

Matt Brust leaves UNC

Matthew Brust, freshman forward from Babylon, N.Y., has left the North Carolina basketball team and plans to enroll at St. John's University.

The 6-4, 210-pound Brust had played in eight of UNC's first 14 games, scoring two points and getting four rebounds.

"I'm just a homesick New Yorker," said Brust, in explaining his decision to withdraw from Carolina. "I had a good experience in Chapel Hill, but I missed New York too much."

I felt it would be a better situation for me to attend school closer to home."

UNC coach Dean Smith contacted St. John's coach Lou Carnesecca about Brust's playing for the Redmen.

Brust's departure leaves Carolina with just 10 healthy players, three of whom are walk-ons, for tonight's ACC showdown with N.C. State. Forward Joe Wolf and guard Curtis Hunter are out of action with injuries.

Basketball

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against State may have been the most important of the young season for the Tar Heels.

"The win at Clemson was nice, and the win at Maryland was nice, but we needed to win this one to prove that we could win the tight ones." Allen said.

Leake was joined in double figures by Poindexter with 18, Dawn Royster with 14 and Kathy Wilson with 10.

The win raises the Tar Heels to 8-7 overall and 3-2 in the ACC, while State drops to 10-4 and 4-1.

Heels in Lexington? Not so improbable anymore

First in a series of weekly Wednesday columns to be written by the DTH sports staff.

Fighting the glare of television camera lights and dealing with microphones stuck in front of his face, North Carolina coach Dean Smith addressed a media that was in awe of what his Tar Heels had done Sunday in being able to take Southern Methodist down to the wire in an 84-82 loss.

Playing the last 10 minutes with only one man over 6-5 against the Mustangs' taller, more physical front line, the Tar Heels were forced to sag back into a tight zone in hopes of keeping the ball away from center Jon Koncak. That they were not blown off the court, and that they actually had chances to tie the game in the final seconds was remarkable.

One reporter posed a remark very similar to that during the lockerroom interview, and Smith smiled. "I just

Frank Kennedy

"Wednesday"

hope Ranzino Smith won't be playing center before the year is over." Smith quipped, drawing grins from the press.

Smith's point was well-taken. Things had gotten so bad on Sunday that 5-11 freshman Ranzino Smith was at point, usual point guard Kenny Smith more or less at the second guard, with Steve Hale basically at small forward and 6-5 Buzz Peterson the power forward. All in a manner of speaking, of course. And at center — junior Warren Martin. Not a particularly pretty picture.

Until the end. What the Tar Heels proved with their ability to stay with No. 3 SMU despite virtually no big men (Brad Daugherty and Dave Popson had fouled out, and Joe Wolf was still recovering from a sprained ankle) is essentially twofold: 1) If UNC can get the foul trouble out of its game, not continue to fall apart with injuries, and peak at the right time, this team can challenge for a Final Four spot in Lexington, Ky.; and 2) If there was ever any question, even the slightest debate about who is the best coach in the country (usually it's Smith vs. Bob Knight), then Smith proved himself beyond any doubt Sunday.

That this edition of the Tar Heels could even be mentioned now as a title contender is surprising. This was a team that, during its Blue-White games and in a couple of early season contests — most notably that laughable Howard affair — looked about as intimidating as a tuna casserole. It was a team very atypical of UNC. It was clumsy, disorganized, without any clear leader. In short — this was a team that had no chance of winning 20 games.

But several things have emerged recently that prove this just isn't the same team as the one early on.

• Speed. It made the difference down the stretch Sunday. SMU coach Dave Bliss said the Tar Heels had the most "wilting" speed he'd seen in some time. The Smith show — Kenny and Ranzino — is lightning fast, and both have daring to go along with it. On more than one occasion Ranzino challenged Koncak inside, driving hard to the basket. Koncak wasn't always the winner.

• Depth. This is where the Tar Heels will not be lacking for at least the next four seasons. With power forward Joe Wolf healthy, there are the rapidly improving Dave Popson and Warren Martin to fill in. Martin has shown tremendous improvement, especially in the mental part of his game. Sunday, Martin actually played Koncak better than the more experienced Daugherty. He rarely passed up an inside scoring opportunity, tossing in shots over Koncak. In one questionable call, Martin knocked away a Koncak dunk attempt, but was called for a foul. The ball had not left Koncak's hands.

A body foul, perhaps, a goal tend, probably not.

• Offense. The Tar Heels will never have trouble scoring. In fact, they have scored less than 75 points only once — in Saturday's 65-61 win over Virginia.

• Steve Hale. He may, in the long run, be the difference. His improvement in all phases of the game has been impressive. Always good on defense, Hale is now the unseen threat on offense. His assists totals have been rising steadily, and he is highly successful shooting from all over the court. He chipped in 18 points, six assists, four steals and seven rebounds Sunday.

So, the Tar Heels are getting better — slowly, as coach Smith would want it. They should win 20 games, go to the NCAA tournament, and perhaps, just perhaps, pull off a win or two. But along the way, there are still a few humps to get over.

• This week's schedule. It is critical. N.C. State and Duke are here. It won't be easy — maybe next to impossible — to win there. The ACC champion must win at home, if nowhere else.

• Injuries. Curtis Hunter is out for nearly a month. Even when he returns, it may take some time before he is effective again. And when Wolf returns, probably within the next week, how effective will he be?

• Hackitis. UNC's foul troubles hit hardest on Sunday, but there had been several earlier games in which more than one player picked up four fouls before the final buzzer. If this problem continues, even the strength of UNC's bench will be pushed to the limit.

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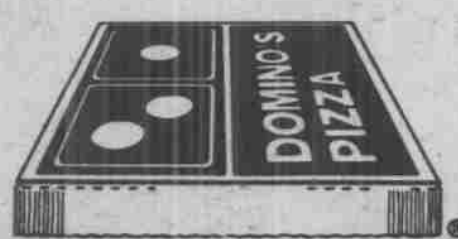
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