

Peterson is role player who just does his job



Peterson is battling Smith, Hale at point.

By **FRANK KENNEDY**
Assistant Sports Editor

It's no secret that the press and, more often than not, the fans try very hard to put athletes on a pedestal and treat them like demigods. There is that attempt to find a great mystique lurking within.

The press will ask just about anything to get the inside story. Did you have a happy childhood? Why basketball? Don't you know the odds of making it in the pros? What kind of books do you read? What is your philosophy on life and are you a believer in Freudian psychology? Should you have been on the All-American team last year? Do you have visions of grandeur when you're on the court?

An attempt is made at taking an athlete and making him somehow different or more exotic from the rest of us.

In walks Buzz Peterson.

He came to North Carolina the 1981 N.C. prep player of the year, ahead of the likes of Michael Jordan. And, he had a high school reputation of getting cute at times on the court. He'll even admit it himself.

So here must be one of those athletes with that mystique; one of those big-mouthed, showboating, egocentric players who wants the world. He wants to start every minute of every game of every season and he wants millions and millions of dollars when he goes professional. If he gets less than any of that, he's going to cry about it. Right? Think again.

Peterson is, to put it simply, the epitome of the role player. He won't ask for more unless it comes to him, and if he doesn't start every game, he isn't going to sit on the bench and mope about it.

The junior point guard from Asheville just wants to do his job.

"I just want to give the team more of a leader, and as a point guard try to get things set up," he said. "I want to make sure everything's running right, calling the right offenses and defenses, have a good assist ratio, keep the turnovers down and just help the team to win in any way I can."

But surely, there must be more he wants out of being on a team that is the preseason pick to win its second national championship in three years?

"As long as I'm out there working as hard as I can to help the team, that's all," he said. "I haven't really set my goals that high."

It is understandable that Peterson would not shoot for the moon just yet. After all, one factor after another has kept him from attaining anything near the status that his classmate Jordan has achieved in the same amount of time.

During his first two years, Peterson played behind the heels to the point position, Jimmy Black and Jimmy Braddock. Last year, however, his playing time increased, especially early in the year when coach Dean Smith was shuffling the lineup.

But all playing time for Peterson came to an abrupt end when, during the middle of the season, he sustained torn ligaments in his knee, ending his sophomore season.

"Being hurt took everything out of me because it was so depressing," he said. "And it sets you back so far. There was so much to learn again (after recovering), it was like starting over again."

If not for that injury, Peterson would have been heir to the point position this year, but instead finds himself in close competition with sophomore Steve Hale and freshman Kenny Smith.

Rumors have been circulating throughout the fall as to

who would handle that role, and only a week before the season-opener with Missouri, Peterson said he had no idea who coach Smith would choose.

"Each day the coach keeps switching us around," he said. "It's a goal of mine to start, but I'll be satisfied coming off the bench like I have been."

Peterson attributes his contentment with being a role player to the development in his mental attitude since first arriving at UNC.

"My first year I walked in kind of nervous and intimidated," he said. "But as time has gone along, I really enjoyed it here."

"(Basketball) takes a lot of my time, and studies do, too, but I think that will help me as a person. It was always a childhood dream to come to Carolina, and I don't have any second thoughts about coming here (instead of attending Kentucky, which he seriously considered).

He said that coach Smith's system has changed his ideas about his role on the court. "Sometimes in high school I got carried away, because it was easier to get away with that stuff because the competition wasn't as stiff," he said. "I don't consider myself a showboat or anything because coach Smith wouldn't go for that too much."

"I try to look at (basketball) differently on the court and off. What happens on the court stays there, and what happens off the court stays there; because if you have a bad practice or a bad game, it might reflect your personality off the court."

Peterson won't make any All-America teams this year, and will be quite a long-shoot his senior year, but that kind of thing really doesn't matter to him, because he has his priorities in order. He knows exactly what he is supposed to do.

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