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## Popson deals with high expectations

By EDDY LANDRETH  
Staff Writer

It is the single word that can become the worst nightmare for some athletes: potential. Potential is a label advertising probable greatness, but it can become a ball and chain not easily loosened.

Charles Dickens wrote "Great Expectations," but UNC senior David Popson has spent the last three years living with them.

"Just coming in here, they labeled me the next Bobby Jones," Popson said. "That's hard to live up to. There's only one Bobby Jones and he's a great player."

In Popson's case, the expectations were unrealistic, UNC coach Dean Smith said.

"I can see why Dave's build reminds one of Bobby," Smith said. "But certainly, it's a danger to compare someone to any one player."

Wipe away the prejudice created by the initial predictions, Smith said, and the true picture of Popson would emerge from all the hype.

"If Dave hadn't come in with all the publicity, everybody would be able to see what I see and what Dave sees, which is a great improvement."

Previous predictions aside, Popson said that he has worked hard to correct the flaws in his game.

"I haven't been pleased with my concentration, and I worked hard on that over the summer," he said. "That affects the whole game."

The lack of concentration in the past caused him several problems, Popson said.

"Sometimes I'd just lose it (concentration) when I'd get into a game, in certain situations," he said. "A player might make me mad. Sometimes a ref would get to me. A ref would call what I would think was a bad call on me and I'd just lose my head and start thinking, 'Why is this happening to me?' I just can't let that happen this year."

"I feel I've progressed over the summer and I'm more mature this year."

Teammate Joe Wolf said that he has seen Popson improve this past summer.

"I expect him to play a lot better because he's a lot looser now," Wolf said. "He's playing with confidence. He's definitely concentrating more. I think he worked hard on his body



Popson was compared to Bobby Jones coming out of high school

this summer and he's in great physical shape, and his mind is also there. He's concentrating so well."

Smith said that he's seen the effects of Popson's mental preparation in practice this fall.

"I think he's done that (improved his concentration)," Smith said. "He's concentrating on making the easy play on offense and concentrating at all times to go after the basketball and become more aggressive."

Before practice began this fall, Smith said that Popson needed to improve his rebounding and strength. Now, after several weeks of practice, Smith said that he can see many improvements in Popson's play.

"Dave's learned positioning and he's gotten stronger," Smith said. "He has demonstrated in practice good

judgment on when to take a shot and when not to. He has demonstrated a consistent effort on the backboards, which we were looking for."

"We're really pleased with his preseason work. It's by far the best he's played since he's been here."

Popson said his goals this year are to rebound and play good defense, and as with the rest of the team, to avoid becoming too tense.

Toward the end of last season, the team felt it had to win, which resulted in a strained atmosphere. Popson said that this year must be different.

"I look at it this way," Popson said. "This is one year, and we've got a great team here. The guys get along great and we're just going to have a lot of fun this year. The main thing is to relax and don't feel like I have to do this. That just makes you tense."

"We're going to try to make the atmosphere a lot looser on and off the court. Last year we did feel like we had to win, especially in the late season. It just made everything really tense. We just didn't play loose. Louisville, they played really loose in that game (in the NCAAs against UNC) and they came out on top."

Three years have passed for Popson and Bobby Jones he is not. This year, David Popson would just like to be himself.

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