

Bound For Raleigh

Wendy Williams Heads For State Pageant Instead Of Center Field

BY SUSAN USHER

This is the first summer since fifth grade that 21-year-old Wendy Williams of Leland has not played slow-pitch softball.

Instead, the reigning Miss Brunswick County and UNC-Wilmington junior is busily preparing for the June 25 Miss North Carolina Pageant.

Giving up a few weeks of playing center field on a slow-pitch team—and the accompanying bruises and scrapes—is about the only concession Ms. Williams is making for what she expects to be the high point in her year-long reign. She leaves Sunday for a hectic week in which her time will be divided between the campus of Peace College and Memorial Auditorium. Through it all, she said she plans to simply be herself.

The week culminates Saturday, June 25, with the crowning of a new Miss North Carolina. The pageant will air at 9 p.m. Saturday on WECT-TV, Channel 6, in Wilmington.

However, 75 of Ms. Williams' friends and relatives won't be watching her from their living rooms. Instead they have reserved seats in Memorial Auditorium.

"I've got a lot of support. That makes me feel so much better," Ms. Williams said in an interview last week at the home she shares with her parents, Daie and Rachel Williams, and a brother, Brent. A sister, Kim Stowell, is married and also lives in Leland.

Most of the 45-plus trophies in the living room case are for softball, not pageants; her first pageant was less than three years ago, when she won the title Miss Southeastern Community College 1985-86 at the Columbus County college.

At a later Miss SECC Pageant the former title-holder returned as an entertainer and was spotted by David Clegg, a judge who also happened to be president of the Miss Brunswick County Scholarship Pageant Committee Inc., sponsor of the local Miss North Carolina preliminary pageant.

With encouragement from him and from her family, she decided at the last minute to enter the pageant, and was crowned Miss Brunswick County last December.

"In the back of my mind I wanted to go to the Miss North Carolina Pageant one time and I knew that this was probably the only chance I'd ever have," she said, recalling her mixed emotions at the time. "But I also wanted to finish school and I knew if I did that I wouldn't be able to attend summer school."

Since the December pageant she has logged more than 21 public appearances, yet said she doesn't think many county residents know who Miss Brunswick County is—something she'd like to see change.

That could happen this week, if Clegg's predictions come true. He's confident Ms. Williams could be the next Miss North Carolina.

While Clegg has done much to build her self-confidence, Miss Brunswick County said she'd be delighted to make the top 10 finalists.

And the \$5,500 scholarship given to Miss North Carolina could go a long way toward paying for graduate school. After she begins teaching, Ms. Williams wants to continue working on her master's degree part-time.

Miss North Carolina will also receive a car and a Raleigh condominium for use during her reign, a wardrobe, and opportunities to earn between \$20,000 and \$30,000 from personal appearances. She typically travels six days a week.

Getting Ready

So far, Ms. Williams isn't nervous about the pageant or the tough competition expected from within her

preliminary group, Group B, which traditionally produces many of the pageant's finalists. "David (Clegg) told me, 'The more competition, the better,'" she said.

In addition to praying for composure, preparation for the pageant also including getting an even tan and trimming a few more pounds from her 5-foot, 7-inch, 119-pound frame. While being a physical education major has helped keep her active, Ms. Williams also went to aerobics three times a week February through May.

Much of her preparation time has gone into pouring through newspapers and news magazines to keep abreast of current events. In her judges' interview on Tuesday afternoon, she anticipates questions on the U.S.-Soviet summit and the presidential race, along with more personal ones. She plans to be ready.

For the interview, she will wear a St. John knit Clegg found for her in New York City. The black, long-sleeved sheath ends just above the knees and has a black and white and matching cuffs. "It's very businesslike," she said.

Its clean, simple lines are reflected throughout her wardrobe designed by pageant seamstress Jamie Shaw of Elizabethtown and Clegg, much of it in white.

Look Is 'Angelic'

The aim is to create an image of wholesome innocence, an "angelic" look that takes full advantage of this Lonnie Anderson look-alike's fair complexion, enormous green eyes, blonde hair and generous smile—without overdoing it.

In Wednesday night's swimsuit competition she will wear a simple white suit accented with French knots, and 4-inch high heels to accentuate the slenderness of her legs. "I've never walked on 4-inch heels before," she said.

For the opening number from "A Chorus Line" contestants will wear sequined black leotards and skin-tone tights.

For one evening of competition she'll don a silver and gold gown of "crushed ice," which she said looks like glass under the lights. Longsleeved with a V-neck front and teardrop back, it fits snugly through bodice and waist, then the bias-cut skirt flows easily when she walks.

"I want to be comfortable," she said. "I'm going to be myself and I want to be personable. Very natural."

This should come readily, since personableness is one of the major assets Miss Brunswick County judges noted her critique.

For her Thursday night talent, she will sing a contemporary gospel song familiar to her local audiences. She sang "Holy Ground" both at the Miss SECC and Miss Brunswick County pageants and hopes it will continue to be a lucky number for her.

The Geron Davis number is "perfect" for her range, she said, adding, "And I sing it with my heart. I really think it is an anointing song."

The song was pulled from her performance repertoire early this year when it was locked in as her pageant number during "work weekend" in March, when contestants met each other for the first time and received initial critiques of their talent.

Judges questioned her choice of contemporary gospel, typically a "no-no" on the pageant circuit. But she never seriously considered compromising with anything else.

In any event, she's ready for whatever comes next week.

"I'm going to do the best I can. What more can you ask for?" she said. "And I'm not going to be disappointed."



KEEPING UP with current events by reading newspapers and magazines is only part of Wendy Williams' preparations for the Miss North Carolina

Pageant next week. Miss Brunswick County leaves Sunday for Raleigh.

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