Fencers Seek Gold in Land of Golden Dome

BY JOSEPH ROLISON
STAFF WRITER

To say the North Carolina fencers are taking a unique approach to this weekend's NCAA Championships at Notre Dame might be an understatement.

In fact, that might be an enormous understatement, considering the circumstances. The NCAA fencing championships are based on individual effort, and the trophies go to single athletes rather than teams.

However, UNC head coach Ron Miller's fencers enter the championship bouts eyeing the mythical team prize as opposed to individual accolades. At stake for the Tar Heels, besides personal awards, is a top-four final ranking and a chance to unseat traditional powerhouses Notre Dame and Penn State.

Team goals in an individual competition? Nothing odd about that, Miller said.

"We've practiced with a team focus all year, so this (tournament) won't be different for them," he said. "We are looking at this from a team objective, rather than individual objectives."

The UNC women enter their Saturday and Sunday bouts with two fencers in each weapon, as was expected. In foil, Kristin Post and Kim Barnes will vie for the title. Lillian Kizer and Melanie Byrd will compete in the epée championships.

"We qualified the number of people we had hoped we would (seven), and things are what we expected except for a few names," Miller said.

The women's brackets consist of 32 fencers in the first round, from whom 24 will be chosen to fence in round-robin bouts.

"Everything is based on the seedings, and from that, Lillian Kizer has a good chance," he said. "Melanie has also played well towards the end of the season."

Miller said this year's field is particularly strong.

"Really, there is little difference between the top four or five fencers and the 25th and 30th fencers," he said. "Everybody is coming in having played decent schedules and having decent records."

The Tar Heel men will feature three fencers in their bouts on Monday and Tuesday, despite a subpar season. Andre Walker will compete in the foil competition, while Matthew Cox and Marcus Crow will seek titles in the saber event.

Badi Bradley will make the trip to Notre Dame as first national alternate, meaning that he will be allowed to fence in the epée competition in place of an absent or injured fencer.

The men's field appears as balanced as the women's, but it does differ in format. Thirty men will fence in the first round, with 24 advancing to the round-robin events.

UNC's fencers will carry their team-oriented attitude into the championships, hoping to earn a high finish and personal honors.

"Everyone is under intense pressure," Miller said. "But we feel prepared and just want to keep an even keel."

SPORTS SCHEDULE

Today

Men's Tennis: vs. Florida State, Cone-Kenfield Tennis Center, 2:30 p.m.
Baseball: vs. Georgia Tech, Boshamer Stadium, 3 p.m.
Women's Golf: at Lady Gamecock, at Columbia, S.C.
Softball: at Winthrop Invitational, at Rock Hill, S.C.
Track & Field: at Raleigh Relays, 9 a.m.; at Florida Relays, at Gainesville, Fla., 1 p.m.
Gymnastics: at N.C. State, Raleigh, 7 p.m.
Men's Swimming & Diving: at NCAA Championships, Indianapolis
Lacrosse: at Maryland, College Park, Md., 1 p.m.
Baseball: vs. Georgia Tech, Boshamer Stadium, 1 p.m.
Women's Tennis: vs. Minnesota, Cone-Kenfield Tennis Center, 10 a.m.
Men's Tennis: vs. Florida, Cone-Kenfield Tennis Center, 2:30 p.m.
Track & Field: at Raleigh Relays, 9 a.m.; at Florida Relays, at Gainesville, Fla., 1 p.m.
Men's Swimming & Diving: at NCAA Championships, Indianapolis
Women's Golf: at Lady Gamecock
Softball: at Winthrop Invitational

Saturday

Men's Basketball: at NCAA regional final, vs. Kentucky or Arizona State, at Birmingham, Ala., 6 p.m.
Women's Basketball: if win Thursday, at NCAA regional final, vs. Vanderbilt or Purdue, at Los Angeles, Midnight

Sunday

Women's Tennis: vs. Virginia, Cone-Kenfield Tennis Center, 1 p.m.
Baseball: vs. Georgia Tech, Boshamer Stadium, 1:30 p.m.
Women's Golf: at Lady Gamecock
Softball: at Winthrop Invitational

Jackets to Face Tar Heels In War of ACC Unbeatens

BY CHAD AUSTIN
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

This year, there are more similarities than differences between the baseball teams from North Carolina and Georgia Tech.

Their records are similar — UNC is 18-8, 3-0 in the ACC, while the Yellow Jackets are 15-7, 3-0.

In league play, both are coming off series sweeps. The Tar Heels put away Virginia last weekend at Boshamer Stadium. Tech took three games from Maryland earlier this week.

And both lost the bulk of their offensive firepower from a year ago.

So expect an interesting and close series this weekend as the Tar Heels play host to the Jackets in a three-game set at Boshamer Stadium, beginning today at 3 p.m.

Last season, the Tar Heels and Yellow Jackets were worlds apart.

Tech advanced all the way to the championship game of the 1994 College World Series before falling to Oklahoma 13-5. UNC didn't make the NCAA field.

But the Yellow Jackets' encore has not lived up to its advance billing.

"To be honest, Georgia Tech has got a new team," UNC assistant coach Chad Holbrook said. "They lost a majority of their offensive contributors from last year's College World Series team. We also lost a lot of pop and punch from our lineup.

"Talent-wise, we think we're pretty favorable to Georgia Tech. They're not going to be able to walk on the field and just show up and beat us. We think we can win the series, and we would be extremely disappointed if we didn't."

The Tar Heels could not say that a year ago.

In 1994, Tech possessed the most potent offensive club in the ACC. Gone from that squad are All-ACC performers Jay Payton, Nomar Garciaparra and Jason Varitek. That trio ranked 1-2-3 in the league batting race last year with averages well over .400.

But the Yellow Jacket bats are starting to heat up again this year.

"We're swinging the bats much better," Georgia Tech head coach Danny Hall said. "I try to get the guys in the lineup who have been swinging the bats the best in games. I also like to try to match some guys against the pitchers we face."

Second baseman Ryan Ritter leads the Jackets with a .438 average and 11 home runs. Freshman J.J. Thomas has also stepped in and picked up some of Tech's offensive slack by hitting .375 and sending seven pitches over the wall.

In contrast, the Tar Heels have relied much more on their hurlers. The series could come down to a classic confrontation between hitting and pitching. Brian Willman, Sean Murphy and closer Thad Chrismon have been the most capable on the mound this season, working with a supporting cast of youngsters.

"I think our pitching has been our strength," Holbrook said. "We had some questions with some guys and with some injuries early in the year, but our pitching has carried us. ... Pitching has been keeping us close and giving us a chance to score a late run or two."

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