

Sports

After undefeated fall season, rugby club heads to England

By BRENDAN MATHEWS
Staff Writer

Friday the UNC Rugby Club continues a tradition of taking on the best the world has to offer when it travels, in coat and tie, to England for a nine-day tour. With games scheduled against teams from Cambridge, Manchester and London, the trip will be less vacation than serious road trip.

"No one goes to England to lie around on beaches," club president Jeremy Kelly said. "We'll be traveling from college to college, spending three days in Cambridge, two in Manchester, three in London. This is definitely a rugby-oriented tour."

The tour comes at the end of one of the most successful seasons in the club's 20-year history. In their first year as an official member of the North Carolina Rugby Union, the Tar Heels swept the competition and posted a perfect 6-0 record. Two weeks into the semester they were ranked the top team in the state, a position they still hold.

"The whole side has been playing together for 12 months, which is very rare for UNC," Kelly said. "We played good rugby this season, and we showed that by winning our division easily and being ranked No. 1 in the state. The whole logic of the tour is to improve our game of rugby. We're going to where people have been playing since age seven. Here most people don't even start until they get to college."

Despite their relative inexperience,

the Tar Heels have built up a strong, cohesive side. They have been able to weather a number of injuries to top players and survive close calls all season long.

The season began in September in ankle-deep mud at Davidson. Playing during a rainstorm that moved from drizzle to downpour, the Tar Heels blasted the opposition, 44-0. A victory over Guilford and a forfeit by Belmont Abbey followed.

A week after N.C. State embarrassed UNC on the football field, the rugby clubs met in Raleigh. In one of the scrappiest games in memory, UNC pulled out a 10-6 win in what turned into a war of attrition. The costliest injury was to forward Mike Freeman, who was taken by ambulance to the hospital for torn cartilage in his ribs. Scrum half Patrick Emerson took a kick in the head, but stayed in despite being a target for Wofford late hits for the rest of the match.

Two weeks later North Carolina won a close one against Duke, but lost Kelly to a neck injury. The season finale at UNC-Wilmington was expected to be a cakewalk, but late in the second half the score was knotted 6-6. UNC, playing without Kelly and everybody's all-American (all-England, actually) Tom Silk, had trouble putting together a sustained drive at the Seahawk try line.

UNC kept its undefeated season intact, though, when the ball came down the back line and was run in for the game-winner by Brendan

Mathews. (I know I'm writing this, but I deserve a little press. It was a big moment.)

The 6-0 record means UNC, the champions of Division II, will move up to Division I for next season. Despite being in the lower division because it is their first year in the league, the Tar Heels have beaten the Division I champions in non-league games for the last two years.

UNC also featured one of the best B-sides in the club's history. Made up mostly of first-year players, the team knocked off Davidson and Guilford before losing two close ones to N.C. State and Duke.

"Interest in the club has surged as a result of the tour," Kelly said. "We feel like we're working toward something, not just going out to play on different weekends. Usually at this stage in the semester everyone is getting lethargic, but now they're all getting ready for the tour."

North Carolina has faced players who grew up with rugby before. Last spring the team traveled to Trinidad where they won one of three against select sides chosen from the island's top clubs. Playing against a faster, stronger backfield taught UNC's backs a lot about how the game is played. They were able to bring those lessons back to North Carolina and upgrade the quality of their game.

The England tour will be more a test of the strength of the forwards, whose job is to fight for the ball both in organized scrums and in the loose play. Once they get it, the idea is to get the ball out to the backs to move it upfield.

"In Trinidad they had exceptional backs. They were very fast," Kelly said. "But our forwards didn't get as much opposition. It's going to be a much harder game up front in England."

"Rugby out here is played at a furious pace," said Paddy Plewman, a senior from England. "Rugby is so much more controlled at home. Here it all seems so frantic sometimes."

How fast, and how well, North Carolina is able to adjust will be crucial to its success on tour.

The logistics of the tour will keep the Tar Heels in their custom coach (complete with bathroom and VCR) for much of their time in England. After arriving at London's Heathrow Airport on Saturday they will head for Cambridge for Sunday's B-side and Monday's A-side games against Trinity College.

Tuesday is the drive to Manchester, home of the finalists in last year's rugby college cup, for a game against the second XV on Wednesday. Friday the team plays London's Burrough Road College of Physical Education.

The team is being hosted by the colleges it will be playing. Team members will stay in the dormitories and eat in the college dining halls as part of the team-on-tour experience.

The whirlwind tour of the "promised land of rugby" ends when the custom coach heads for Cardiff Arms Park, the Welsh national stadium. There the club will watch from the stands as the Australian touring side takes on the Barbarians, a select side of the best from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and France.

Kelly put together the tour when he returned home to England over the summer. His brother at Trinity College helped to organize the match there, while two of last year's exchange students, Rhys Williams and Antony McAndrew, set up the match at Manchester.

Of course the tour hasn't been cheap. Over 3,000 T-shirts have been sold to raise money and bank accounts have been emptied to make up the difference.

The University pitched in its two cents worth (literally), giving the club \$400 to take 27 people to England for nine days.

"The tour should really serve as an example to everyone," Kelly said. "It just shows what a bunch of guys can do on their own when it's what they want."

Powers, Guenther top list of swim team returnees

By NEIL AMATO
Staff Writer

Since the men's and women's squads both finished in the top 20 at the NCAA swimming championships last season with very few seniors, UNC coach Frank Comfort is looking nowhere but up for this year.

Also giving Comfort confidence for the 1988-89 campaign is the fact he has several returning All-Americans and a talented group of freshmen.

The women's squad is coming off a second-place ACC finish and a 19th-place showing in the NCAAs.

"We have a very well-balanced team in terms of classes and ability," Comfort said. "The major focus of the women's team revolves around the co-captains, Amy Pritchard and Wendy Powers."

Pritchard, a senior from Charlotte, is a strong distance freestyler and backstroke. Powers, a senior from Baltimore, has been an All-American each of her three seasons in many different events.

Another plus this year is the return of three-time All-American Melanie Buddemeyer, who sat out last season with an injury.

Kim Beattie, one of six returning seniors, is also a three-time All-American in relays. Beattie, a native of Winter Park, Fla., will defend the ACC title in three events: the 50, 100 and 200 freestyles.

Other key returners include: senior Keira Stroupe, one of the best all-around swimmers for the Tar Heels; sophomore sprint freestyler Jill Benala; NCAA qualifier Barb Bolton, also a sophomore; sophomore Heather Nottingham, defending ACC champ in the 100 and 200 breaststroke; sophomore distance freestyler Stacy Sawyer; sophomore All-American Hannah Turlish; sopho-

more Karin Andren, who's filling the shoes of ex-UNC great Susan O'Brien in backstroke. Also, an excellent crop of freshmen led by Susan Leupold will bolster the squad. Besides having three fine recruits for this season, diving coach Randy Emerson has three returning letter winners in Valerie Corish, Natalie Gould and Martha Williams.

"The captains are doing everything possible to build up a tremendous team feeling," Comfort said.

The men's team, captained by senior Chris Himebauch and junior Jed Guenther, is looking to defend its ACC title. The squad, which lost no seniors, also finished 19th at the NCAAs.

Himebauch and Guenther lead the Tar Heels this season. Himebauch, a senior who was also a co-captain last year, is a model of consistency. A Chapel Hill High School grad, Himebauch was named most improved swimmer his sophomore season and has consistently placed in ACC events.

Guenther, a junior from Berwyn, Pa., is a double All-American in relays.

Other keys to the men's success are junior Tony Monasterio and sophomores John Davis and Marc Ferguson. Monasterio also swam on two All-American relays and will be looked upon this year to score points in freestyle. Davis, a Weston, Conn., native, was last year's ACC co-swimmer of the year.

Another reason for the Tar Heels' team success is what Comfort calls his "quartet" of divers — senior Andy Hunter, junior Ted Hautau and sophomores Chris Morris and Nunzio Esposto. In both the one- and three-meter springboard events, those four placed between second and eighth at the ACCs.

"A lot of schools look at diving

as a stepchild, but diving is incredibly important here," Comfort said.

One swimmer who was important on last year's team but is, as yet, missing so far this year is junior Tod Schroeder. Schroeder claims he needs to be redshirted because of an injury. Comfort says he's still doesn't know if Schroeder, a record-setting freestyle sprinter, will swim this season.

"His whole situation continues to be evaluated by the medical people, and if it's possible for him to swim, he will be given the option to swim," Comfort said. "He'll have to decide whether he wants to compete or not. Right now, it's completely out of my hands. I'm not a doctor."

Whether Schroeder swims or not, Comfort knows that being the defending ACC champs doesn't give UNC an excuse to rest on its laurels.

"The major responsibility is to recognize that they need to do everything they can to improve," Comfort said. "It's a whole new year. We are the defending champions. We will probably be picked to win the conference again."

Comfort went on to say North Carolina had to maintain good intensity because the other ACC squads would be charging hard and fast.

"They need to have the same passion and fire to win as they had last year," Comfort said. "The rest of the conference knows who they have to beat, and they will be very motivated to beat us. If we can respond to that then we can defend our title."

Although Comfort said he thinks both teams are stronger, he doesn't want to make any predictions. "You have to take things day by day and meet by meet."

"It's my goal and the goal of the athletes to move higher nationally," Comfort said.

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