

UNC Seeks Redemption in Tourney

By DAVE ALEXANDER
Senior Writer

This is not the time for North Carolina to be scrambling for solutions. Yet the past month has raised more questions than it has answered about the No. 15 Tar Heels.

"I thought we were better than we played," said UNC point guard Ed Cota following the Tar Heels' 81-61 loss against Duke on Saturday. "Obviously we need a lot of improvement."

There's little time for improvement for the Tar Heels, who begin their quest for a third consecutive ACC Tournament championship Friday with a 7 p.m. contest against Georgia Tech at the Charlotte Coliseum.

Action begins tonight when top-seed Duke takes on No. 9 Virginia and No. 7 Florida State battles No. 7 Clemson.

The Tar Heels could avenge five of their six league defeats this season en route to the title in Charlotte by downing Tech in the opener, Maryland, who swept UNC, in the second round and Duke, which also has two wins against North Carolina to its credit, in the final.

But most of all, the Tar Heels would like to shake the slump that has plagued them since a 98-64 win against Florida State on Feb. 7. Since that win, UNC has lost decidedly to the Terps and Devils, and managed to win despite subpar performances against N.C. State, Virginia and Wake Forest.

"I don't really care who we've got to play," Cota said. "We've just got to go out there ready to play."

It seems someone got the formula backwards for UNC this season. With a roster loaded with inexperience, the Tar Heels were supposed to struggle early.

Second-year head coach Bill

Men's ACC Basketball Tournament



Guthridge figured to have his hands full with only two returning regulars - Cota and senior forward Ademola Okulaja.

"Last year we hit the floor running because we were a better team," Guthridge said. "This year we had to start at step one - here's the basket, here's the ball."

"In a lot of ways it's fun to do that. I think most coaches really enjoy the teaching part of it. I thought this team really came along fast."

Much faster than most expected. UNC won its first eight, most notably a sweep through the Preseason NIT Tournament that including a win against then-No. 2 Stanford. The team rose to No. 3 in the polls after that win and had many thinking if a third-consecutive Final Four was a possibility.

In December, UNC had fewer ups than downs, suffering its first loss of the year against College of Charleston on Dec. 5. Before the new year, UNC had

lost to the Yellow Jackets and California.

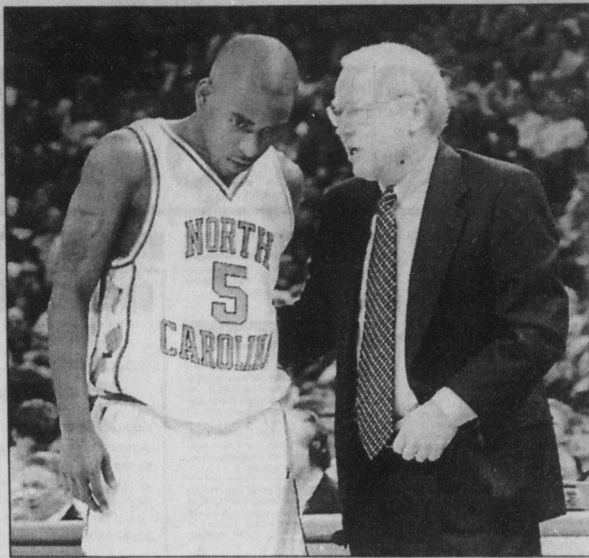
But the future promised only brighter things. With Ronald Curry being weaned into the rotation after a season of football and Vasco Evtimov set to return from an NCAA-imposed suspension, North Carolina figured to be a much-improved team by February.

For the most part, that hasn't happened. UNC have seemingly been walking in place for the past four weeks.

There are several legitimate explanations - fatigue from a grueling schedule, and injuries and illnesses, most notably to guards Max Owens and Jason Capel.

But whatever the reasoning, it's been frustrating for some, especially Cota, who helped UNC win 62 games while losing only 11 in his first two seasons.

"I always feel we're gonna win, but that's not always the case," he said. "We get in these funks sometimes. We're not that great of a team that we can fall behind and come back anytime we



UNC point guard Ed Cota (left) and coach Bill Guthridge have had to adjust from last year's veteran squad to this season's young team.

DTH/SEAN BUSHNER

want, turn it up any time we want."

The Tar Heels would do well to turn it up soon, or they could find themselves home prematurely with no reason to search for any solutions.

Lang Earns Freshman Honor

UNC forward Kris Lang was named to the ACC All-Freshman team Tuesday, becoming the first North Carolina player since Ed Cota in 1996-97 to garner that honor.

Lang has averaged 10.5 points per

game and 4.5 rebounds per game while starting every contest for the Tar Heels.

He was joined on the team by UVa. forward Chris Williams, the league's freshman of the year, Duke's Corey Maggette, Wake's Darius Songaila and guard Adam Harrington of N.C. State.

UNC guard Jason Capel barely missed making the team and finished sixth in the voting.

The Sports Editor can be reached at sports@unc.edu.

SPORTS BRIEFS

UNC-Old Dominion Rained Out Wednesday

North Carolina's baseball game against Old Dominion on Wednesday was rained out. UNC was leading 1-0 in the bottom of the second when the game was cancelled.

The game might be rescheduled for later in the season, but no date has been set. The Tar Heels (11-0) host Coastal Carolina today at 3 p.m.

Varsity Eight Ranked 14th in Preseason Poll

Entering just its second season, North Carolina's varsity eight is ranked 14th in the country in US Rowing's preseason poll.

"Our goal is to be one of the top 10 teams in the country," UNC coach Joel Furtek said. "This ranking validates our belief that we're moving closer to that goal."

UNC's team finished 11th at the prestigious Head of Charles Regatta in Boston last October. The rowers on the varsity eight are Meredith Acly, Lauren Agrella, Heather Higgins, Rachel Koblinsky, Erin Nepel, Lucienne Papon, Dana Peirce, Danae Ringelmann and coxswain Sam Hermitte.

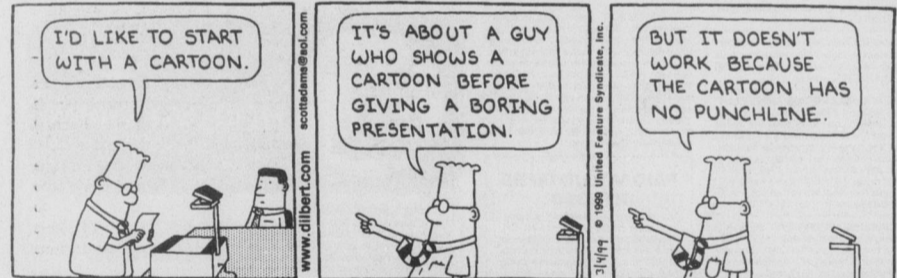
Since only the top 10 teams are numbered in the poll, UNC was in the others receiving votes category.

-From Staff Reports

Watered Down by Brad Christensen



Dilbert®



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Wrestlers Ready for ACC Battle

UNC wrestlers will be gunning for their seventh ACC Tournament title in eight years this weekend.

By HUGH PRESSLEY
Assistant Sports Editor

North Carolina wrestling coach Bill Lam had one major wish for the Tar Heels coming into 1999: that they stay healthy for the entire year.

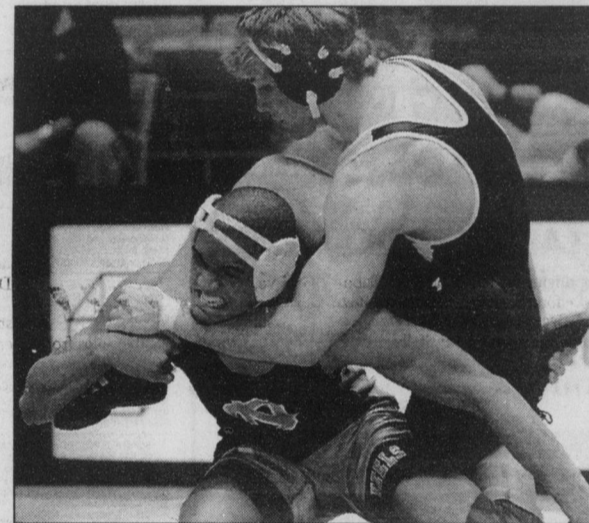
And when UNC went into its last regular season meet against N.C. State on Feb. 18, it looked as if Lam would get his wish heading into the postseason.

So you can imagine what was going through Lam's and the rest of the Tar Heels' minds when, just 1:21 into sophomore JohnMark Bentley's match against State's John Carreon, the nation's fifth-ranked 149-pounder went down with a sprained ankle and was forced to default his match, giving the "Pack six points and an eventual 18-17 win.

"That was something we didn't need to happen," Lam said. "It took the life out of all our guys."

Of all the wrestlers on Lam's squad, Bentley - who is 29-5 overall and 12-2 in dual meets this season - was one the coach surely needed to stay healthy.

And with Bentley still nursing his bum ankle just a few days before the Tar Heels travel to Charlottesville, Va., on



North Carolina's Corey Bell (left) won the ACC title at 177 pounds last year. He will try to duplicate the feat at 184 pounds this weekend.

DTH/DAVID SANDLER

Saturday for the ACC Tournament, his status - and UNC's chance to win its seventh conference title in eight years - is questionable.

But that doesn't mean the rest of the Tar Heels are weary. While they know Bentley's presence could undoubtedly increase UNC's odds of taking home the conference title, the team still believes in the ability of its remaining grapplers.

"We know what we can do," said UNC junior Chuckie Connor, who leads the Tar Heels with a 33-3 overall record and nine pins for the season. "We'd be pretty strong with JohnMark in the lineup, but we also know that we can still win without him."

For that to happen, UNC (11-5, 4-1 in the ACC) needs to get flawless performances from its younger wrestlers -

something the Tar Heels aren't necessarily used to.

In years past, UNC has been blessed with potent upperclassmen, including last year's squad that featured four senior starters. This year's team has just three seniors total with a combined dual-meet record of 12-19.

But with the resurgence of freshmen Matt Kenny (21-8) and Brad Byers (28-11), the Tar Heels should have enough depth to sweep through the ACC tourney once again, with or without Bentley.

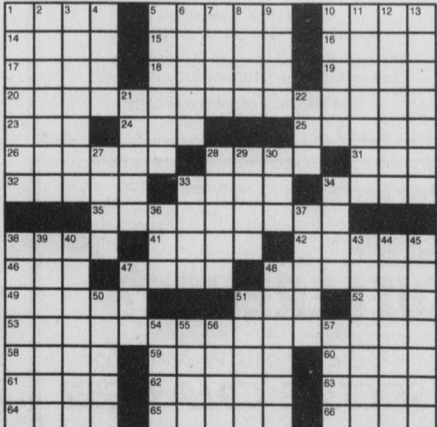
"I've been impressed with all of our freshmen this year," Bentley said. "I think they've worked really hard, and they'll be pretty successful this weekend."

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THE Daily Crossword

By David Macleod

- ACROSS
- 1 Beans
- 5 Infield fly
- 10 Smooch
- 14 Inter (among others)
- 15 Muse of poetry
- 16 Give off
- 17 Clay
- 18 Islamic text
- 19 Ill temper
- 20 Deep Purple hit of 1973
- 23 Vietnamese holiday
- 24 Modern: pref.
- 25 Humiliate
- 26 Skilled ones
- 28 Mimicked
- 31 Spanish uncle
- 32 Consumer advocate Ralph
- 33 Stop up
- 34 Meadows
- 35 Honeydrippers hit of 1985
- 38 American suffragist
- 41 Spike or brad
- 42 Tessie or Milo
- 46 Bruin Bobby
- 47 First of the pot
- 48 On the way up
- 49 N.E. school
- 51 Part of a min.
- 52 Hwy. sign abbr.
- 53 Cascades hit of 1963
- 58 Skeleton piece
- 59 "Aida," e.g.
- 60 Alphabet start
- 61 North Carolina college
- 62 New Testament book
- 63 Minute circus star
- 64 Mr. T's last name
- 65 British PM (1970-74)
- 66 Williams and Turner
- DOWN
- 1 Tape-recorder spindle
- 2 Walkway of the Southwest
- 3 Held the helm
- 4 Polio vaccine developer
- 5 Tea types
- 6 University of Maine town
- 7 Element
- 8 Zion National Park state
- 9 Corn concoction
- 10 Skewered entree
- 11 Replicate
- 12 Region of Poland on the Oder
- 13 Music systems
- 21 nos (just between us)
- 22 Roll of bills
- 27 Irritating individual
- 28 Michael Caine film
- 29 Survey
- 30 Concert
- 33 Outer covering
- 34 Not as much as 36
- 36 Arbor, MI
- 37 Utterance
- 38 French realist
- 39 Sleeve opening
- 40 Pie in Cooperstown
- 43 Fit to be employed
- 44 Templed
- 45 Meetings' plans
- 47 Cigar dropping
- 48 Go over again
- 50 Off skill
- 51 Proud step
- 54 Flurry flyer
- 55 Ron in
- 56 Greek cheese
- 57 Floating platform



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