



DTH/David Minton

Sophomore guard Rodney Hyatt is being counted on to provide back court depth this season

Hyatt a walk-on no more

By KEITH PARSONS
Staff Writer

Last year at this time, Rodney Hyatt was just another freshman at UNC, who happened to have thoughts of playing basketball for Dean Smith. This year, however, Hyatt is on scholarship and may possibly play a big role for this season's team.

"Everything sure feels better this year," said Hyatt, a 5-foot-7 sophomore from Wadesboro. "I'm more confident and I think I can help the team more this year."

Hyatt, like most freshmen, was a bit overwhelmed last year by everything here at UNC, such as classes and newfound independence. But with help from his family, he was able to balance his time and began to perform much better in class.

"I came in this year better prepared, and I have already seen the results," Hyatt said. "I came into this year knowing what to expect, so I'm looking forward to being more competitive. I think I have the opportunity to make this much more like high school, where I had a difficult time at first, but later I was able to compete better."

As a senior at Anson Senior High, Hyatt made the all-conference team his junior and senior years. But no colleges offered him a scholarship, so he knew he would be forced to go to a school and make it as a walk-on. He then decided to attend UNC.

"I came up here (to Chapel Hill)

to watch a few games, and they told me I could come here and walk on," Hyatt said. "I was really impressed with the school, not just the basketball team, but the entire school. I figured if the basketball thing didn't work out, then at least I could get a first-class education."

Hyatt started last season with the varsity, but then moved down to the junior varsity to gain more experience. He was quickly moved back up, and stayed there for the rest of the year.

"The coaches let me be myself and told me I had a good chance of playing here," Hyatt said. "(Trying out) was just something I had to go

through."

Hyatt played in 15 games for the Tar Heels last year, averaging 1.3 points a game. He shot 60 percent from the field, and 87 percent from the free-throw line.

Smith said he is looking for Hyatt to give UNC's thin backcourt corps a lift.

"Rodney should be much better this year and I look for him to compete for more playing time," Smith said. "He is not overly quick, but he might be able to help us on defense."

Hyatt said he would be up to the task.

"I'm not a walk-on anymore. I need to contribute now more than ever."

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