

Estroff back in swing after wrist injury

UNC first baseman looks to regain last year's All-America form

By Scott Gold
Senior Writer

If UNC first baseman Steve Estroff's sense of humor in the preseason is any indication of how he might perform in the upcoming campaign, the All-America's senior year may be a bit of a disappointment.

After suffering an injury to his right wrist while checking his swing in a game late last year, Estroff did not swing a bat for six months and has been working to rehabilitate himself.

"I just need to get the timing back," Estroff said. "It's a whole building-back process. I'm just trying to get back into the swing of things, so to speak."

Harrumph, harrumph. Just a year after taking the ACC baseball world by storm, Estroff gives one a comfortable feeling that he is back and ready to roll in his senior campaign.

But Estroff is still readapting to that comfortable feeling — one that fit him so snugly while attending North Springs High School in Atlanta — so prolonging the process is okay for him.

"I was looking to have a good year," Estroff said about last season. "But it was unbelievable, just icing on the cake. That's what you want. You see that you are doing these things, but when the season is over, everyone is busy telling you that you did it."

Estroff doesn't really have to be told; his numbers speak for themselves. In 1990, when the Tar Heels won a school-record 51 games, he hit .389 with 15 home runs and 73 RBI, second-most in UNC history. His slugging percentage was an astounding .699, and his 89 hits were the third-best total in school history, behind only current pros B.J. Surhoff and Scott Bradley.

All of this was enough to earn the lefty second-team All-America honors and a spot on Baseball America's "Dream Team." For his career, Estroff has built up some hefty numbers — a .327 average, 20 dingers and 100 RBI in 135 games.

"The coaching staff always felt that he had the potential to be explosive offensively," said UNC head coach Mike Roberts. "The first year or two here it didn't quite happen for him as early as he would have liked and as we would have liked. But it didn't surprise us when it actually happened."

Estroff's high school performance certainly suggested a stellar career. He hit .620 during his junior year in 1986 — yes, .620 — for one of the top three prep averages in the nation. In his senior year, when opposing hurlers were pitching around him, he mustered 10 home runs in 30 games and drove in 35 base runners. Estroff was hounded by scouts from the Atlanta Braves throughout his last two years of high school.

"He's the best player I've ever had,"

said North Springs head coach Dick Prindle, a North Carolina alumnus now in his 19th year. "The scouts were looking at him because he was a great line-drive hitter at the time. It was just a matter of time before he learned to turn on the ball and really get a hold of it. I thought he would get drafted out of high school."

Scouts turned away, though, when they heard that Estroff was serious about the college thing.

When he arrived at UNC, Estroff didn't mesh immediately with his teammates. He said he had a hard time balancing academics and athletics and adjusting to his new environment. Academics won out over baseball, and Estroff mustered a .204 average in 25 games as a freshman.

"I knew I was a good hitter, but I came here and had to prove myself all over again," Estroff said. "I didn't really fit in, and it was hard for me to deal with the new environment. It was a tough year for me. It was sort of a downer, and I felt like I let myself down."

That pattern continued throughout the first half of his sophomore year. Through the first 31 games, Estroff stroked 21 hits in 87 plate appearances for a .241 average. But, in a glimpse of what was to come, he batted .400 over his next nine games until a hamstring injury forced him back to the bench.

Baseball success was slowly — but surely — coming along. Scholastic success, though, had been there from the start.

"Those were my two main goals coming in — getting an education and playing baseball to the best of my ability," Estroff said. "At first, my academics outweighed my baseball because my playing was down. My academics sort of shined. I just try to balance my time."

Estroff's academic career is still shining: He is on track to graduate on time with a degree in business administration.

"Steve is an outstanding student-athlete. He certainly helps our academic situation," Roberts said. "He's a great example for some of our younger players because he does so well. Steve's the guy that the players really should look to."

Because of that, Estroff has felt some external pressure to repeat as the superhero of last season's dilapidated offensive attack. He said it has affected his performance so far in the preseason.

"They don't really need me as much as they did last year," Estroff said. "Right now, everybody else is doing really

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The Steve Estroff File

Number 15	Steve Estroff — First Base											Senior, Atlanta, Ga. (North Springs)		
YEAR	AVE	GP	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB		
1988	.204	25	49	9	10	1	1	2	9	11	10	0		
1989	.268	47	138	20	37	10	0	3	18	23	25	0		
1990	.389	63	229	51	89	20	3	15	73	33	25	0		
Totals	.327	135	416	80	136	31	4	20	100	67	60	0		

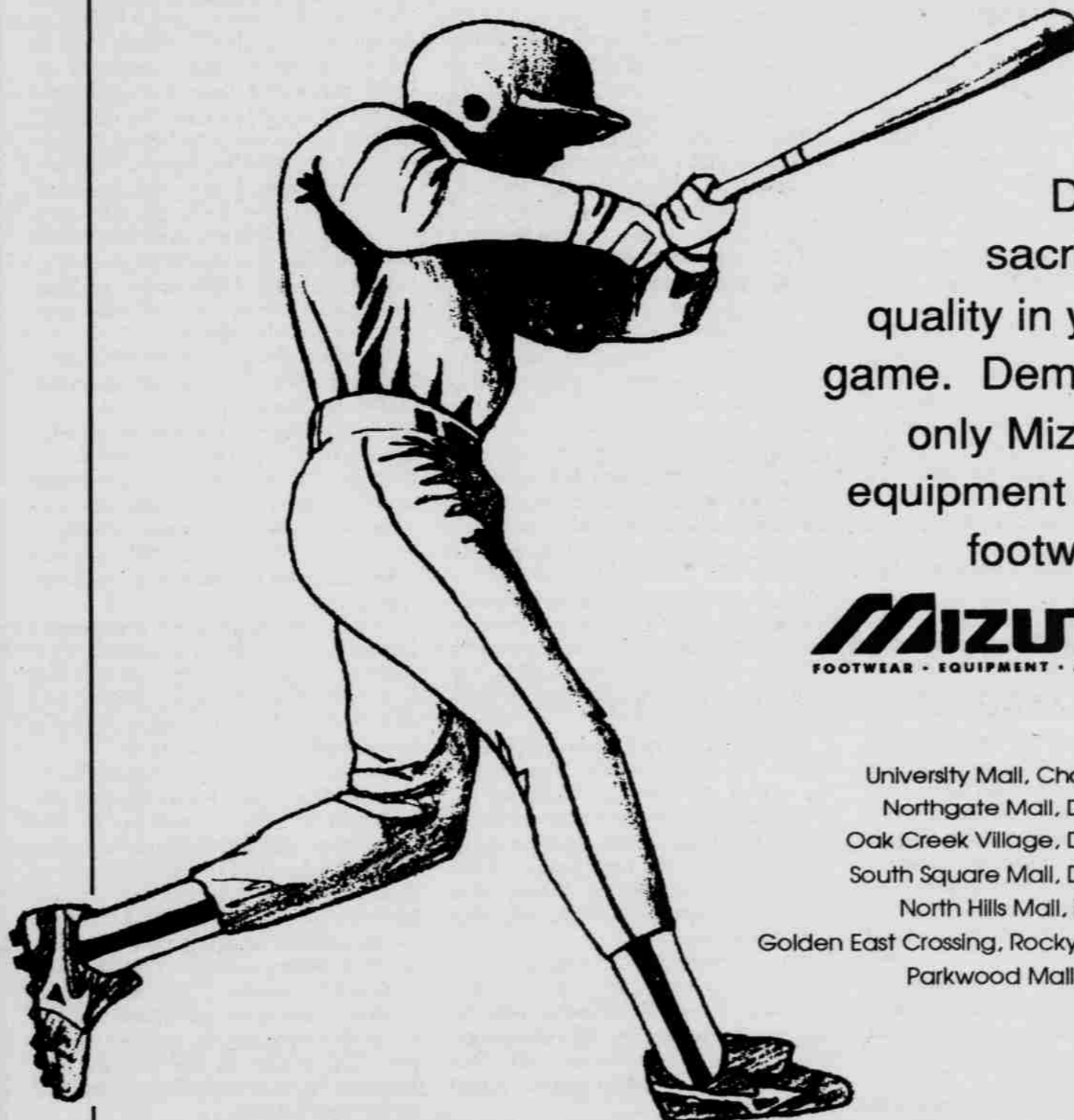
Bats left, throws left; Majoring in business

Accomplishments: 1990 — Second-team All-America, first-team All-ACC ... On Baseball America's Dream Team ... National Player of the Week after he became the first Tar Heel to ever homer twice in the same inning ... ACC Tournament MVP ... 73 RBI were second-most in UNC history; 89 hits third-most; 20 doubles second-most ... 14-game hit streak.



Steve Estroff

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