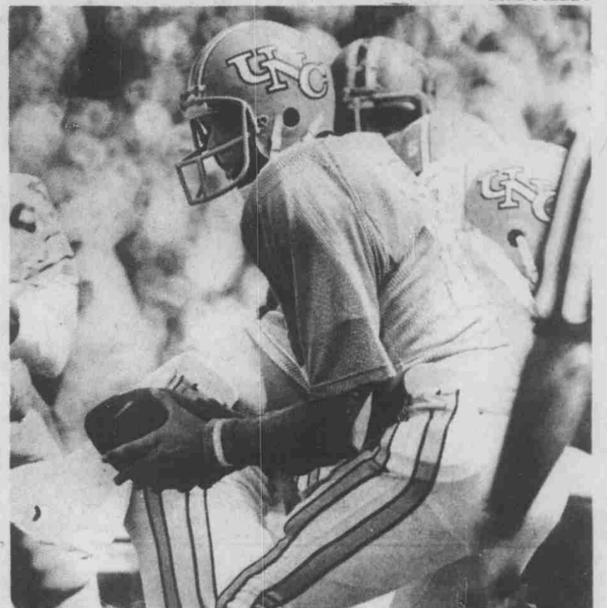
"It was really rewarding, for myself and for the team," he said. "It was really a tremendously rewarding season. We were coming off such a disappointing year (1978), when we were expected to do so well and we didn't."

In Kupec's eyes, his improvement from the 1978 to 1979 seasons was an example of the entire team's progress. "Until this point (79 season) I hadn't produced like I should have. I worked hard in the spring, and lifted weights to get stronger, like the rest of the team." It was an effort to improve, and Kupec's statistics last season showed it: almost 1,600 yards passing and a 54 percent completion rate.

He did everything but run well, with foot speed not his forte. But if he becomes a pro quarterback, he won't be asked to run much.

Maybe it's no coincidence the athlete he most admires was a pretty fair passer named Joe Namath.

—BILL FIELDS



Steidle

DTH/Andy James

Steidle

Stickman part of sport's spread

The final season for lacrosse co-captain Bret Steidle has been a successful one. His senior leadership is partly responsible for the young Tar Heels being only a victory away from sharing their first Atlantic Coast Conference lacrosse title.

The wait for a championship has been difficult, but for this year's team it has been rewarding. "I'm hoping that we'll make it to the national tournament," Steidle said. "This is the year."

The Narbeth, Pa., native has played tough all over the turf from his midfield position. UNC coach Willie Scroggs wants his midfielders strong on defense and offense as well, and Steidle fits this mold perfectly.

Steidle credits Scroggs with Carolina's leap into the national lacrosse rankings. "The program is improving a lot," he said. "Scroggs has turned it around. He's all business out on the field. He wants to win. We don't mess around out there."

Scroggs' lacrosse practices consist of two-and-a-half hours of intense hitting and hard running, but neither the practices nor the game pressures take away from Steidle's pleasure on the lacrosse field.

"I enjoy playing lacrosse," he said. "There are a lot of tough spots you have to endure, but I love lacrosse."

Steidle's playing time increased last year in Scroggs' first season. The Tar Heels finished the year with a 5-3 record, but a loss to N.C. State to conclude the year prevented them from going to the NCAA's.

This season has been highlighted by a 14-5 defeat of top-ranked Virginia. A spot in the nationals is waiting for Carolina if it can beat State and Washington & Lee to conclude the year.

The growth of the lacrosse program at UNC is indicative of the sport's spread from the traditional areas of Maryland and New York. By being part of Carolina lacrosse, Steidle has helped shape this trend—one he said he hoped will continue.

"Lacrosse is an expanding sport," he said. "It's becoming very popular in many areas."

—GEOFFREY MOCK

Mario

Wrestler reaches his potential in Carolina mat program

When Carter Mario came to North Carolina in 1976, the wrestling program was still in the growing stages, looking to rise above the rest of Atlantic Coast Conference. Leaving UNC with two straight ACC team titles and a national ranking is a credit to his leadership.

"He's an excellent leader," UNC coach Bill Lam said. "He's the type of competitor I wanted for the program. Carter leads by example by working hard in practice."

In addition to the two ACC team titles, the Tar Heels have compiled a 26-1 record over the last two seasons, including 23 consecutive dual meet wins. Many of these wins were close, and it was in these tight matches that Mario's leadership was felt.

"Whenever I would need a key win, Carter would come up with one," Lam said. "He saved a couple of years of my life by taking the pressure off with big wins."

Mario reached his potential his junior year as he swept undefeated through the dual meets in the 158-pound class and the

Tar Heels won their first regular-season ACC title.

He excelled in post-season tournaments, winning the ACC 158-pound title and advancing to the round of 16 in the NCAA tourney.

As a senior he moved up a weight class to 167 pounds, perhaps the most difficult class in the conference.

He started off well in the new weight, taking second places in both the Carolina Invitational and the prestigious Lehigh Invitational.

After some midseason problems, he rebounded to gain key wins in close ACC matches against N.C. State, Clemson and Virginia. He finished the season with an 18-4 record.

He was sidetracked in his effort to win a second ACC individual title, but his 10-2 win for third place over Virginia's Jerry Young was necessary for Carolina to edge N.C. State for the team title.

Mario will stay in Chapel Hill next year and help Lam with the wrestling program.

—GEOFFREY MOCK

The Daily Tar Heel Sports

The stories and pictures on this and the preceding page are about some of the best Carolina athletes who finished their collegiate careers this year. Every senior isn't profiled here, because space limitations won't permit it. *The Daily Tar Heel* hopes these pages will suffice.

Making any varsity team as a walk-on at UNC is an admirable feat. To go on and be an all-state selection and the captain of the team four years later is even more astonishing.

But that's exactly what fifth-year senior Jackie Kimbro did for coach Beth Miller's volleyball team. An astute instructor spotted Kimbro in his volleyball class, referred the freshman to Miller and the road to volleyball success began.

Kimbro made the team as a sophomore, was a tri-captain and an all-state selection her junior year. She was team captain in 1979. But her contributions to the team were as much spiritual as physical, Miller said.

"Jackie isn't a real flashy player," Miller said, "but she's consistent. She's the most consistent player we've ever had on the team."

That consistency contributed to her leadership both on and off the court.

Although she's basically a low-keyed person, her encouragement and team support earned the respect that go along with the title of team captain.

"Her manner itself is a stabilizing factor," Miller said of the Greensboro resident. "She's basically a quiet person and is real dedicated. That type of influence is an important factor."

Kimbro agreed with Miller's assessment and characterized herself as a silent leader.

"My leadership role has been more of a silent one because I'm not a real outgoing person," she said. "I do what I think should be done and help people who come off the bench by talking to them and relaxing them. Most of all I try to be consistent on the court."

"Jackie is a good leader," Miller said, "and not just teamwise. Her values help as far as her contribution to the team."

—MARJO RANKIN