

SPORTS

Nation's best recruits may bring UNC wrestlers back on top

By DOUG MCCURRY
Staff Writer

Head wrestling coach Bill Lam enters the 1990-91 season in an unfamiliar situation.

For the first time in his 14-year tenure as coach, UNC does not return an ACC champion or All-America. He is also coming off a season in which his team failed to finish first or second in the ACC Tournament for the first time in 13 years.

These startling facts may lead one to think that Lam is expecting a difficult rebuilding season. But Lam followed the lead of basketball coach Dean Smith and soccer coach Elmar Bolowich in bringing to Chapel Hill arguably the top recruiting class in the nation.

That's definitely a way to replenish the talent pool.

Leading the freshman class is Ty Moore, who out of Allegheny High School became Pennsylvania's first four-time state champion in 50 years. Lam said that Moore has the talent at 118 pounds to compete with college



Bill Lam

wrestlers now, although he is unsure whether he will redshirt Moore this year.

Other top recruits include three-time Virginia state champ Jody Staylor; three-time South Carolina state champ Marc Taylor; two-time North Carolina state champs Stan Banks and Seth Richards; Virginia state champ Ross Iaci; Pennsylvania state champ Brad Silimperi; and Durham-Jordan graduates Travis Lam and Trey Ezell.

Banks is expected to challenge immediately for the starting role at both 167 and 177 pounds, while Seth Richards should battle for the starting role at 142 pounds.

Another interesting struggle for mat time is at 118 pounds. Sophomore Jeff Vasquez is by no means guaranteed the job after his 7-17-1 season last year. He will be pushed by Moore and Silimperi, who are no strangers to facing each other. Moore beat Silimperi for his fourth Pennsylvania state title last year.

"We have some freshmen who could start," Lam says of his freshmen class, rated first by Amateur Wrestling News. "They will help us. But the time we're going to see most of them is two years

down the road. For the young kids that do start now, it is a great time for the fans — the student body — to get to know them, because two years from now they are going to know who they are."

The majority of the freshmen who do not start this year, which begins for the team Friday at the Eastern Nationals in Norfolk, Va., should be redshirted. This would allow each newcomer a year of everyday practice against the starter at his weight before having four years of eligibility. Lam smiles when he talks about two or three seasons from now, when he should reap the rewards of this outstanding recruiting class.

For this year, Lam is relying on the experience of the team's upperclassmen to start at most weights and help develop the younger talent. Junior Pete Welch is the top returning wrestler this year. He was 25-14-2 overall (4-1-1 in the ACC) last year, winning the East Stroudsburg Open and missing All-America honors by only one match.

"I want to be All-American, national

champion," Welch said. "I've got two years to compete and three years to do it in, so some time in that time frame, I'd like to do that."

Lam believes that this is a realistic goal for Welch. Judging by the 40-26-4 career record that he compiled while starting the last two seasons at 158 pounds, there is no reason to doubt it.

Welch is also excited about the superb freshman class. "They look really tough," he said. "We have a lot of young guys — but guys who can do it. They are pretty positive. All are good workers."

The team returns more impact wrestlers than just Welch. Senior Jay Landofo won 16 matches at the upper weight classes last season, finishing second in the ACC and missing the All-America rounds of the NCAA Tournament by one match. Senior Erik Keyser returns at 167 pounds, where he compiled a 12-9 record last season.

"I am looking to Pete, Jay, and Erik for leadership," Lam said. "They are doing a good job of getting the young

guys squared away."

They will need to do an excellent job leading this extremely young team. Landofo and Keyser are the only seniors, and Welch is joined in the junior class only by Doug Roemer, a 150/158 pounder with a career record of 11-7.

Although the team is lacking in experience, members are still optimistic about the upcoming season.

"I'm excited about the season in a lot of ways — not because we have a lot of talent back, because in some ways it looks like we have less talent than we've had in a long time," Lam said. "But we have come together as a team. They are looking forward to proving a lot of people wrong. They don't want to wait two years to be good."

Said Welch, "We talked about team goals, and everyone is focused. The ACC and NCAA tournaments are very important. I'm not sure quite how high we can finish — maybe top 10."

The team is just following the attitude expressed on its T-shirts: "ALWAYS ON TOP."

Hamilton undergoes surgery on right knee

From staff reports

Linda Hamilton, a senior defender on the UNC women's soccer team, underwent arthroscopic surgery on her right knee Wednesday, head coach Anson Dorrance said.

Hamilton, a four-time All-ACC and two-time All-America selection, is questionable for UNC's NCAA Tournament quarterfinal on Nov. 11. The operation involved correcting torn cartilage in her knee, an injury which first occurred in a Sept. 30 game against George Mason and resurfaced on Oct. 24 against UNC-Greensboro.

Hamilton did play in both games of last weekend's ACC Tournament before deciding on surgery. Magnetic resonance image testing performed on Tuesday confirmed the injury.

The 1988 ACC Player of the Year and a starter on the U.S. National Team, Hamilton played her first three collegiate seasons for N.C. State before transferring to UNC prior to the 1990 season. The Marietta, Ga., native has scored two goals this year, both in a critical 3-0 victory over Virginia on Oct. 20.

The Tar Heels, 17-1-1 and seeded



Linda Hamilton

first in the NCAA Tournament, will host the winner of this weekend's N.C. State-William & Mary matchup on Nov. 11 at 2 p.m. As the top seed, UNC received a first-round bye.

Preseason All-ACC Basketball

Voted on by ACC sportswriters

First Team	Second Team
Kenny Anderson, Ga. Tech (88)	Rick Fox, North Carolina (38)
Dale Davis, Clemson (80)	Chris Corchiani, N.C. State (16)
Christian Laettner, Duke (77)	Walt Williams, Maryland (7)
Bryant Stith, Virginia (69)	Bobby Hurley, Duke (4)
Rodney Monroe, N.C. State (51)	Chris King, Wake Forest (4)

Player of the Year: Anderson

Rookie of the Year: Rodney Rogers, Wake Forest

Merola

from page 6

high school, had to adjust to playing in Missimo's shadow.

"The reason why he didn't get more recognition or stats," Bolowich said, "is that he did not come in as a hit-man as a freshman like Missimo did. (Merola) was not such an impact player in his first year."

That freshman year, the Tar Heels had their dream run, winning the inaugural ACC Tournament and making the NCAA Final Four. Their championship hopes were ended by eventual national champion Clemson in the semifinals.

Unfortunately, that season may be the high point of Merola's time at UNC. During his sophomore year in 1988, he was moved to the back to help the Tar Heel defense.

"I hated it back there," he said. "But that's what they wanted, so I said, 'Sure, I'll do it.' But I've always been a forward. I'd rather have people chase me for 90 minutes than chase someone for 90 minutes. I like scoring goals. I like being a part of the action. You need your defensive players. We've got some good ones, but I hated it."

Then the injury bug bit Merola hard. He tore both his hamstrings, one his freshman year and the other his sophomore year.

"(Injuries) are a pain in the butt," Merola said. "You're doing so well for a while, you're expecting a lot of great

things out of yourself, and when you don't come through the best you know you can, and what everyone else expects from you, that's real frustrating. You get down on yourself."

Another problem he has faced is UNC's record during the past few years. Much was expected after the Final Four, but things have not gone as planned. The Tar Heels went from 20-5 that year to 14-9 his sophomore season to 9-9-1 last season. This year, the Tar Heels posted a 12-5 record but were a disappointing 2-4 in the ACC.

"It's really hard, because most of the players that come here were stars at their schools," he said. "If you look at their credentials, every one of them says state championships, All-America, All-whatever. So, everyone's pretty much come from a winning program. Then last year was just devastating to a lot of people."

While Merola prepares for his last games as a Tar Heel, he claims his love affair with this school will never end.

"I hope they really do kick butt (next year)," he said. "If they can get somebody to step in and score some goals, they're going to be good."

"I love this place and everything about it, and anytime anything goes good here, it's great. I'll go back home and flash my North Carolina stuff and say, 'Look at the Heels!'"

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