

The coaching game: More than X's and O's



Football coach Carl Torbush (left) was named head coach after six players recommended Torbush to athletic director Dick Baddour in December.

Player-coach relations reach beyond sidelines

BY FORREST EBER
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

When six North Carolina football players approached UNC Director of Athletics Dick Baddour in December and told him that they wanted defensive coordinator Carl Torbush to fill the head coaching vacancy, they sent a message to Torbush.

Not only did his players have faith in his ability as a coach, but they also respected and cared for him.

That message came as no surprise to Torbush, who shares a bond with his players that stretches far beyond the boundaries of the football field.

"Probably my best evaluation of (the relationship with his players) is when they wanted me for head coach," Torbush said. "They told me how much they truly did respect me and how much they did love me."

The close relationship is nothing new to student-athletes at UNC. For almost twenty years, some of North Carolina's premier coaches have been not only building dynasties on the playing field, but also friendships away from it.

Karen Shelton and Anson Dorrance each took home their sport's top prize this fall, but to the coaches, the lives they touch take precedence over wins and losses.

After winning the ACC Field Hockey Championship in November, Shelton was praising the exploits of her players when a reporter told her she seemed like a proud mother talking about her children.

Spoken in jest at the time, the words seem to ring true.

"It's not so much like a mom," Shelton said later of her relationship with her players. "But in a way it is because they know I care about them and I think that's the biggest thing. I love them and I think that I get that back from them."



Field hockey player **CINDY WERLEY** described coach Karen Shelton as "a coach on the field and a friend off the field."

"... When you're driving people to higher levels of performance, there is still the uncomfortable relationship (between player and coach)."

ANSON DORRANCE
UNC women's soccer coach

But, the coaches understand that for success, the love must be tempered with discipline. And it is this point that makes the relationship such a special one.

The recent Latrell Sprewell-P.J. Carlesimo fight brought to light the fragile relationship that exists between a player and a coach. Such a relationship extends to the college scene.

College coaches spend more time with their players than do the players' parents during their school years. As a result, coaches must undertake the role of parent. But as employees who draw salaries from the University, they must also play the role of coach.

With the responsibility of coaching comes a responsibility for discipline. And discipline often leads to strain in the relationship.

"There's still a distance (between the players and coaches)," Dorrance said. "Because when you're driving people to higher levels of performance, there is still the uncomfortable relationship."

Few people probably understand the complex player-coach relationship better than Leslie Lyness. Lyness, a two-time field hockey All-American, won a national championship as a player with the Tar Heels in 1989.

Now a graduate student at UNC, she roams the sidelines as one of Shelton's assistant coaches.

"(Shelton's) got a great relationship with (her players)," Lyness said. "She respects them as people and as athletes. It's reciprocal — the players respect her as a coach and as a person."

That may be the key to the relationship between player and coach: understanding that each is also a person.

"She is a coach on the field and a friend off the field," UNC field hockey player Cindy Werley said.

"We're lucky to have her as a coach and a friend."

Winning not paramount — just expected

BY KURT TONDORF
SENIOR WRITER

Dick Baddour wants every one of his coaches to be comfortable. The North Carolina director of athletics knows that coaching can take its toll on the men and women who run his 28 varsity sports programs. So since he assumed his post in 1997, Baddour says he has continued his predecessor John Swofford's de-emphasis on winning at all costs.

"We just don't sit around and say, 'This program did this, and maybe they should be doing better, and what were the shortcomings,' and that sort of thing," Baddour says of the athletics department. "That doesn't happen much. Doesn't happen at all."

"I think people would be amazed with how little we talk about winning."

And yet UNC coaches, working in such pressure-free environs, continue to win big.

Since 1986, UNC athletics have captured a league-high 88 ACC titles and 17 national championships. The overall excellence of the program earned North Carolina the 1993-94 Sears Directors' Cup, awarded to the NCAA's all-sports champion.

Despite the accolades, Baddour insists he and his department care less about winning than they do about their coaches' ability to maintain their programs' integrity, the academic standing of their student-athletes and the positive nature of those athletes' experiences. He says the department never officially evaluates the performances of UNC coaches on a year-to-year basis.

What, then, under this *laissez-faire* department policy, drives UNC coaches to bring home so much hardware?

The trick has been to bring in coaches whose primary source of motivation has always stared back at them in the mirror.

"We obviously all put pressure on ourselves," says Karen Shelton, whose UNC field hockey teams have won the last three national titles. "Winning is fun, it's what we all try to do."

"We work very hard to try and win all the games that we can. But that comes from within. It doesn't come from the administration. ... I don't feel any extra pressure."

Of course, the administration has never found a reason to pressure Shelton, and in her 17 years she has never provided one. She is a star in the UNC coaching ranks. Her four national titles place her second among active UNC coaches.

UNC women's soccer coach Anson Dorrance leads the pack with 15. He, too, says he feels no pressure from his superiors to add to that total.

"They give you the tools to be competitive," he said. "And I love the freedom." But not every UNC coach is as successful as Shelton and Dorrance. Others in the North Carolina coaching fraternity feel although the athletics department says it might not stress winning as paramount, on-field success certainly counts for something — like job security.

Baseball coach Mike Roberts says, "I've always felt like we've been encouraged that if we had a good graduation rate and no NCAA (violations) and were competitive in our sport, that we could always count on continuing to be employed." (In August, following the first losing season of his 21-year tenure at UNC, Roberts announced he would step down after the 1998 season.)

UNC football coach Carl Torbush acknowledges that there are "two or three things North Carolina values a lot more than wins and losses."

But in his next breath, Torbush says, "That is the number one objective — to win games. Over a period of time, if you don't win enough, you need to look for another job."

Winning in itself is a catch-22 — if you win once, the understanding is that you'll be able to do it again and again, without fail. The pressure mounts, and not just from within.

Baddour even admits to that.

"I think you do become a victim of your own success," he says. "I don't know if victim is the right word. But the more you are successful, the higher the expectations are — not just from our supporters, but also internally."

"This institution — there is always an expectation that we will do well."

LONGEVITY

FROM PAGE 1

at the helm of their respective programs. N.C. State's coaches have an average tenure of 12.1 years, and every other school in the ACC averages fewer than 10.

Even UNC's recent hires — Torbush and men's basketball coach Bill Guthridge — have at least 10 years of assistant coaching experience at North Carolina.

"We've got a very close family atmosphere (among coaches)," Torbush says. "That's because all of them have been here the same amount of time I have. The people I've known are the same people I've known for 10 years."

Across the board, UNC's coaches and athletics officials express immense satisfaction with the state of sports at the University. North Carolina has a core of banner programs that maintain the school's mantle as one of the winningest universities in college sports. Women's soccer and field hockey won national titles in 1997, and the basketball and football programs are among the nation's top 10.

North Carolina's tradition is rooted in such success, but the athletics department wants to project an image that goes beyond wins and losses. UNC's coaches insist winning is secondary to graduating athletes and bringing them to their potential on and off the field.

"We in athletics understand that athletics are a part of the University, but it's not paramount," Baddour

says. "It shouldn't be."

Many UNC coaches call the department's outlook progressive. Yet progress is uncertain, even with a vision as clear as UNC's seems to be. For every coach as successful and secure as Dorrance, there is one whose program does not win as much or generate the same number of headlines. Consider Roberts, whose departure as a coach remains a mystery that neither he nor Baddour will explain to the public.

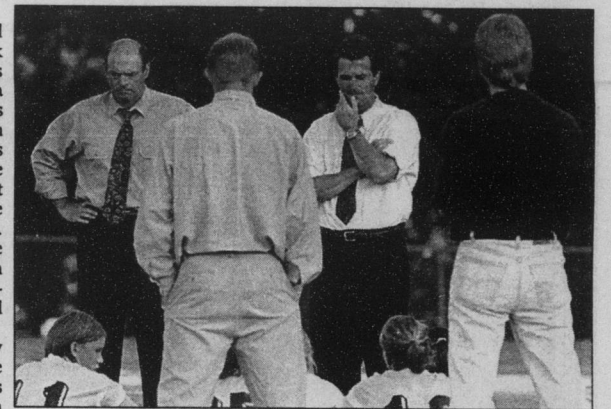
Roberts doesn't know what he'll be doing this time next year, though he hopes he'll be doing it at North Carolina. Here is the ultimate loyalty, the underlying thread that ties each of the University's coaches together: beyond the comfort and flexibility afforded by the athletics department is a belief in the brilliant tradition of UNC sports.

"You have to understand the shadow that all of us coach under, and it's Dean Smith," Dorrance says. "Every coach in this University has directly learned about what's important from him. ... He's the one who's almost written a code for all of us. The thing he's created is a coaching community, because we all feel, ironically, protected because he's here."

Smith created the model program while coaching at



Athletic director **DICK BADDOUR** said the athletic department doesn't review each program's performance at the end of the season.



Women's soccer coach Anson Dorrance (third from left) said former basketball coach Dean Smith helped create a coaching community at UNC.

Permanent address: Chapel Hill

Once a coach arrives at North Carolina, it's safe to unpack the suitcases and prepare for a long stay. UNC has more coaches who have coached 10-plus, 20-plus and 30-plus seasons at their school than any other athletic program in the ACC.

	Clemson	Duke	FSU	Ga. Tech	Maryland	UNC	NCSU	Virginia	Wake
Head coaches	13	19	14	12	18	21	14	18	14
10+ years	3	8	6	3	6	12	7	4	5
20+ years	1	2	2	0	1	6	4	1	0
30+ years	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Average tenure	6.1 years	8.8 years	9.9 years	6.8 years	9.6 years	12.9 years	12.2 years	7.9 years	6.3 years

UNC, winning 879 games and two NCAA titles in 36 seasons. Smith teams won at least 20 games per season for 27 straight years, an NCAA record.

In the process, he graduated 96 percent of his players, and those men went on to become doctors, lawyers, businessmen and politicians — exactly the kind of examples that make UNC's programs shine.

Smith stayed at UNC for so long because the athletics department gave him the freedom and means to run his program as he chose. Dorrance, Shelton and others have stayed for similar reasons.

North Carolina provides ample opportunity for drawing and keeping athletes: an academically challenging school, an attractive campus and town, good coaches and a commitment to constantly improving athletic facilities.

"Coaches here know they're going to work with outstanding people," Baddour says. "You're in the coaching business to be around young people and enjoy that association."

Such an association is constantly changing, and UNC's coaches are expected to change and improve with it. For the most part, they seem up to the task, resulting in an undying tradition of success for North Carolina sports — and a resolve by UNC's coaches to perpetuate that success.

"Hopefully, you're always evolving as a coach," Dorrance says. "That happens to anyone who has a commitment to doing things properly. That's certainly the case with every coach that's been here for an extended period."

Coaching carousel

Men's athletics at North Carolina have undergone a facelift in the last six months. In that span, the head basketball, football and baseball coaches either announced retirement or moved on to greener pastures.

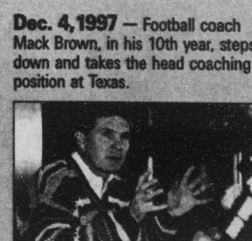
The three coaches take with them a combined 1,686 wins in 66 years of coaching in Chapel Hill.



Aug. 27, 1997— After 20 years at the helm, baseball coach Mike Roberts announces he will step down following the 1998 season. Roberts held a 738-405-3 career record prior to the start of the '98 campaign.



Oct. 9, 1997— Dean Smith retires after 36 years as basketball coach; assistant Bill Guthridge steps in.



Dec. 4, 1997— Football coach Mack Brown, in his 10th year, steps down and takes the head coaching position at Texas.



Dec. 8, 1997— Carl Torbush, who served as defensive coordinator for 10 seasons under Brown, is named head coach. Torbush coaches the Tar Heels to a 42-3 victory against Virginia Tech in the Gator Bowl.