

Sports

Nhi Le's determination, fencing spark team

By LAURA GRIMMER
Staff Writer

When UNC fencer Nhi Lan Le, a senior business major from Decatur, Ga., has a dream, you have to feel sorry for her roommate.

"I go to bed thinking of fencing," the Vietnam native said. "I'll think of new attacks and defenses in my sleep and lunge off the bed."

It is this kind of dedication that makes Nhi's ultimate goal the Olympics. Fencing head coach Ron Miller stands behind the captain of the women's team in her aspirations.

"Nhi definitely has the physical tools and the intelligence to make it," Miller said. "The only thing stopping her will be her late start in the sport."

As many UNC fencers have done, Le took beginning fencing in the fall of her freshman year, tried out for and made the team.

"Most serious fencers at the big schools, such as Columbia, Penn State or Notre Dame, start fencing when they're about 12 years old," Miller said, "and European fencers begin almost at birth. Nhi started when she was 19, so she has a lot of catching up to do. If anyone can do it, though, I think Nhi has the abilities."

She has already responded to the challenge of playing catch-up. Le spent last summer working and training in London with the London Thames Fencing Club, and she plans to train and travel in France and Italy, the European fencing capitals, this summer.

The fencer's season lasts approximately six months and training lasts about nine. The practices at North Carolina are four days a week and range from three hours a day in the fall to five hours in the spring, when the dual meet season kicks into action. Doesn't she ever get tired of it? All that fencing for four years?

"I never don't want to go," Le said. "Sometimes my body may not want to or I'll have other obligations, but I truly love fencing. It's a healthy

obsession with me. I just have to know when to not let it possess me."

Far from being possessed, Le concentrates on being in control. She carries a 3.2 GPA in the business honors program, serves as vice president of the Association of International Students and is involved in the work-study program with the International Center.

"Yes, Nhi does a lot," Miller said. "But she balances it well. She really knows how to organize her time and disperse herself."

Le's family, now residing in Atlanta, had a hard time understanding her dedication to something besides academics. Of her five sisters and three brothers, Nhi is the only Le who is seriously interested in sports.

"My parents really didn't understand my intense interest in fencing until I'd been doing it for about two years," Le said. "Now they know that it's something I want to do, and they support me."

That's not to say that some conflicts between the two don't remain.

"Sometimes it's hard for them to understand," Le said. "Like, I want to go home for the Vietnamese New Year, which is at the end of January, but there's a very important meet in Boston that weekend."

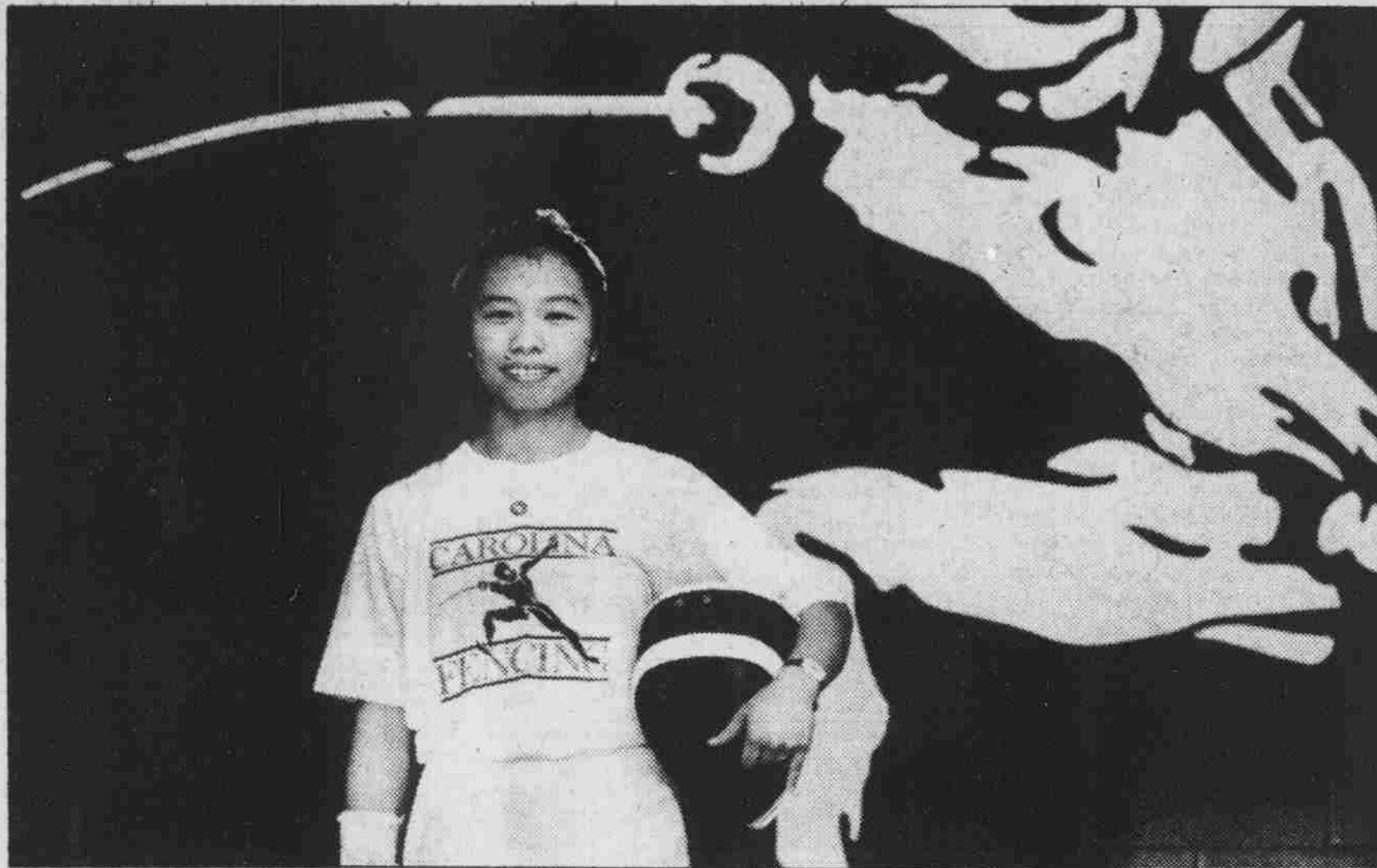
"Often, I'll choose my family, but this time I had to choose fencing," Le said. "It wasn't an easy decision."

Dedication and commitment are Le's roads to the future.

"Nhi has to be one of the hardest workers on the team," Felix Dover, co-captain of the men's team, said. "Her leadership as women's captain is instinctive. She leads more by example, and even when she's not really aware of it."

Coach Miller agrees. "Nhi's desire and drive carry over to her team members and inspires them," Miller said. "It's a strength of her leadership and her character."

Le said that her main focus as team captain is to provide the women



DTH/Larry Childress

Nhi Le is UNC fencing's brightest star, a first team All-ACC performer whose goal is the 1988 Olympics

with a role model that they can depend upon. "Whatever I do, whether it's on the fencing strip or at work or in the classroom — I'm going to push myself."

"I want the team to respect not only me, but also my fencing. That

really means a lot."

Ranked ranked No. 1 on the UNC women's fencing team, Le was first-team all-conference last year. She also made the Mid-Atlantic Regional team. She is determined to eclipse those accomplishments this

season. As for the future, Le's coach is sure his star pupil will always land on her feet.

"Nhi has what I call an 'indomitable spirit,'" Miller said. "Even when she's down, no one fights harder."

AP Top 20

1. Iowa (34)	16-0	1,263
2. North Carolina (28)	15-1	1,252
3. Indiana	14-1	1,133
4. Nev.-Las Vegas (3)	15-1	1,088
5. Purdue	14-1	1,063
6. DePaul	14-0	974
7. Syracuse	15-1	774
8. Temple	16-2	696
9. Illinois	13-3	680
10. Clemson	16-0	670
11. Oklahoma	12-3	655
12. Duke	13-2	568
13. Alabama	13-2	567
14. St. John's	12-2	514
15. Georgetown	12-2	404
16. Pittsburgh	13-3	296
17. Auburn	10-3	295
18. Navy	11-3	189
19. TCU	13-3	154
20. N.C. State	11-4	113

Others receiving votes: Florida 79, Kansas 59, New Orleans 24, Kansas State 21, UCLA 18, Seton Hall 17, Houston 15, Cleveland State 10, Virginia 9, St. Louis 7, Memphis State 6, Michigan 6, Texas El-Paso 6, West Virginia 6, Georgia Tech 5, Providence 5, Vanderbilt 4

ACC Standings

Team	ACC	Overall
UNC	4-0	15-1
Clemson	3-0	16-0
Duke	3-1	13-2
N.C. State	3-2	11-4
Georgia Tech	1-1	9-4
Virginia	1-2	11-4
Wake Forest	0-4	8-6
Maryland	0-4	4-5

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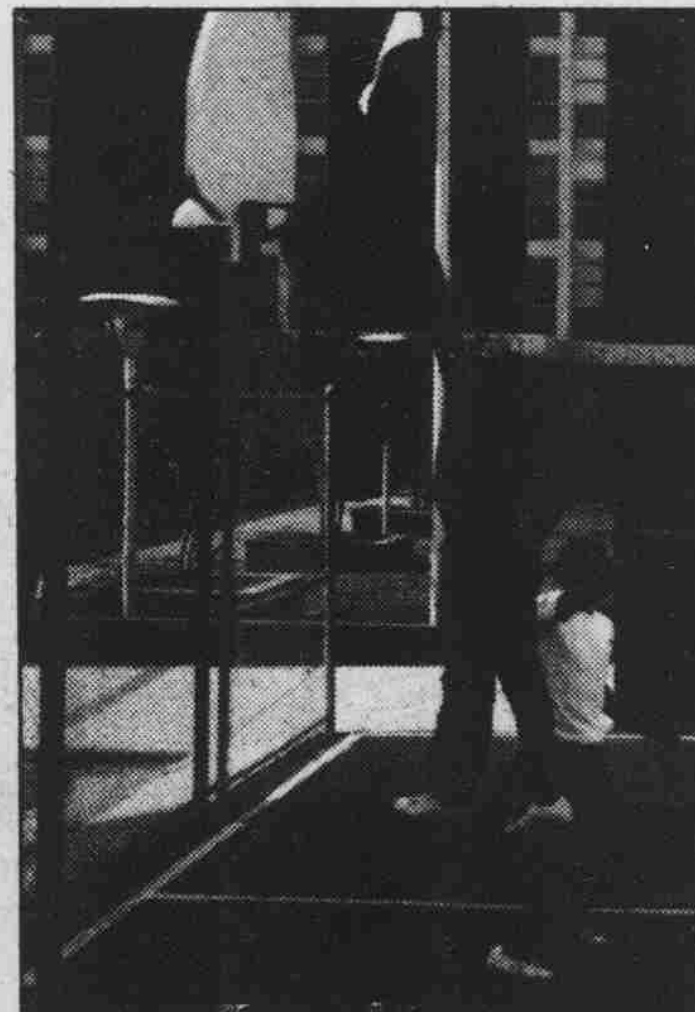
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