

Decision led to stellar career

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place in the game for that guy who can create stuff, who can put the bat on the ball, who can get on base hit, steal a base, score a run."

That was Gwynn, playing among big boppers in an era tarnished by steroids.

The only doubts about Gwynn are why he stayed with the Padres his entire 20-season career, through many more bad seasons than good.

He could have made more money elsewhere but was comfortable in San Diego, where the spotlight isn't as intense as in New York or Los Angeles.

A 15-time All-Star, Gwynn made a career out of wearing out the gaps with singles and doubles. With his sweet left-handed swing, Gwynn loved to hit the ball the opposite way, between third base and shortstop. Because baseball scorekeepers designate third base as 5 and shortstop as 6, Gwynn called it the "5.5 hole."

He made a serious run at hitting .400 in 1994, topping out at .394 before the players went on strike Aug. 12.

Gwynn's favorite hit didn't count in his official totals.

In Game 1 of the 1998 World Series, Gwynn turned on a pitch by San Diego native and fellow lefty David Wells, driving it off the facade of Yankee Stadium's upper deck for a home run.

The prevailing reaction?

"Shock. And I remember it," Gwynn said. "One of the reasons why is because after that game, you're dealing with the New York press. You just lost a game that you led 5-2 and one of the New York guys asked me, had I ever hit a ball that far before. I said, 'Yeah. It's not my fault you never saw me play.' I think he was kind of taken back by that."

"But you roll into Yankee Stadium, and unfortunately or fortunately, a lot of people hadn't really thought about what you were able to do in your career. They knew I was a pretty good hitter, but that was kind of the last thing people expected."

The Padres were swept in that Series and haven't been back since. Gwynn also played in the 1984 World Series, which San Diego lost in five games to Detroit.

Now, he's looking forward to a trip to Cooperstown.

Gwynn and Cal Ripken Jr. are expected to be shoe-ins for the Hall of Fame. Also on the ballot is Mark McGwire, who is expected to be judged harshly by the Baseball Writers Association of America members who vote for the Hall of Fame.

Gwynn said he thinks McGwire, who has denied using illegal performance-enhancing substances, is a Hall of Famer.

"I think I would vote for him," Gwynn said. "I think I would vote for a lot of those guys who are considered to have done it. Just because they're considered, how many other guys on that list did or didn't, and aren't in that shadow of a doubt that people have put those guys in?"

"It's unfortunate, because I played in the middle of the steroid era. There's nothing I can do about that. You look at my numbers. I don't think steroids are going to be the first thing you think about."

So what helped Gwynn become one of baseball's greats?

"Just good old-fashioned hard work. And again, understanding what type of hitter I was. I knew if I could make that shortstop take a couple of steps to his right, he was going to have a hard time throwing me out. Early on, understanding what I needed to do to get that ball in that direction."

"I knew I didn't drive the ball really well, but I needed to be able to drive it in the gaps between the outfielders in order to keep having success, and was able to do it."

Gwynn retired after the 2001 season. He spent a season as a volunteer assistant at SDSU, then took over as head coach. He's 113-132 in four seasons and hasn't gotten the Aztecs beyond the Mountain West Conference

tournament.

"In college baseball, you need to get to a regional. And we haven't done that in 15 years," he said. "I'm feeling the heat. I need to win some games this year."

His son, Tony Jr., played for him with the Aztecs, then made his major league debut last season with the Milwaukee Brewers.

"It's been awesome," Gwynn said. "To me that's even been better than waiting around for this, to be honest."

Gwynn thinks back to his SDSU days, when he played point guard for the basketball team and set the school's game, season and career assists records, which still stand.

"I had played baseball my whole life but never really concentrated on it," he said. "And I knew that if I was going to make it professionally, this was going to be my best shot."

During his final basketball season, he would steal away when possible to the baseball field to work on his hitting and defense.

Then came that unique draft day, when the Clippers picked him.

"It was a nice gesture. But I knew where I needed to go. I knew in my own mind I could play big league ball. You just didn't know when the opportunity was going to present itself."

Charlotte freshmen make an impact on collegiate programs

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while connecting on 56.6 percent of his shots.

"Jerry is as good as he wants to be," JCSU coach Steve Joyner said. "He's battling with focus from half to half, but he can do so many things. The more he can focus on doing those things, there's no telling how good he'll be."

Cheek, a 6-1 forward, was the most-decorated player in Mecklenburg County last year, with All-America and all-state honors. At Duke, Cheek is one of the Blue Devils' top reserves, averaging five points and 15 minutes per game.

"It's exciting, it's different from high school," she said. "It's elite players, and more of them. It's like a business with more media. It's different. It's not playing just to play, but it's still fun."

At South Mecklenburg, Cheek was predominantly a slasher. At Duke, she plays inside more but the Blue Devils' system allows her to show off some versatility.

"I'm playing in the post a lot more because I'm a physical player," she said. "I knew it was going to happen. (At South) I'd play the post, but I like to shoot. At Duke, they let you show all your skills."

Bulls try to extend run

By Herbert L. White

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Johnson C. Smith isn't playing like a team in transition. The Golden Bulls, coming off a convincing 79-70 win over No. 9 Virginia Union, has won three straight going into Saturday's CIAA West Division opener against Fayetteville State at Brayboy Gym. Tip-off is 7:30 p.m. JCSU, 5-4, 3-2 CIAA, has gotten a boost from an infusion of newcomers and revamped lineup. With sophomore Ryan Scott and freshmen Jerry Hollis and Javon Borum in the starting five, the Bulls are spreading the offensive wealth and quicker on defense. Scott, a transfer from College of



Joyner

Charleston, has played but two games, but averages 17.5 points a game, while Borum leads the Bulls with 29 assists in five starts.

"We've pretty much settled into a rotation, which we weren't able to do in the first semester," Smith coach Steve Joyner said.

As a result, preseason all-CIAA guard Maurice Hooper has returned to form after struggling early. He leads JCSU in points with 151 (16.8 per game).

Fayetteville State (6-6, 2-3 CIAA) already has a division win against N.C. Central, which makes Saturday an important early test for Smith. With the Virginia Union win a week behind them, Joyner wants the Bulls to stay focused.

"I hope they understand how to take a game like this against Virginia Union," he said. "I don't want them to be an emotional team that's up one minute and down the next. I want them to be consistent from half to half and game to game."

2007 CIAA predictions

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coaching days at St. Aug's.

• Lesson learned. The Pioneer Bowl stays in Charlotte under the stipulation that Johnson C. Smith won't be in it. (See last week's column.)

• Never give up. After years of nagging, threatening and more nagging, my boss finally caves in and renames the paper The Sports Tribune.

BONITA BEST is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.

Plus-one a possibility for Bowl Championship

By Ralph D. RUSSO

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Thanks to Michigan's Rose Bowl loss, the new and improved

Bowl Championship Series finishes Monday with a legitimate No. 1 vs. No. 2 title game.

The question is how to make sure it happens next year, and the seasons after that.

The BCS added a fifth game in this its ninth season, with top-ranked Ohio State and No. 2 Florida meeting the week after the Sugar, Rose, Orange and Fiesta bowls have been played. The Gators were a controversial choice until Southern California soundly defeated No. 3 Michigan in Pasadena, Calif.

Now, those who want a major college football playoff are lobbying for what's called the plus-one model, consid-

ered the logical next step for the BCS.

Under one scenario the plus-one would look a lot like a playoff, with teams seeded into the various bowls. The other would restore the traditional bowl lineups, and the final BCS standings to set the final game would come out after the bowls.

The idea got batted around a bit two years ago, when BCS officials decided to expand, and college football's decision-makers gave it a cool reception.

"I think there's a willingness to talk about (the plus-one) more, but still I don't sense overwhelming support for it," Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese. "I think that the Pac-10 and Big Ten in particular are pretty strong in their opposition for it."

"I think to get to the plus-one will be a struggle."

Both Pac-10 commissioner Tom Hansen and Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany said the schools they represent have no interest in further tampering with the relationship between the two conferences and the Rose Bowl, their longtime and lucrative partner.

"The Rose Bowl is the most important external relationship we have," Delany said. "It's more important than the BCS. We're going to honor it. We're going to salute it."

A system that further devalues the Rose Bowl just isn't going to get their support, he said.

The BCS came into existence eight years ago when the Big Ten, Pac-10 and Rose Bowl agreed to join the four other major conferences (Atlantic Coast Conference, Big 12, Southeastern Conference and Big East), Notre Dame and three mar-

que bowl games (Sugar, Fiesta and Orange) in an effort to match the top two teams in the country in the final game of the season.

Delany said it's unfair to characterize the Big Ten and Pac-10's loyalty to the Rose Bowl as the major obstacle to a plus-one.

"I'm not going to agree with the proposition that we're the stumbling block when in fact we're the final blocks that allowed this to come into the perspective to improve everybody's lot," he said.

Hansen agreed.

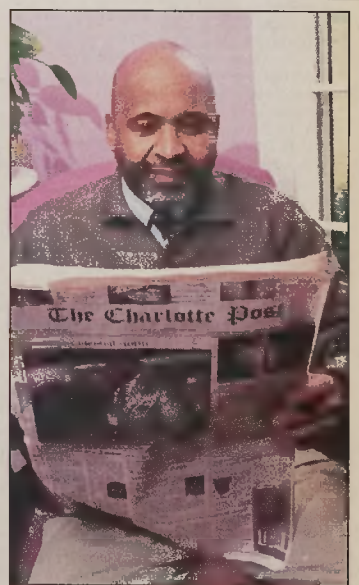
"We believe the BCS as currently constituted was good for the overall health of college football. That's why we joined up in the first place," Hansen said. "We feel we've made one sacrifice, and we're not necessarily interested in making another for something we don't see any great advantage from."

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