

SPORTS

Ready For Court

UNC Charlotte's Michelle Smith Helps Power 49ers



UNC Charlotte's Michelle Smith is making a comeback from a severe ankle sprain last year. The 5-9 sophomore is known for her defense (left) but her offense can make opponents shudder as well.

Photo/CALVIN FERGUSON

By Herb White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

When Michelle Smith goes onto the volleyball court, she becomes a different person.

The UNC Charlotte sophomore's solemn face becomes animated, the feet get anxious and she becomes quite vocal. In other words, the sport makes her some kind of excited.

"I'm one of those types of people that when I'm playing, I'm a different person," she says. "I talk a lot more to the players. I'm just more into it, more excited about the game when I'm playing."

Last year, Smith did get to do a lot of digging or spiking for the 49ers, who are 5-5 going into Saturday's UNCC Tournament at the Mine Shaft. A preseason ankle injury limited Smith to

just six matches last season. After redshirting, she's back to help the 49ers improve on last year's 10-26 record.

Smith, a 5-9 native of Jeffersonville, Ind., had an outstanding freshman campaign in 1988, leading UNCC with 304 kills and 308 digs. The next year, she severely sprained her left ankle, all but wiping out her sophomore season. Smith is now dedicated to fighting her way back to previous form.

"I think physically, I'm back to where I was last year before I got injured," she said. I should be above that. I should be going up and up, but now I'm trying to go up past that level because I'd been so far down last year."

While the 49ers have been up-and-down as a team this season, Smith says they're ahead of last year's pace. With only one senior (Roslyn Forester) on the

team, the 49ers have improved with a mix of experience and youth. Veteran players make the difference in close matches, if for no other reason than they've been in those situations before.

"This year we have a lot more experience. That's the bottom line," said Smith. Last year, we had two returning starters from the previous year, and both of us were injured. Experience counts for a lot."

Smith is one of UNCC's better hitters, using a combination of power and leaping ability to slam the ball to the floor. Playing outside hitter for the 49ers, however, doesn't mean offense is the only part of her game.

Defense is now Smith's forte, reasoning that missing last year took a toll on her development as an offensive force. Where opponents once scrambled to dig wicked spikes, they now face someone who can beat them

when the ball goes into the 49ers court.

"My hitting," was once the focal point of Smith's abilities, "but now it's my defense. I have to build back up to where I was last year. I still don't know how my defense got better."

When Jacksonville, UNC Asheville and Virginia Commonwealth come in for this weekend's tournament, Smith and the 49ers will be ready. She is already predicting UNCC will sweep the event. After this weekend, we'll be 10-5," she says.

The 49ers' rise to respectability isn't going to be easy, but Smith and her teammates are determined to make it happen. They may have a mediocre record now, but that doesn't have to be this team's legacy.

"None of us are satisfied with it because we want to be 10-0. But we're going to work on it until we are."

Weekend Sports Agenda

High School Football Friday

Ashbrook at Providence: The unbeaten Green Wave should have no problems taming Jim Seacord's Panthers on this road test.

Freedom at Crest: Both teams are so evenly matched, mistakes will likely be the key here.

East Gaston at Olympic: Olympic has shown flashes of brilliance this season. There should be plenty of flash against lowly East Gaston.

Garinger at Myers Park: An entertaining--and intriguing matchup. Can the Wildcats' speed overcome an opportunistic herd of Mustangs?

Independence at Hunter Huss: A big test of strength in the Southwestern 4A. The loser could be in for a hard time when the playoff invitations go out.

Harding at North Mecklenburg. The Rams haven't found themselves yet, but this is a good place to start.

South Mecklenburg at East Mecklenburg. Rudy Abrams' Eagles are still the biggest surprise in Charlotte. They're short on depth, but have lots of heart.

West Mecklenburg at West Charlotte: Say nothing more--the first of three west side skirmishes. The Lions will look for the lead against Maseo Bolin and the Indians.

College Football Saturday

CIAA

Johnson C. Smith at S.C. State 1:30 p.m. Bulldog Stadium, Orangeburg, S.C.: Smith put points on the board last week, but still lost 28-26 to Fayetteville State. S.C. State's rebuilding season should get a boost against the Bulls, who've failed to get everything together for 60 minutes.

North Carolina Central at Hampton: The Eagles broke into the win column at home last week against a non-conference foe. Now they'll face a Hampton team that needs a conference win as desperately as they do.

Livingstone at Virginia State: The Bears are going to have their hands full with the Trojans, a team that makes opponents pay for mistakes.

Virginia Union at Bowie State: The Panthers can take a big step towards the Northern Division title with a win. The Bulldogs (0-2 CIAA) need a win in the worst way to remain a factor.

Fayetteville State at Winston-Salem, 7:30 p.m.

Bowman-Gray Stadium: The Rams got that long-awaited first win last week. Fayetteville State knocked off Smith and can go a game up in the win column with a victory.

Elizabeth City at Grambling: The Vikings take on the legendary Eddie Robinson and his Tigers. On the road. Bad news.

MEAC

N.C. A&T at Norfolk State 1:30 p.m. Norfolk, Va.: The Aggies are for real, but so are the CIAA's Spartans. Both teams are 4-0 and don't particularly care for each other. The best game (on paper) in the area.



James Cuthbertson
POST SPORTS WRITER

Welcome To The ACC, Florida St.; Glad To Have Ya

And then there were nine...Welcome to the Atlantic Coast Conference, Florida State.

Welcome to the dog-eat-dog world of the ACC.

Welcome to the Dean Dome, Littlejohn, Cameron Indoor Stadium, Cole Field House, University Hall, Joel Memorial Coliseum, Alexander Coliseum and Reynolds Coliseum, hell holes of the universe.

Welcome to Memorial, Wallace Wade, Grant, Byrd, Kenan, Carter-Finley, Scott and Groves, pits of the universe.

Life in the ACC will not be easy, but you bring a quality program for the competitive wars and expand the horizons of the ACC across six states, thus controlling a sizable share of the market from Key West, Florida to Elkton, Md. That's the entire Southeastern coast.

Schools voting yes on the second vote for expansion were Clemson, Georgia Tech, North Carolina, N.C. State, Virginia and Wake Forest. Voting no were Duke and Maryland. Their abstentions--by UNC, N.C. State and Wake Forest on the first expansion vote, three yes and two nos had precipitated the second.

After voting to expand, the

league voted unanimously to add Florida State to the fold.

The decision to expand was not an easy one, as it took a day for the league to reach a decision. This included three votes, with the last held at 8 p.m. on Sept. 13.

The Seminoles--that's an Indian for those who don't know their college mascots--will begin competition for every team sport except football in the 1991-92 season and football by 1993.

Florida State is a prized acquisition because of the academic and athletic reputation it has.

This will be the fourth time the ACC's membership has changed. The charter members in 1953 were Clemson, Duke, Maryland, North Carolina, N.C. State, South Carolina and Wake Forest. They were pullouts from the old Southern Conference that stretched from Maryland to Louisiana.

Virginia was added in December of 1953. South Carolina left in 1971 and Georgia Tech, formerly of the Southeastern Conference, joined in 1978.

Now the speculation begins on who will be the 10th school.

The Metrolina Rankings

1. West Charlotte--The Lions are rolling on, scoring 34 points on defensive-minded Crest. They are Red Hot!

2. Ashbrook--Led by James

Bowden, the Green Wave are swashing to the top of the Southwestern 4A conference.

3. Garinger--The Wildcats are growing up and growling up the storm.

4. West Mecklenburg--The Indians are ready to go on the warpath in the Tri-County, led by Maseo Bolin and Perry Ferguson.

5. East Mecklenburg--The Eagles don't have a lot of depth and that hurts them during these hot Indian days with so many players going both ways.

6. Olympic--The Trojans lost a heartbreaker to Harding, but they are still a dangerous team. Shawn Boe is a good quarterback and Nate Abraham is a good quarterback and Nate Abraham is a sight to behold on the run.

7. Charlotte Latin--The Hawks beat Orangeburg Prep, one of the best private school teams in South Carolina.

8. Independence--Led by Kemp Smith, the Providence Day Chargers are headed for a showdown with Charlotte Latin for the state private school championship.

10. Harding--The Rams have come a long way. Against Olympic, the big, stepping Marlon Lotharp looked very dangerous. When he needed inches, he got

yards.

The best of the rest: Hunter Huss, Providence.

Featured Game: West Mecklenburg at West Charlotte.

One of these teams will emerge as the favorite in the Tri County's race for two berths. The other will join Olympic and Harding in the race for the two other berths.

With Maseo Bolin, who lives in West Charlotte's district and has brothers who went to West Charlotte, has kept the Indians armed and extremely dangerous. Added to this is the fact that there is no love lost between the Lions and Indians.

The Lions of Tommy Knotts are powerful in rushing, passing, special teams, punting and placekicking. Did I miss anything?

This game could be close. West Charlotte 28 West Mecklenburg 14.

In other games: Ashbrook 24 Providence 7; Crest 7 Freedom 6; Olympic 20 East Gaston 0; Garinger 17 Myers Park 14; Independence 17 Hunter Huss 10; Harding 24 North Mecklenburg 12; East Mecklenburg 17 South Mecklenburg 7; Piedmont 7 Catholic 6; Latin 17 Polk County 7; Country Day 16 Christ School 3; Providence Day 19 Hammond 7.



Photo/CALVIN FERGUSON

Water Break

Felicia Glass helps a Johnson C. Smith football player cool off with a blast of water Wednesday during practice. The Bulls play Saturday at S.C. State in Orangeburg, S.C.