

Sports

State to visit UNC tonight

By MIKE BERARDINO
Sports Editor

Traditionally, February is a cruel month for Jim Valvano and his N.C. State basketball program. Things just wouldn't be normal in Raleigh around this time of year unless the Wolfpack was disappointing experts, facing a near-mutiny, mired in a losing streak of several games and appeared headed for a typical 7-7 league finish.

With that established, let's just say things aren't very normal in our state capital these days.

I mean, this is February, right? Then what in the name of Chris Washburn is N.C. State doing at the top of the ACC standings? And please tell me how the Wolfpack managed to go into Cameron Indoor Stadium last Saturday and emerge unscathed, with a 77-74

win over a Duke team that some say will win the national championship?

When sixth-ranked North Carolina (16-3 overall, 5-2 in the ACC) hosts No. 16 N.C. State (15-4, 5-2) tonight at 9 o'clock in the Smith Center, a share of first place in the conference will be on the line. Not only that, but so will the wait-'til-March Wolfpack's five-game winning streak.

State's last loss, in fact, was to the Tar Heels, by a 77-73 count. In that one, UNC shot an eye-popping 65.9 percent from the field, compared to just 45.6 for the Wolfpack.

J.R. Reid had 17 points and Kevin Madden 16 off Dean Smith's bench to lead the visitors. State, pounding the ball relentlessly inside, got 26 points from Charles Shackelford and 16 from

his sidekick, Chucky Brown.

The Sunday afternoon game, televised nationally by NBC, also featured some of the roughest pay this side of the Big East. Elbows were flying, and one, belonging to State reserve big man Avie Lester, knocked a sizable chunk out of Ranzino Smith's forehead. The cut required 12 stitches to close, but Smith returned to the game anyway in time to hit a couple of key pullup jumpers in the waning minutes.

Since that Jan. 24 meeting, the Wolfpack has run off narrow victories over Maryland (83-81), DePaul (71-66), Virginia (75-69) and Duke.

The Wolfpack's performance tonight should show everyone just how serious Valvano & Crew are about breaking with tradition.

Couch hurdling way to the top

By ROBERT D'ARRUDA
Staff Writer

At first glance Sharon Couch appears to be a typical freshman. However, she is anything but typical. Couch happens to be a freshman sensation who is burning up the women's track circuit.

In high school Couch, who hails from Rice, Va., won state titles in a remarkable four events. At North Carolina, Couch has encountered an equally remarkable degree of success.

Both head coach Dennis Craddock and sprint and speed coach Charles Foster work closely with Couch. Although standing a modest 5-foot-6 and weighing 135 pounds, Couch is an explosive athlete.

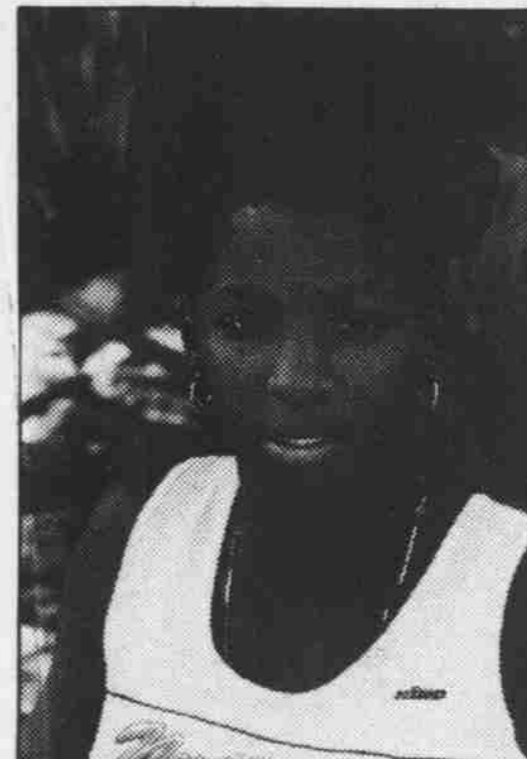
"Sharon is a ball of energy, she keeps things happening all the time," Foster said. "Sharon has spirit, and she brings an awful lot of spirit to the track team."

Speaking of keeping things happening, Couch already has established a new UNC long-jump record. In addition she has qualified for the NCAAs in both the long jump and 55-meter hurdles competitions.

"Sharon is an exceptional athlete," Foster said. "She leads the ACC right now in the 60-yard dash as well as the 55-meter dash and hurdles."

Ever since sixth grade, Couch has been sprinting, jumping and soaring to new heights on the track. When asked about her versatility, Couch said, "I have competed in seven different track events. I'm basically a hurdler. That's what got me here, but the versatility of what I can do also got me here. I can literally just about do anything."

What sets Couch apart from other



Sharon Couch

versatile athletes is that she excels in every event.

In addition, the diminutive leaper also embodies everything amateur athletics should be about. She is a fierce competitor who always shows excellent sportsmanship.

"I believe in good sportsmanship," Couch said. "I love track because it's fun."

Couch also feels that traveling across the country to compete in different track meets is a great experience. "Everywhere I go now, there's always someone there I've met before," she said.

Coming out of high school, Couch had college offers pouring in from every corner of the United States. "It wasn't my big dream to come to North Carolina, but I love it," she

said. "It's the best place I could be. Coach Foster really impressed me. He's a great hurdler coach, and I'm a hurdler. Coach Craddock also convinced me to come here. I think it's the best college in the United States, and I love it."

Like every athlete, Couch has set goals for herself, and hers are very high. "I want to run the hurdles and do the long jump in the Olympics," she said.

Incredibly, she has already qualified in the long jump competition, and this past weekend at the Millrose Games in New York, she qualified for the NCAA hurdles championship.

As the year progresses, Couch will most certainly get better and better, Foster believes.

"Speed takes precedence over any technique," he said. "And what Sharon does is she applies the speed, and the technique will come as the year goes on."

Couch has always followed track and field contests, and she once had the opportunity to meet her idol, Jackie Joyner Kersee, whom many consider the greatest women's amateur athlete in the world.

"She reminds me a lot of myself," Couch said. "She's achieved world prominence, and that's what I think I can do. I never could say this confidently before, but I can now. I really feel good about my ability and myself."

For now, Couch wears the familiar blue and white of the University of North Carolina. In time, though, she may one day wear the red, white and blue of her country.

The best days for Sharon Couch, it seems, are still to come.

| | N.C. State | Edge | UNC |
|-------------------|--|------|---|
| Backcourt | Freshman Chris Corchiani (6.8 ppg) has taken over the starting point guard spot. Senior Vinny Del Negro (15.9 ppg) has been a second-half terror of late, burning UVA, and Duke. | | Junior Jeff Lebo (14.1 ppg) is shooting almost 89 percent from the foul line. He also sports an 87.35 assist-to-turnover ratio. Senior shooter Ranzino Smith (13.1 ppg) is healthier again. |
| Frontcourt | Charles Shackelford (16.2 ppg, 9.8 rpg) and Chucky Brown (16.1 ppg) provide a potent one-two punch inside. Brian Howard (6.2 ppg) is improving fast at the swing position. | | J.R. Reid (19.7 ppg, 8.7 rpg) continues his remarkable shooting, making almost 68 percent of his tries from the field. Scott Williams (12.2 ppg) and Steve Bucknall (8.8) join him. |
| Depth | The Wolfpack bench runneth 10 deep, with freshman gunner Rodney Monroe (10 ppg, 27 treys) and sophomore enforcer Avie Lester (2.9 ppg) leading the way. | | The Tar Heel reserves outscore State's bench 28-7 in Raleigh, with Kevin Madden (9.2 ppg) getting 16 of them. Pete Chilcutt (7.1 ppg), Ric Fox and King Rice also contribute. |
| Defense | State is allowing opponents 69.2 ppg, and holding them to a .501 shooting percentage. Taking the ball inside can be treacherous, with Shack and Avie always ready to reject shots. | EVEN | UNC is allowing 74.8 points a night, despite holding opponents to a .476 shooting percentage. Williams and Reid can also redirect spinning basketballs with relative ease. |
| Coaching | Jim Valvano has been criticized for being too much of a showman, a one-man talk show and a con artist in a \$500 suit. But the guy does know how to coach (160-89 in his eighth year). | | Dean Smith has a 627-178 record in 27 years of head coaching. Against his slick coaching neighbor from Raleigh, Smith has won four of the last six meetings. |

Compiled by Mike Berardino

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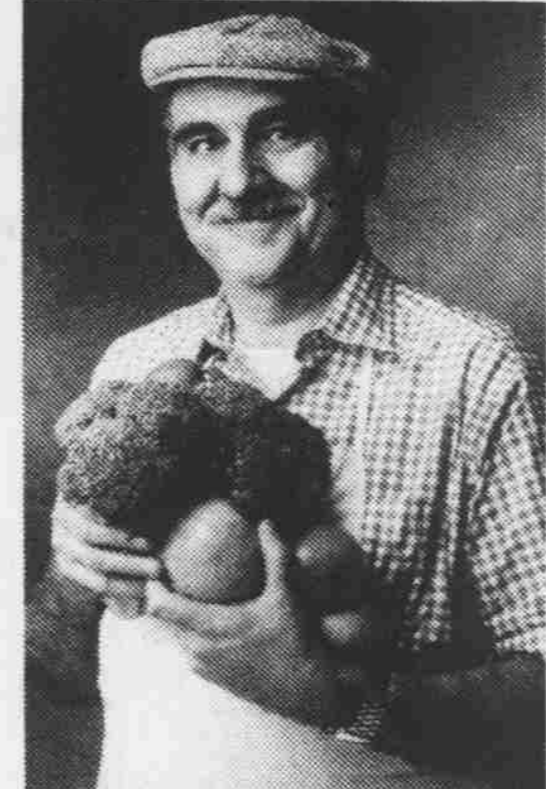
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LOST: DENIM GUESS WATCH. Lost Thursday, 2/5 possibly near Coker Hall. Reward. Please call 933-3167. Katherine.

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18-30 YEAR-OLD WHITE MEN with respiratory colds and flu needed for paid EPA research study at UNC. You must be a non-smoker in good general health - no asthma or hay fever. Call Dr. Chapman at 966-6219 or the Recruitment Office at 966-1253 as soon as you think you are getting a cold or the flu.

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