

Sports

Baseball's Nevin is prepared for future, but plays for today

By NEIL AMATO
Staff Writer

With graduation fast approaching, Tom Nevin, like many other seniors at UNC, is apprehensive about the future. A center fielder on the North Carolina baseball team, Nevin says his post-graduation plans include "anything but unemployment."

"I want to play pro first, and then I'll see what happens," the Goldens Bridge, N.Y., native said. "After that I don't know what I want to do."

Before Nevin makes any major career decisions, he and his teammates will be concentrating on the rest of the season. Nevin will try to lead the 23-10 Tar Heels (11-2 in the ACC) in their run at the conference's regular-season and tournament crowns.

Nevin said he likes his team's chances of coming out on top. "If we get everything together and keep playing the way we're playing, I don't see why not," said Nevin, who bats anywhere from leadoff to cleanup in the UNC batting order.

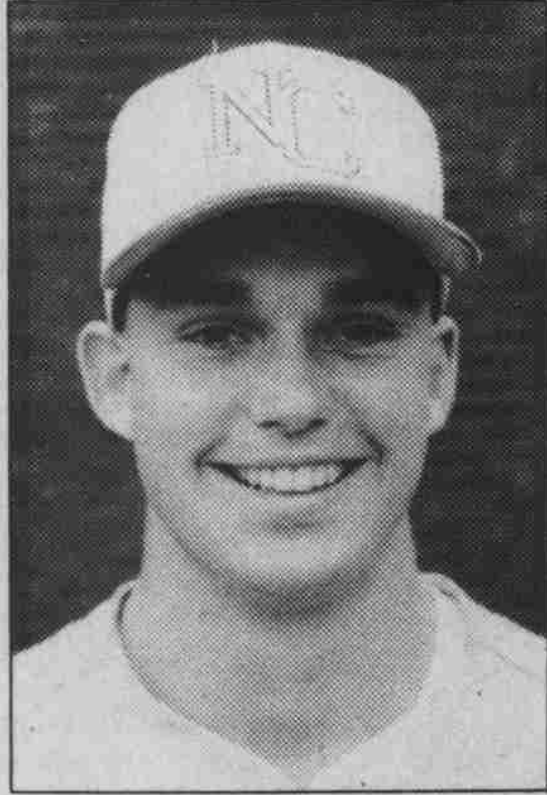
But to do that, UNC must start to do one thing — perform at the plate. The Tar Heels started to turn things around offensively in the twinbill sweep of N.C. State, pounding 20 hits and putting 11 runs on the new scoreboard in the two games. According to Nevin, the Tar Heels "just weren't hitting the ball" before that, and their lackluster .249 team average going into the State wins showed it.

"In baseball, everything runs in streaks," Nevin said, "and for the first 30 games we didn't hit at all."

The slump partially included Nevin, a .335 career hitter in two seasons with UNC. After missing 11 games with a separated shoulder, Nevin re-entered the lineup April 1 against Virginia. But he didn't exactly become Wade Boggs. Nevin went into the doubleheader versus the Wolfpack hitting .269. After going 4 for 9 in the two games with a home run and two doubles, Nevin had raised his average to .289. Now that he seems to be back in the groove, the Spanish and economics major hopes he can continue to produce, which is what he's expected to do following seasons of .323 and .343 at the plate.

"I just want to go out there and do my thing," Nevin said. "I just want to hit the ball hard, and hopefully good things will happen."

Although the Tar Heels have had their troubles on offense, they have been getting wins through fine pitching. Nevin said he believed that the mound men have been UNC's saviors.



Tom Nevin

"We've got awesome pitching," Nevin said. "It's kept us in so many games."

Despite having only two errors in the field and having a gun for an arm, Nevin has a distinct favorite when it comes to offense and defense. "Definitely offense," Nevin said. "When you're in the outfield you just kind of hang out. I definitely like offense better."

While it may not be true that Nevin has hung out in center, it's certainly evident that he's always been ready at the plate. After playing his freshman season at William and Mary, transferring to UNC and redshirting one year, Nevin hit .323 in his sophomore season while starting in center. During his junior year, Nevin hit .343 — including 13 homers, 19 doubles, 70 runs scored and 143 total bases. Although Nevin has 33 stolen bases in his two seasons, he's swiped only four this season.

Nevin explained the reason he and his teammates hadn't been burning up the paths so far this season.

"We want to run, but we haven't really had the chance because we've been in so many close ball games," Nevin said.

Speaking of close games, that's something Nevin isn't used to, at least in his baseball, or shall we say tee-ball, debut.

"We won our first game 66-33," Nevin said. "It's something I've remembered over the years."

Nevin has been playing baseball since first grade or when he was "this tall," as he held his hand about three feet off the ground. In high school, Nevin was a catcher who was converted to play the outfield when he went to W&M. Despite starting at William and Mary, Nevin thought he needed a switch.

"I really wasn't happy with the baseball program there," Nevin said. "Even though I started, I just wanted something better."

Nevin and the other Tar Heels, who lambasted the Soviet National Team 13-2 in an exhibition Monday, hosted the visitors to a welcome dinner after the wins over the Wolfpack. Nevin was intrigued by the Russians.

"They speak English better than you think," Nevin said. "I mean, we didn't get into any major deep political things. Even though we don't speak the same language, we can understand each other."

Comprehension of doing the right things is what Nevin and his teammates need to do if they want to go far this season.

Heels, Nichols swat Duke

By DAVE GLENN
Sports Editor

UNC baseball coach Mike Roberts had a problem Tuesday.

Archrival Duke was coming to Boshamer Stadium with its best pitcher on the mound, and Roberts' top two starters — John Thoden and Michael Hoog — had just pitched Saturday.

The Blue Devils, last in the ACC, smelled an upset. But not Roberts.

He simply went to the bullpen early — very early — and watched as UNC (23-10, 11-2) relievers Rich Fernandez and Jim Dougherty shut down the Blue Devils (17-14, 9-9) for nine innings, combining on a six-hit shutout in the Tar Heels' 11-0 romp.

Of course, the combination of three hits, six runs and five RBIs from Todd Nichols and Ryan Howison didn't hurt, either.

"I was pleased that we continued to swing the bat," Roberts said. "Their starter (Mike Trombley) is an excellent college pitcher, and we didn't hit him at Duke. It was good to see us hit some balls hard off of him."

Eventually, that is. After an unearned UNC run in the second inning, the closest thing to a score came in the top of the third. With Fernandez pitching in his first start of the year, the Blue Devils strung together three singles, only to have

lead runner David Griffin gunned down by 20 feet at the plate on a strong throw by right fielder Darren Villani.

Roberts dealt his ace early, as Dougherty (4-1) relieved Fernandez in the fourth and went on to pick up the win with 5 2/3 innings of one-hit ball, striking out six.

Dougherty, who has started four games in his 16 appearances, said he wasn't surprised by Roberts' tactics. "My job is to come in as a long reliever with Fernandez," Dougherty said.

While Dougherty made things occasionally interesting by mixing in six walks to the Blue Devils, the Tar Heels finally got things going against Trombley in the fifth.

Nichols, who was 3 for 4 with three runs and three RBIs on the day, got into the act with a line drive through a pulled-in infield to drive in Ron Maurer, who had doubled. Howison followed with a single to score Nichols, who had stolen second. That was enough to make a loser of Trombley (3-6), but it was just the beginning of a four-run fifth.

After a Villani double and a walk to UNC catcher Jesse Levis, Tom Nevin singled home Villani and Brad Woodall brought home Levis with a sacrifice fly to give the Tar Heels a commanding 5-0 lead.

In the sixth, Nichols struck

again, driving in Dave Arendas from third on an infield single. Howison routinely followed with a perfect hit-and-run double down the right field line, scoring Nichols with the Tar Heels' seventh run.

"We haven't been able to take a lot of batting practice lately, but we had a few hours (Tuesday)," said Howison, who is finally recovered from a hand injury sustained early in the year. "I changed my stance a little, and it seemed to help me."

Nichols, who has been exceptional defensively for UNC this year, said his latest streak has a lot to do with his approach to hitting. "Especially mentally, because I'm concentrating on the ball more than ever," he said. "We're all getting back to focusing on coming through with the big hits and RBIs when we need them."

Batting in the eighth, when UNC tacked on the final four runs of the evening, Nichols almost polished off his scintillating performance with a homer. But his left-handed smash bounced high off the right-center field fence for a double, driving in Arendas with the Tar Heels' 10th run.

That left — who else? — Howison at the plate, and he promptly lined an RBI single to center to complete the massacre.

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