

# Carter settles in for sophomore campaign

BY ROBBIE PICKERAL  
SPORTS EDITOR

Vince Carter was not very happy last winter.

Everybody seemed to be worried about the then-freshman guard. The press. The fans. His high school coach. His mother.

He wasn't meeting expectations, you see.

He wasn't consistently scoring 20 points a game; he wasn't consistently playing hard-nosed, up-tempo defense.

And he wasn't consistently in the North Carolina men's basketball team's starting lineup.

That's when the frustration set in. "It was different," Carter said. "I was used to being 'The Man' on the team and doing a lot of scoring. And I got here, and my role wasn't somebody to do the scoring. It was so long as I could get the ball, get it down court and get it to the open man, (Coach) was happy."

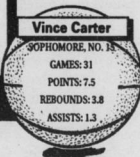
But Carter wasn't smiling, because he simply didn't understand his new rookie role.

He was supposed to be the savior to a youth-laden hoops squad that had lost its two stars — Jerry Stackhouse and Rasheed Wallace — two years early to the NBA draft.

He expected to start, he was expected to score (a lot), he was expected to lead the crowds with bone-jarring jams and serve as a potent defensive stopper, despite his youth.

All in a matter of mere rookie months. "I expected him to play more, you expected him to play more, he expected to play more, and that's the problem," UNC men's basketball coach Dean Smith said.

"It wasn't the kind of year he was



having as much as (it was) expectations."

Funny thing is, Carter did have a solid first year.

Eye the numbers: 7.5 points and 3.8 rebounds per game, 40 assists, 20 steals and a 49.2 shooting percentage.

"He had a fine first year," Smith said. So why all the pine time? His defense.

Carter struggled with Smith's in-your-face man-to-man, often leaving his feet and letting his assignment stroll by.

Classmate Ademola Okulaja specialized in defensive stoppage, and as Okulaja's game improved, Carter's minutes slipped.

By mid-year, Okulaja had replaced Carter as starter, and rumors of transfer erupted when Carter's high school coach, Charles Brinkerhoff, paid a visit to Chapel Hill.

"He was just concerned," Carter said. "There were a lot of rumors back home about (a transfer). And my mother was concerned. So he just came up here to make sure things were OK, that I was doing OK, and he just had a simple conversation with Coach Smith about it."

"... I never said anything about me transferring. I was frustrated, yes, but I never considered backing out of it. That's

not good. I can handle it. It shows what type of man you are. I wasn't going anywhere (else) from Day One."

But he will go elsewhere on court. With the graduation of Dante Calabria, Carter should return to his more natural position — off-guard — and he could get some clean-up time at point, if junior Shammond Williams and freshman Ed Cota need the rest.

He could also return to small forward, if needed, though the front court is packed with depth.

"I've worked hard on my ball-handling this summer," he said. "I think I'm capable of playing the 1, 2 or 3 position this year."

He's adjusting well, he said, and learning his new position amongst a squad traditionally comprised of role players. And perhaps most importantly, he's understanding Smith's vision for both the game and his players.

"He's settled me down; I think I settled myself down," Carter said. "I think I understand what he's asking, and I think everybody else understands what he's asking. So I think it's time to put everything together and make something happen."

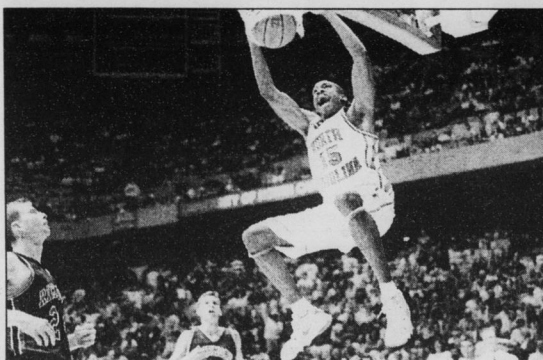
But it's still a learning process, and Carter is, after all, just entering his second year.

So he still gets emotional, he still throws his mouthpiece in practice, he still gets agitated with his play at times.

"I just want to make the team be the best we can, get things right," he said.

"I just want to learn everything, and sometimes I get frustrated because sometimes I do things wrong. But I think I learn that way, because I'm trying to make myself better."

And happier.



UNC swingman Vince Carter lost his starting job midway through last season.

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**ZWIKKER**  
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transfer Makhtar Ndiaye to give him a breather off the bench and an improved set of inside moves — so he says — to help him do battle with the ACC's top centers.

That's the tangible part. But basketball is about intangibles, too.

That's where Zwickker's experience comes in.

Zwickker knows the elation that comes with winning a national championship.

He's the only player on this year's squad who knows that feeling.

And he's also the only player who's experienced the agony of losing twice in the second round of the NCAA Tourna-

ment. It's a good script so far. Now he just needs to write the final act.

"I think it's the best thing so far for me to sit out and try to get stronger and get

my confidence up, just build on my all-around game," Zwickker said.

"I think over the last couple of years that I've done well so far, and now it's my time to step up."

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