

Freshmen Rice, Fox will face year of adjustment, learning

By **ANDREW PODOLSKY**
Staff Writer

Since they announced their decision to attend North Carolina last year, most of the basketball world has wondered aloud how King Rice and Rick Fox will fill the void left by the recently departed Kenny Smith and Joe Wolf.

Judging by their performances in the recent Blue-White games and the positive comments their teammates have heaped upon them, Rice and Fox seem to have adjusted admirably to the lights and glitter of big-time college basketball.

UNC has had many freshmen in the past few years that have contributed in their inaugural season. There was Michael Jordan's jumper in the 1982 championships, Jeff Lebo's contributions two years ago, and of course the monster in the middle called J.R. Reid last season. No one knows which, if either, of this year's pair will rise to stardom.

The 6-foot 185-pound Rice, hailing from Binghamton, N.Y., is an excellent playmaking guard who was touted by many as the premier high school point guard in the country. Rice picked up seven points and six assists in the first Blue-White game, and improved to an 11-point, seven-assist performance in the second.

UNC coach Dean Smith was quick to warn about the dangers of high expectations. "King will be a backup guard to Lebo," Smith said. "I don't see Fox or Rice starting right now, but they will definitely contribute. I see them somewhere in the top eight or nine in the rotation."

Smith went on to speculate about what to expect this year. "King is not a beep-beeper," he said. "He doesn't have the great quickness of a Kenny Smith, but he will get the job done. I just hope he can stay healthy. As evidenced in last year's Notre Dame game, we needed and still need backcourt depth to win. We may now have that."

Rick Fox will have a slightly different season. At 6-foot-7 and 220 pounds, he has a bruising year ahead. Every day in practice he'll face a front line that ranges from 210-250 pounds. But Fox appears to have adjusted well in terms of progressing between the first and second Blue-White games.

Fox hit 10 points, ripped down three rebounds and had the White squad's only blocked shot in the initial contest. In the second contest he gained confidence. This time he contributed 16 points and even found time for two assists. More importantly, he led both teams with 12 rebounds. His nearest competitors, Bucknall and Williams, could muster but eight apiece.

Earlier in the year, Reid predicted Fox would be a big asset. "Rick is really a good defensive player, and extremely strong inside," Reid said. "He's going to help us a lot this season if he comes along and learns the system."

Smith agreed and added, "Rick has a lot of potential, make no mistake about that. It will just be a matter of how much we'll need him and how well he adjusts."

Along with the positive comments has come some caution for what promises to be a busy year for the two newcomers. Since the press is unable to talk directly to the freshmen until after the Syracuse game, the comments of the veteran team members on the perils of the freshman year give a good indication of what to expect.

"Well, we're going to give them a hard time in practice," Reid said, "to remind them where they are. But my freshman class seemed to make it through all right."

"I know it's hard for them," senior guard Ranzino Smith said. "They have to be shocked by all this attention. But they are both extremely good players. King simply

gets the ball to the players who need it, and Rick may develop into one of those players who needs the ball. I wouldn't expect a miracle right off, however."

Academically, the freshmen have some adjusting to do as well. In this regard, there could be no better advice than that given by sophomore Kevin Madden. Madden sat out last season because of academic problems, but seems to have rebounded.

"In fact, we may have created a monster," Dean Smith said. "Now he'd rather study than practice."

Letting Smith's hyperbole sit alone, Madden did have something to say about the freshmen.

"I talked to both of them a lot," Madden said. "You can't goof off, you have to stay on top of it all the time. I told the freshmen to listen to the coach and it will all come together."

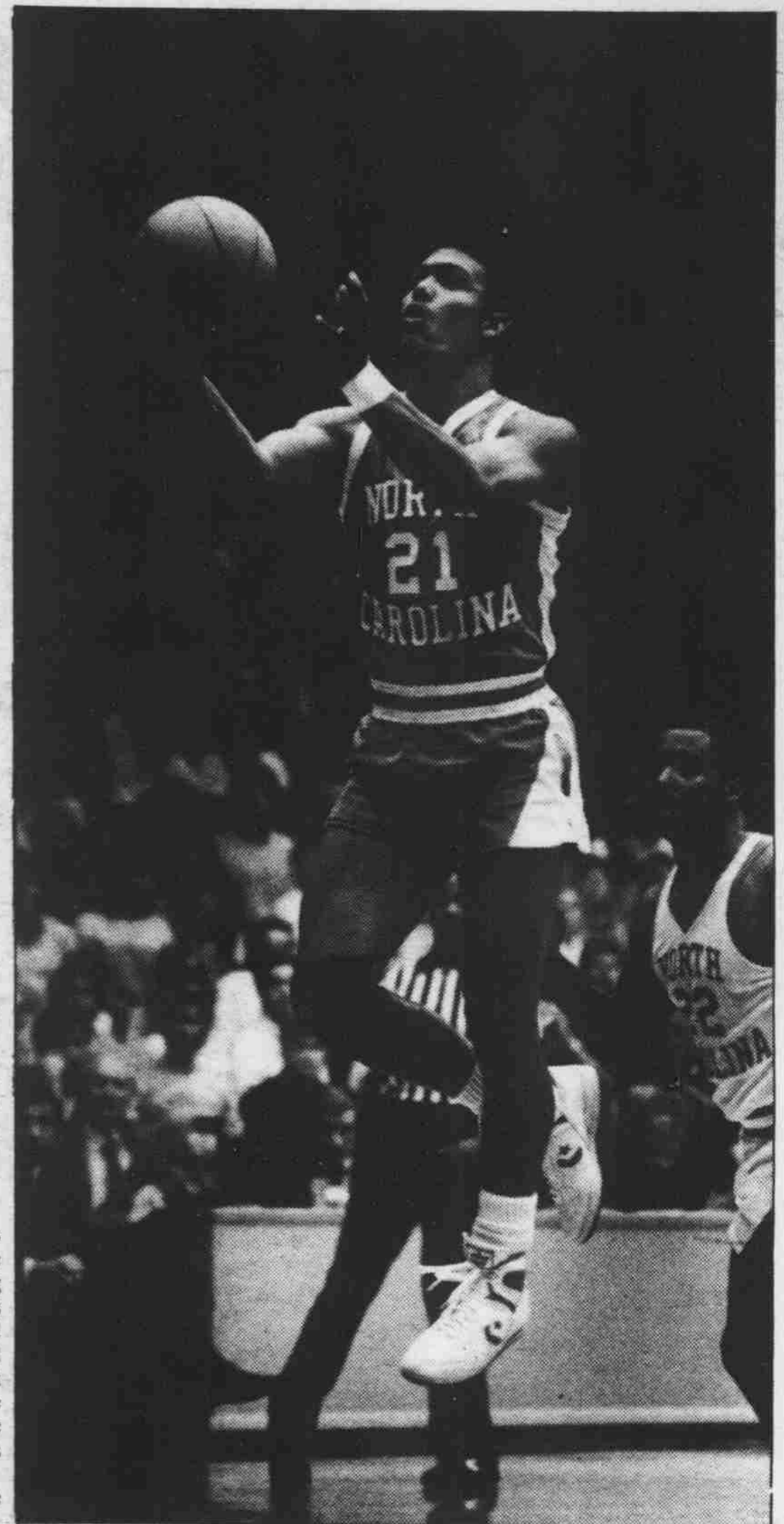
Scott Williams added some of his own experience, also.

"They had better budget their time, use a daily calendar, and find time to study," Williams said. "You have to put up with going back to the room after getting beat up on in the lane by someone like J.R., and then motivate yourself to study. Sometimes it's not easy."

But easy isn't what major college basketball is about. And if Rice and Fox can dodge the pitfalls of academic ineligibility and waking up late for games, they might find themselves in the position in which the freshman Jordan found himself, one Monday night a few years ago.

FROSH NOTES: Fox becomes the sixth ACC import from the Caribbean in recent years, following Wake's Sylvester Charles, Tech's Yvon Joseph and Antione Ford, and Virginia's Andrew Kennedy and Olden Polynice . . . UNC assistant coach Randy Wiel also hails from the Caribbean, a native of Curacao in the Netherlands Antilles. Fox comes from Nassau, in the Bahamas.

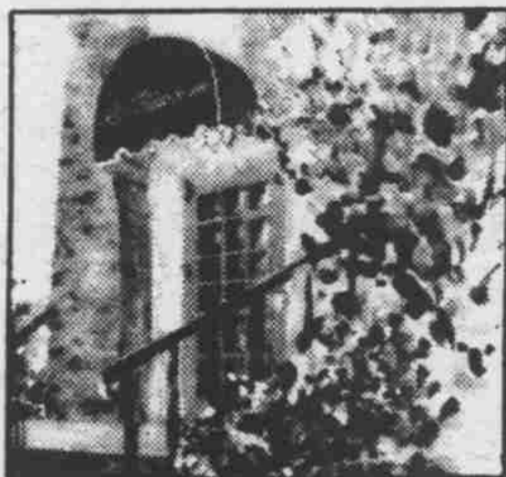
Rice was a four-year starter at the point for Binghamton High School, as well as a two-way football player through his junior year . . . Fox did not play high school basketball last year because of an Indiana eligibility technicality.



DTH/Tony Deifell

Freshman guard King Rice, though not as fast as the departed Kenny Smith, has already shown a flair for the spectacular play

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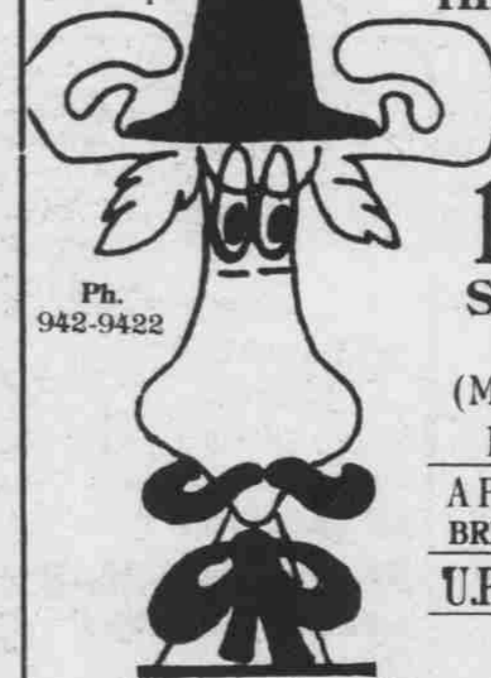
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