

'Street player' Donnell says she resents meddling coaches

By **MIKE BERARDINO**
Sports Editor

If Liza Donnell had her way, there would be no basketball coaches at the U.S. Olympic Festival, and the games themselves would be played outside on the blacktop instead of inside the Smith Center.

You see, Donnell, a rising junior at UNC and a member of the Festival's East women's basketball team, classifies herself as a "street player."

The fast break is Donnell's domain and she's only comfortable when going full-tilt. As a result, Donnell has little patience with coaches who try to make the basketball court their personal laboratory, mixing combinations and styles in an effort to find that perfect chemistry.

"The coaches say that I get caught up in playing a street game," she said. "But I think the street game is the best. It's just a matter of combining that street game with your organized game to create that awesome game."

An awesome game was what Donnell had against Duke in last year's regular-season finale. Before a big crowd in Cameron Indoor Stadium, the 5-foot-5 Donnell poured in a game-high 19



Liza Donnell

points and provided the spark that carried UNC to an 83-67 win over the Blue Devils.

That was unquestionably the high point of Donnell's college career, a career which has also had its share of high turnover-low point games.

In her sophomore season, Donnell started just nine of 29 games, but still managed to lead the Tar Heels in steals with 50. She

averaged 9.1 points and 2.3 rebounds a game.

The speedy Donnell's natural ability is never questioned. What coaches continually ride her about, though, is her judgment — deciding when to force the tempo and when to slow things down.

"I'm getting a little tired of hearing how I should play under control," Donnell said. "Sometimes it goes in one ear and out the other."

"I'm playing and she's not," said Donnell, referring to coaches in general. "Only I know how it feels out there on the court and I make my best judgment."

Throughout her career, the Newark, N.J., native has played the game at breakneck speed, sometimes at the expense of her team.

"Sure, I like to run and gun. But I'll play the slow-down game, too, as long as I can be the one to determine it," Donnell said. "If I take off down the court and I'm in a groove and I'm in a flow and (the coach) tells me to hold it up, that's frustrating."

Donnell, who unsurprisingly has no interest in a future coaching career, recommends a hands-off approach to mentors everywhere.

"A lot of these girls (at the Festival) are street players, but then the coaches get them and they want them to play organized," Donnell said. "I feel the coaches shouldn't take away the street game. Do you think Michael Jordan plays an organized game? Of course not. He combines the two."

While it saddens Donnell that some of her fellow "street players" will be changed by their Festival experience, she is determined to avoid that unthinkable fate.

"It's not going to happen to me," she said. "These coaches aren't going to change me, because I know this Festival only lasts for two weeks. I'm not going to change my game just for two weeks. I'm going to play the game the way I know how, because that's how I made this team."

The story of how Donnell made the Festival team is almost as interesting as her lengthy anti-intervention dissertation.

After being cut in tryouts before the last two Festivals, Donnell finally made good this April at the Eastern tryout camp in Norfolk, Va.

She almost didn't allow the

third time to prove itself as a charm.

"For a while, I was ready to give up on it," Donnell admitted. "Then I said, why not go for it one more time? And if I don't make it this time, at least I'll know where their program is at — that the coaches are looking for their kind of players and that's it."

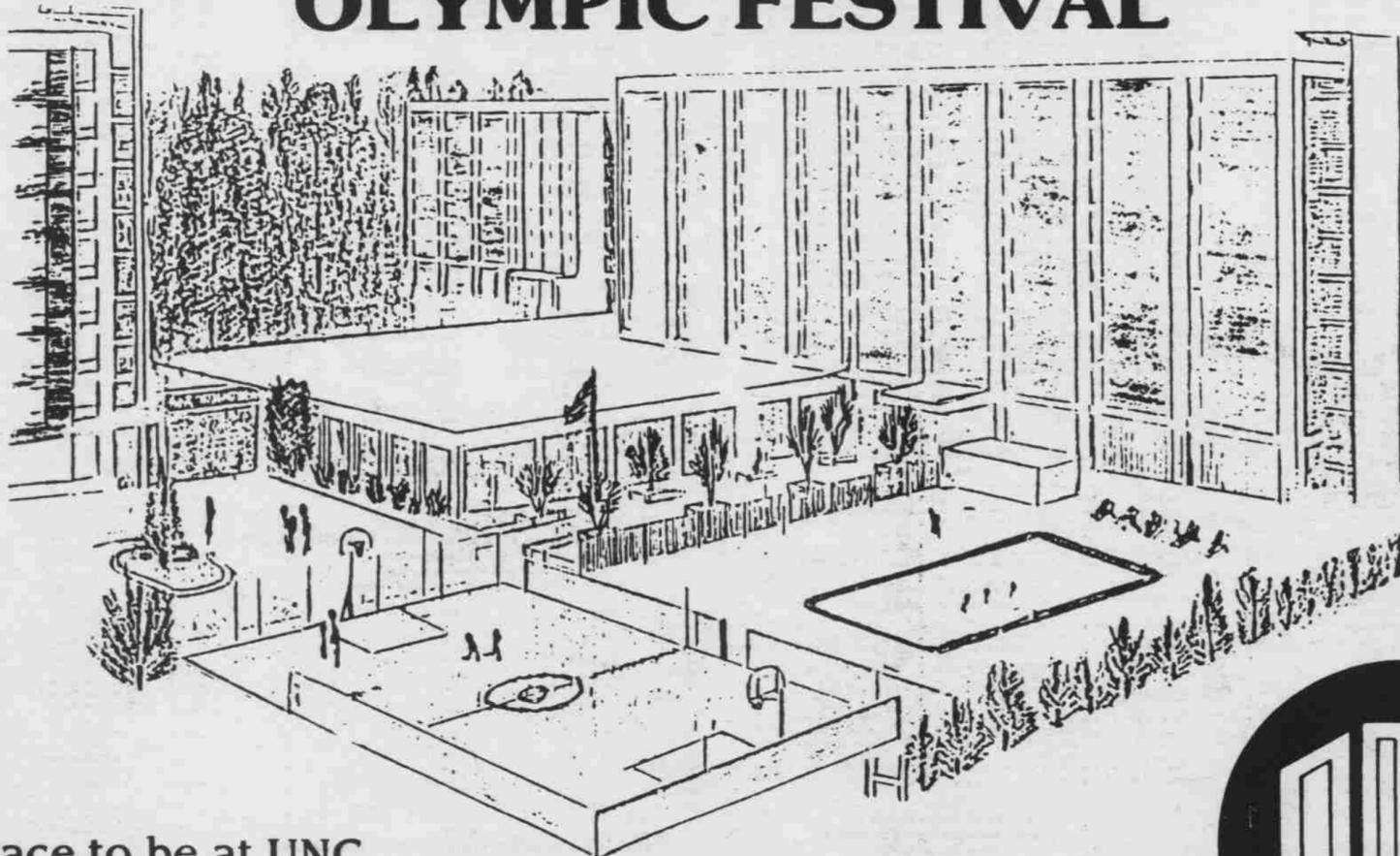
At the April camp, held at Old Dominion University and conducted by East coach Ceal Barry of the University of Colorado, Donnell's natural talent finally shone through.

"The caliber of talent was very low, so those players who were very good just stood out," she said. "When we scrimmaged up there, I could do just about anything I wanted. The girls I was playing with were street players, so we looked good playing together and we executed just fine, even though we didn't even have a play."

Now that she has finally arrived at the Festival, Donnell would like to settle an old score.

"I hope to play so well at this Festival," she said, "that all those people who were on the committees when I tried out before will say, 'Man, why did we cut her? We sure did make a mistake.'"

HOUSING SITE FOR 1987 OLYMPIC FESTIVAL



The Place to be at UNC
Live with convenience to both
campus and downtown Chapel Hill.

Fall Accommodations Available

Now offering guaranteed single rooms at reasonable prices



The Place To Be At UNC

UNIVERSITY SQUARE

(919) 929-7143