

Rice improves game

Spends summer working on better fundamentals

By JAMIE ROSENBERG
Staff Writer

The UNC basketball community should be convinced by now that King Rice is not going to be the next Kenny Smith.

In fact, after a disappointing 1987-88 season, the second-year guard from Binghamton, N.Y., may have a hard enough time proving he is actually King Rice, the once highly regarded rookie who raised expectations and then promptly lowered them last year with a dismal .393 shooting percentage and a 2.1 points per game average.

But Rice, who worked extensively on his shooting and his confidence over the summer, hopes to dispense with the criticism and show coach Dean Smith and Tar Heel fans that he can play a significant role on the team this season.

"I think now I've got my confidence back," Rice said. "I've worked hard all offseason, and I'm just looking forward for an opportunity to be getting into a game and doing well."

When Rice does enter a game, he will probably be backing up senior point guard Jeff Lebo. Although not ruling out the possibility, Smith has said he does not expect to have the 6-1 Rice and the 6-3 Lebo playing much at the same time, simply because of the height disadvantage that would create in the backcourt.

"I'm sure King and Jeff are going to play together some," Smith said, "but I'd like to have a bigger guard

in there defensively. We were fortunate to have Al Wood and Michael Jordan there in the big guard spot, and you get spoiled having another rebounder there."

Rice may still be relegated to a backup job, but he expects that job to be a more active one.

"I think I'll be more of a floor leader instead of just coming in on defense and trying to stop guys," he said.

If becoming a floor leader was Rice's intention at the start of the summer, he sure picked the right mentor to study under. He spent much of his time with his predecessor, Kenny Smith, working on all aspects of being a successful guard in the Tar Heels' system.

"Kenny and I would do a lot of shooting drills together, and we would play against each other in pickup games," Rice said of Smith, now a star for the NBA's Sacramento Kings. "He showed me some things in the open court and he really helped me with my jump shot. I'm shooting the ball on the way up instead of on the way down, and that's helping a lot."

One of the biggest indicators of Rice's progress will be whether he can turn those clangs into swishes in game situations, and whether he will have the confidence to take the open shot.

"I think early in the year (1987-88) when I missed a few shots and



DTH/David Surowiecki

One of the keys to the Tar Heels' season is whether or not King Rice will become a scoring threat

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