

SPORTS THURSDAY

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Baseball beats Wake, takes regular season title

By DAVE GLENN
Sports Editor

WINSTON-SALEM — The Tar Heels' John Thoden and Todd Nichols were 15-year-olds when UNC baseball won its last regular season ACC title.

That was in 1983, when Scott Bankhead, B.J. Surhoff and Walt Weiss helped UNC coach Mike Roberts to a 10-2 regular season record en route to his second of his three conference championships.

Bankhead and Co. are professionals now.

But it was Thoden and Nichols who pitched and hit like major leaguers Wednesday, as the Tar Heels squeaked out a 4-3 road victory over Wake Forest.

With the win, the Tar Heels upped their record to 27-12, with a sparkling 15-4 record in ACC competition. The 15 wins represent a new record for most conference victories by a UNC team in one season. The Diamond Deacons dropped to 30-19, 9-10 in conference play.

Roberts, now in his 12th year at the helm of UNC baseball, said he

was happiest for his players. "They're the ones who have earned it," Roberts said. "They've played well all year, and they've stuck together. It's always a thrill when you have an opportunity for the regular season championship."

It was the first time at the top of the mountain for Thoden and Nichols, two veterans on a team with only one senior starter.

Nichols, a Medford, N.J., native, continued his hot hitting by knocking in the Tar Heels' first two runs. The 6-1, 210-pound left fielder opened the

scoring in the second inning when he slammed a 375-foot home run high over the right-center field fence. In the fifth, Nichols brought home UNC second baseman Dave Arendas with a one-out single.

Thoden, the Tar Heels' ace right-hander, kept the Deacons at bay, going the distance in recording his ACC-leading seventh complete game of the season. The Medford, N.Y., native scattered nine hits while walking four and striking out six. Though they got the job done, those are not particularly impressive

numbers in Thoden's case.

Roberts said Thoden won on a day when he wasn't at the top of his game. "I thought he had good stuff," Roberts said. "But he did a great job of mixing pitches up throughout the game. He just did another outstanding job of pitching, particularly in the ninth."

It was in the ninth that Thoden got Wake's Chris Kowalcik to pop up with the bases loaded, after the Deacons had scored to come within 4-3, for the game's final out.

Roberts was particularly pleased

with the performances of his two Medfordites. "When you're involved in championship play, your veterans have to come through, and they did," Roberts said.

In the bottom of the fifth, ACC batting leader Warren Sawkiw evened the score with a two-run homer.

UNC took the lead for good in the sixth inning. Darren Villani led off with a walk. He went to second and third on consecutive ground-outs and scored on a wild pitch.

Lacrosse — Everything you always wanted in a sport

OK, I admit it.

At 5-foot-8, I'm way too short to be a basketball star — of course, the fact that my shooting percentage hovers around the five percent range doesn't help any.

At a slightly disproportioned 150 pounds, I don't have the physique for a sparkling career as an intimidating football defensive back. All right, I do have the perfect build to be a pretty good professional croquet player, but that's about it.

But somehow, if I could transform and become a dominant player in any sport, I'd shun the glory and money of the glamorous professional sports to spend my college days frolicking as a lacrosse player.

What better sport to succeed in than in one whose NCAA Top 20 includes schools with nicknames like the Blue Jays (Johns Hopkins), the Greyhounds (Loyola, Md.), the Quakers (Pennsylvania), the Minutemen (Massachusetts) and my personal favorite, the Flying Dutchmen (of Hofstra University).

I'm sick and tired of being a Tiger, a Bobcat, an Indian or a Bulldog. I want a cool nickname, damn it, and lacrosse is the sport if you're looking for a veritable potpourri of imaginative school monikers.

But the attraction goes deeper. The entire aura surrounding your basic lacrosse player is intriguing. People, especially people on this campus — especially girls on this campus — worship lax players.

Today, the top lax schools in the nation include Navy, Hofstra, Adelphi and a handful of Ivy League colleges (mighty pretentious Ivy League schools I might add). In short, lax has attained a reputation as the sport of preference for "pretty boy" schools.

"Hey, face it. Lacrosse is a preppy sport," explains Tom Brennan, the athletic director at the nation's third-ranked team, Loyola (Md.).

Andrew Podolsky Asst. Sports Editor

"It's no accident that the best academic schools in the nation have the best lacrosse programs," adds Pennsylvania coach Tony Seamen. "Most of the players are well-off kids going to college for professional careers. It's just not an inner-city sport. There's an element of class involved."

In a phrase, the grim-faced, rough-and-tumble coaches of America's lacrosse community just defined the basic lacrosse player as "a rugged preppy who maintains the image of the innocent boy next door gone bad."

"Yeah, I can see a little bit of that description in lacrosse players," said Don Zimmerman, head coach at Johns Hopkins, the top-ranked school in the nation. "Lacrosse has a bit of a mystique about it. Lacrosse players are a tightly knit group, and they tend to look out for one another more so than in other sports."

"A lax player has to master the stick skills. Anyone can dribble a basketball or throw a football. But it takes a special talent and it's unique to be able to control a ball with a webbed stick."

Ahh yes, the lacrosse mystique. Take my roommate my freshman year. He was a nice guy, and had his share of female acquaintances. But somehow, the fact that he was a lacrosse player opened up a whole new range of female accompaniment to him.

I remember female friends trying to get me to fix them up with my friends. I'd say "I have a nice roommate," and they'd say "big deal."

But when I casually mumbled "and he plays lacrosse," I suddenly was surrounded by every girl in my

English I class squealing "God there is just something about those guys that is sooo cute!"

Meanwhile, I'm sitting there, drumming my fingers, scheming on just how expensive it would be for me to take up the game of lacrosse. Hmmm . . .

What a sport. Any sport in which it is not only legal, but is considered a good, aggressive tactic to level your opponent in the middle of the field for no apparent reason has my vote as the sport of champions.

Sure, class plays a part in it, but it goes deeper than that. Now, I've been known to swing a pretty mean golf club at times. But it's kind of tough to get girls to swoon when you drain a challenging 17-foot putt.

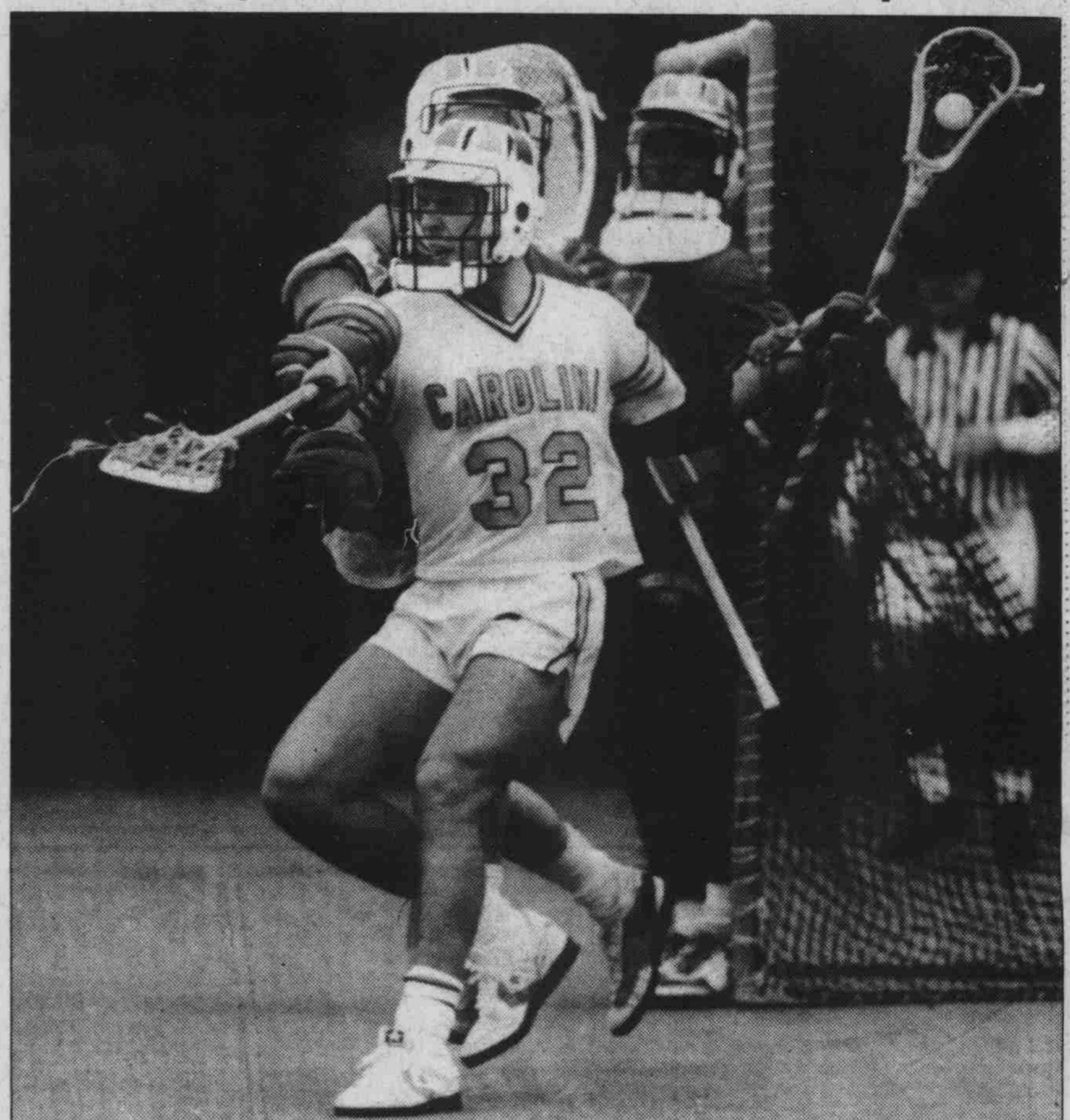
But, if you can dart between two or three 6-4, 215-pound defenders, get swatted in the legs and arms with wooden sticks, elbowed in the head, poked in the eye and still manage to acrobatically rifle a little ball into a lacrosse net while you get body-slammed to the turf, you'll have girls buying you blue cups at He's Not Here for three weeks. And they'll be buying you St. Pauli Girl, not the cheap Schaeffer Light swill.

Yes, Northerners hold a special role on this campus, perhaps being a little more cosmopolitan and mysterious than your typical co-ed. But lacrosse players (virtually all of which are from north of the old Mason-Dixon line) carry that attraction one step further.

Even guys see it (albeit in a slightly negative manner). You can see armchair quarterbacks in every bar saying "Hey man, I could have legs like that, I just don't take the time to work at it."

But most importantly, lacrosse has a professional attraction for me. It is the sport of lacrosse that will give me my headline masterpiece. In a

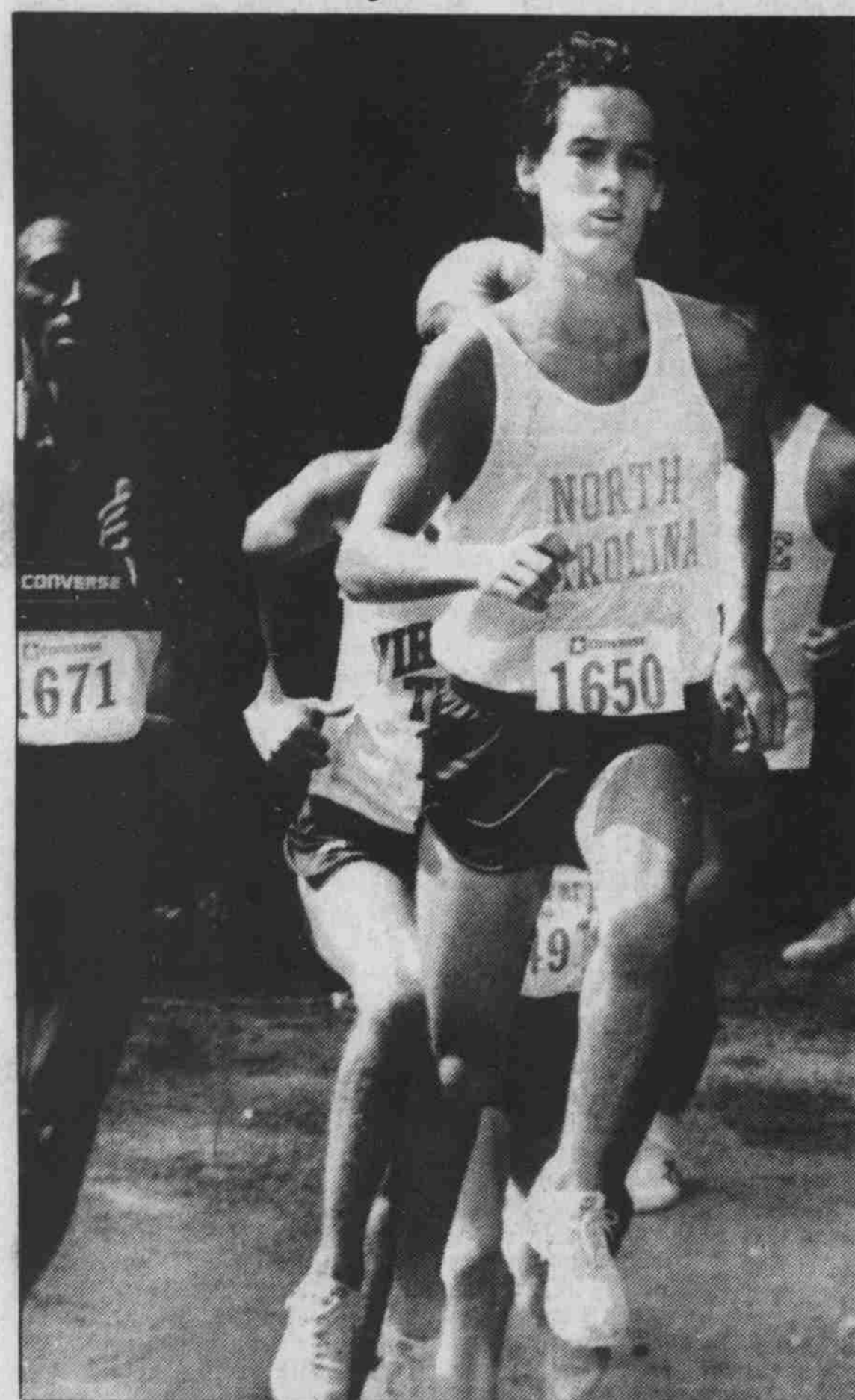
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DTH/David Surowiecki

There's a certain twist to the game of lacrosse that brings with it an almost cult-like atmosphere

Even injuries can't stop McGowan



DTH file photo

Mike McGowan has stayed on track despite a series of injuries

By DAVID J. KUPSTAS
Staff Writer

If you had told senior Mike McGowan in December that he would place in the top six in the 1,500- and 5,000-meter races at the ACC Track and Field Championships this spring, no doubt he would have become an extremely happy man.

McGowan was at home in Toronto, Canada, recovering from major surgery in which a large lump was removed from behind his chest bone.

"I was as messed up as you can be," said McGowan, who, for a period of about two weeks, thought he might have cancer. "I just wanted to get healthy again. As far as running, I wasn't even thinking of running at that point."

The injury came at a time when McGowan thought he was beginning to run well. He wound up missing about six weeks of valuable training time. Coach Dennis Craddock didn't think he'd be back at all this year.

"I kept giving him encouragement, hoping he would be back in time for the spring season," Craddock said. "But in my own heart, I really didn't think a person could have his chest cut open with a saw and have a tumor taken out and four months later be running a competitive mile."

After McGowan recovered from the chest problem, his senior year was again interrupted when he went down with a bruised bone in his shin. This type of injury is a few notches less severe than a stress fracture.

Despite all the adversity, McGowan was able to place sixth in the 1,500 meters (3 minutes, 59.7 seconds) at the ACC Championships in Charlottesville, Va., Saturday. Two hours later, he raked in a fourth-place finish in the 5,000-meter run (14:48.2). His time in the 5,000 might have been higher had he not run the 1,500 twice, once to qualify and once in the finals.

"To warm up and down for an event, you're probably talking about seven or eight miles," he said. "You're

going to be tired."

The points he won for the team in the 5,000 meters gave the Tar Heels just enough to tie Virginia for fourth place.

McGowan began track competition in the ninth grade. That year, he ran cross-country in the fall and played soccer in the spring. He said he chose those activities because he was "too small to do anything else."

By his sophomore year in high school, he began to train year-round. Considered one of Canada's top prep runners in his senior season, McGowan was recruited by many schools for track, but he didn't know if he wanted to leave his native country for college.

He finally decided to come to America and UNC because of athletics. McGowan said that academics did not play a role in his decision because UNC and Canadian colleges are about equal in that respect.

Finding time to study is not really a big problem for McGowan, who is a member of the Dean's List and the ACC academic honor roll.

"For people to say that you can't be a good student and a good athlete at the same time . . . he's just another blaring example that you can if you set your mind to it and you want to do it bad enough," Craddock said.

McGowan got off to a fast start in his collegiate running career, as he was named top ACC freshman during the 1985 cross country season. In the spring, he finished third in the ACC 5,000-meter championships.

In his sophomore year, McGowan was an All-ACC cross country runner. A slow-recovering ruptured appendix later ruined much of his year, but he managed a seventh-place finish in the ACC 5,000-meter championships.

One of his best races was last year's 10,000-meter ACC championship. Although he finished third, McGowan was pleased with his perfor-

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The Final Column: the good, the bad

By JOHN BLAND
Staff Writer

Well, gang, here it is: My Last Column.

Not forever, mind you. Just until The Summer Tar Heel starts.

Over the past year I've written about such diverse subjects as football, women's soccer, the Charlotte Hornets, steroids, the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue and Elvis on TV. And accordingly, some people have either liked what I have had to say, or haven't liked it.

But that's OK, I can deal with that. I understand that some people must have their own opinions and I can live with it, as long as they keep their mouths shut.

Now, today I'm going to write about sports. I am. Really.

Top 10 Sports Moments of 1988-89 (for me, anyway)

1. The Swimsuit Issue — OK, gals, this is your last chance to get mad at me.

2. UNC's ACC basketball crown — To all those drunken UNC deviants at the Southernmost Hotel in Key West who damn near turned the pool area into something out of "Caligula" after the game: I thank you.

3. Victory over Duke at Duke — At the time I was holed up in a computer room going slowly mad, but it was nice to get out and mingle with 2,000 of my closest friends after the win.

4. Covering my first football game — Even though we lost to Maryland, and the free food was really cheap, and I couldn't bring a flask of Jim Beam, the air conditioning of the stupendous new press box made it all worthwhile.

5. Lacrosse — Anything about this game is Top Ten material.

6. UNC women's soccer NCAA championship — At home over State to boot. Pardon the pun.

7. The Charlotte Hornets — I admit it. I was wrong. Tripucka, Bogues, Chapman and Co. are the second worst team in the NBA. But I still love 'em.

8. Bud Bowl — The greatest commercial in the history of television, stuck in the middle of some dumb football game.

9. Mack Brown — Maybe not next year either, but I've a feeling he'll be winning some very big games before he vamooses.

10. The First 10 Minutes of the Michigan Game — After that it just got depressing. But Jeff Lebo for ten minutes . . .

And, as we all know, you have to take the good with the bad.

Bottom Five (I'm an optimist) Sports Moments of 1988-89

1. The Last 30 Minutes of the Michigan Game — God, I just don't even like mentioning this.

2. George Steinbrenner — I'm going to kill this man someday. Especially if he trades Mattingly.

3. Oklahoma football — A disgrace to the football community. Thank God they didn't recruit me. I would've blown the whistle right then and there. Unless they gave me a Corvette.

4. Steroids — A very real problem that's starting to get on my nerves.

5. English soccer — When will these idiots ever learn? The cradle of modern society, one of the bastions of civility, and they kill people over a game that's about as exciting as watching lint accumulate in a Kenmore.

There you have it. For seniors, I bid you a fond ciao. Follow me in The Summer Tar Heel as I cover Eastern European folk dances.