

Youth and speed

Shelton's troops will need both to overcome the heartbreak of 1987

By **ANDREW PODOLSKY**
Assistant Sports Editor

It has been nine months since the North Carolina field hockey team suffered a bitter 2-1 overtime loss to Maryland in the national championship final. But still the memory lingers, even as the Tar Heels prepare to open the 1988 season.

As head coach Karen Shelton wistfully explained, "I really thought we had that game won when it went into overtime. It was disappointing, we were just unlucky."

But the memory of that tough loss in the finals is what sticks in people's minds most, not the fact that the Tar Heels are coming off a 19-2 season, and had them pegged at No. 1 for most of the season.

The last four years have seen steady improvement in the program, but still no national championship. UNC has been ranked No. 1 at some point in each of the last three years, and have finished the past two seasons as the top team at the end of the regular season. The team keeps getting closer and closer to the title, only to have its hopes dashed in the semifinals or finals of the national tournament. Last year for instance, they spent most of the year as the consensus No. 1-ranked team, but fell just short.

This year's national rankings will place UNC in the top five, but it will be the first time in three years that UNC doesn't head into the season holding down the top slot.

Unlucky? Yes. But has Shelton sat idly by on her laurels during the offseason? No. The coach has recruited six freshmen to replace the five senior starters (including two All-Americans) that graduated last year, and switched a few positions around to try and get the right mix to finally propel the Tar Heels to that elusive national championship.

"If we are going to be successful this year, we will need communication and leadership from our upperclassmen," Shelton said. Specifically, the team will rely on juniors Tracey Yurgin (sweeper), Leslie Lyness (midfielder), Julie Blaisse (center), and leading returning scorer Jennifer Anderson (back) to fill the void left by recent graduates Lori Bruney, Betsy Gillespie and Maryellen Falcone.

They were three of the team's top four scorers last year, accounting for 46 goals and 33 assists, more than half of the team's total scoring.

Thus, the team that will make the run this year can be best described with two words: young and quick.

"We will definitely be a little younger this year and we have good overall speed," Shelton said. "I am hoping that we will continually improve as the year goes on. This year's team has no problem with motivation. Our seniors realize that this is their last shot at it, and I am happy with the whole team's hard-working attitude."

"They know that they are young, and know that they are going to have to steadily improve as the year progresses."

With the challenging schedule the team faces early on this year, they will have to start improving early. After the alumni game, and the Sept. 7 home opener against Radford,

UNC travels to Boston for a tough three-game weekend series (from September 16-18) against Maine, Northeastern, and the first real tester of the season - New Hampshire.

They won't get a break the following weekend, as they face what Shelton terms "probably our biggest weekend of the season" from September 22-25. That weekend the Tar Heels play Iowa, Old Dominion, and defending national champions Maryland in quick succession. Shelton pointed out, "these will be especially hard games. Iowa will be in the top five, ODU came within a game of getting into the final four last year, and Maryland is always tough."

After that series, Shelton sees West Chester, and Virginia as the toughest opponents. "I feel pretty good about our schedule, it's strong, and the fact that we have three home weekends in a row (in September and October) will help us when we head into the ACC tournament and the national tournament," Shelton said.

After the three-week homestand, the Tar Heels will play four away games before the ACC tournament, which will be held in Charlottesville, Va., in the last weekend of October.

So let's take a look at the personnel on the 1988 team. The starting lineup will likely include four seniors, three juniors, three sophomores and a freshman. The co-captains are Yurgin and Anderson. Only three players return to the same starting positions they had last year.

Tentatively, the front line will include sophomore Peggy Anton on the left wing, Blaisse (15 goals, 4 assists last year), and frosh Cathy Osmer on the right with junior

Sharon Ross (4g, 1a) seeing a lot of action. Laurel Hershey (7g, 2a) moves from forward to midfield this year, and joins Lyness (1g, 0a), and Kathy Staley (4g, 2a).

Virtually everyone is back on the defensive squad. Leading returning scorer Anderson (1g, 23a) and senior Michelle Russell return to their positions of last year, with the final spot still up for grabs. Sophomore Evelien Spee will take over the goalkeeping duties after serving as back-up last year, and Yurgin will be the sweeper.

Shelton added "I feel pretty good about our recruiting year as well. The freshmen may be able to bolster our forwards." The most promising of the slew of incoming freshmen are forwards Osmer and Nancy Lang, who hails from Killingsworth, Conn. The rest of class of 1992 includes Jennifer Clark, Mary Hartzell, Alisia Morgan, and Maura Troy.

Turning to Spee, Shelton added, "We are simply expecting her to come up with the big saves. She has excellent range, and flexibility. And at 5-10, she is able to cover a lot of ground in the goal. She is a game player, and she is a competitor."

So another season begins with UNC ranked in the top five (ho hum). The regular season has never been a problem. The team has been always held steady until the post season, when the team's season-long trend of improvement suddenly disappears. A disappointing loss always seems to appear at the most inopportune time. Shelton hopes that the team's new look will allow the team to stay strong through the year and, for once, to peak at the right time.



Junior Julie Blaisse will head up the Tar Heel attack in '88 after a strong campaign last year

Summer

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Ford was an All-American in 1976, '77 and '78, and he won the John Wooden Award in '78. In 1975, he became the first freshman to be named most valuable player of the ACC Tournament. In addition to scoring 2,290 points, he ranks second all-time in assists at UNC.

In 1976, he co-captained the gold-winning U.S. Olympic men's basketball team at Montreal. He spent four seasons in the NBA, and he was the 1979 rookie of the year with the Kansas City Kings.

He had recently been named color commentator for the NBA expansion Charlotte Hornets.

"I've talked with the staff here in the past about coaching, but it's a dream come true to coach at my alma mater and a great thrill to work with coach Smith," Ford said. "He has played a very important role in my life and there is no one better with whom I could begin my career."

Many Tar Heel fans have spent the summer tracking the U.S. Olympic men's basketball squad, for a certain flattopped player is weighing heavily in coach John Thompson's plans for the Seoul, South Korea, event.

UNC junior J.R. Reid has made the squad, helping provide much-needed muscle underneath. Thompson made what was no doubt a painful cut for him Saturday when he axed Georgetown freshman Alonzo Mourning, and the former high school rival of Reid's was his strongest competition in that role.

Of course, the squad has Danny Manning, David Robinson and Charles Smith (of Pittsburgh), but their strengths are more as finesse players than physical ones. Reid, however, is at his strongest when dominating a game from the paint.

Reid's teammates Jeff Lebo and Scott Williams were also invited to the tryouts back in May. But an ankle injury leftover from the NCAA's kept Lebo from participating, while Williams spent a day at Thompson's camp before returning home to attend to "family matters."

Soccer America Poll

1. Harvard	14-1-3
2. Indiana	18-3-0
3. Clemson	18-5-1
4. Southern Methodist	13-4-1
5. Duke	13-5-1
6. Virginia	17-3-2
7. Nevada-Las-Vegas	14-5-0
8. Seton Hall	14-4-3
9. North Carolina	20-5-0
10. UCLA	14-7-1
11. San Diego State	20-6-0
12. Adelphi	14-4-2
13. George Mason	13-5-3
14. South Carolina	16-2-3
15. St. Louis	12-7-4
16. N.C. State	13-6-2
17. Santa Clara	12-6-2
18. Maryland	9-6-5
19. Penn State	12-6-3
20. Akron	12-6-3



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