

Smith to assume role of leader as a senior

By **CHRIS SPENCER**
Assistant Sports Editor

Sure, we know he can shoot, but can he play defense? And how will he adjust to a starting role? And what about that new beard? These are some of the major questions that revolve around senior Tar Heel guard Ranzino Smith, and the answers to those questions will have a major impact on the team this season.

Smith is one of a select few Chapel Hill natives to play for UNC coach Dean Smith. By the time he was a senior at Chapel Hill High School, Smith had established a well-earned reputation as a scorching shooter. That reputation was enhanced by his streak of scoring 30 or more points in eight straight games as a senior, a streak which undoubtedly helped him become the state's high school Player of the Year in 1984.

But after accepting a scholarship to play at UNC, Zino found the going tough, although he did contribute some key points for the team in his freshman campaign. He averaged just two points a game that year, dishing out a grand total of seven assists in 167 minutes.

During his sophomore season, Smith continued to provide instant offense off the bench, more than doubling his scoring average to 4.6 points a game. In 10 straight games that year, he scored as many points as minutes played.

Last season, Smith saw considerably more playing time and was given the green light by Dean Smith to fire up just about any 3-pointer he wanted. Zino averaged 7.5 points, made 30 steals and handed out a respectable 58 assists. He scored a career-high 21 points in 21 minutes against Miami and combined with Kenny Smith to put Georgia Tech away in Atlanta, as the two guards bombed the Yellow Jackets for 19 points in a six-minute span.

He played in all 36 of UNC's games as a junior, starting four of them and averaging better than 16 minutes of playing time. But the biggest challenge of Smith's career will come this year.

Smith came to UNC in the same recruiting class as Matt Brust, who later transferred to St. John's and is a starting guard. Today, Smith is UNC's only senior, and he wants to use his final season in Chapel Hill to prove that he can play defense and handle the ball as well as he shoots it.

"In the off-season I worked on my

overall game," Smith said. "I worked on my ballhandling a lot. I basically want to be a better basketball player than I was last year."

A big concern for the team in the wake of Kenny Smith's graduation will be the lack of depth at the point guard position. Junior Jeff Lebo will start there, but Smith said he could play the position too if needed.

"I'm prepared to play there if I have to," he said. "But coach Smith has improved me as the number two guard, and that's where I've been playing since I've been here."

The 6-foot-1, 189-pound Smith said that while the backcourt will be fairly small, size has never been a concern for him.

"I've played against guys taller than I am," he said, "basically my whole career in basketball."

As the only senior on the team, Smith is ready to shift into a leadership role. "I need to help lead the young guys in the right direction," he said. "It's great, and it's definitely a challenge. Everyone will contribute this season, and that's what everyone is striving for."

This year's team has had to deal with some uncharacteristic distractions, but Smith said the Tar Heels have dealt with them well.

"(The distractions) have had no effect on myself or the other guys," he said. "Actually, I think we're working harder than before. Everyone's playing normal, and they all have a great attitude."

Interestingly, Smith is extremely productive from the charity stripe when the game is on the line. Last season, he led the ACC by making all 20 free throws he attempted in the last five minutes, joining Maryland's Teyon McCoy (13-for-13) as the only perfect late-in-the-game free-throw shooters.

As for the beard, maybe it will make Smith play like James Worthy, the last Tar Heel player to wear one. But the quiet senior insists that it is for medical reasons.

"It's something that I discussed with my dermatologist," he said. "We decided that it would help stop any skin diseases I might get from sweating."

For the most part, the questions that revolve around Smith will have a major impact on the fate of this year's team. Whether or not the answers to those questions come out positive, you can bet that Smith will work hard to assure that they will.



DTH/David Minton

Senior guard Ranzino Smith has earned a reputation as an instant offense player, but must lead as well

Virginia

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depth," Holland said. "But right now, we can't be projected as winning a whole lot of games."

So look for Virginia to do well and to maybe surprise a few superior teams, but don't expect to look near the top of the standings and see the Wahoos.

WAHOO NOTES: Virginia has led the ACC in technical fouls in five of the last nine years . . . Cavalier

Coach Terry Holland has the second best career winning percentage against ACC competition with .525 percent. Dean Smith leads with .737 percent . . . Bill Batts' 66 percent field goal accuracy was 13 percent better than his free-throw average, at 53 percent.

Cavalier point guard John Johnson is the leading scorer among returning lead guards. Johnson averaged 12.3 points-per-game last

season. . . . Virginia is the ACC leader in players from the Midwest, with six. The rest of the league combined only has six players from that region . . . Prized recruit John Crotty lists one of his hobbies as "bikini watching."

Guard Darrick Simms got over 30 percent of his points last season from the foul line. Only UNC's Steve Bucknall received a bigger portion of his point total from the charity stripe.

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