

UNC to Kick Off Season's Final Leg Deacons Look to Crush Tar Heels' NCAA Hopes

North Carolina hosts the ACC Women's Swimming and Diving Championships for the first time since 1997.

By IAN GORDON
Staff Writer

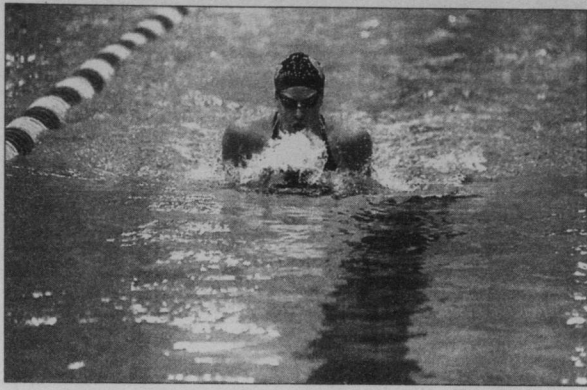
Throughout the year, North Carolina swimming coach Frank Comfort has emphasized the fact that the collegiate season should be broken into sections.

The first is a sort of preseason that includes the team's late-fall and early-winter dual meets. After intensive training during winter break, the second session – the regular season – begins.

Finally, as the dual-meet season winds to an end, squads prepare to compete for conference championships and, eventually, an NCAA title.

This weekend, the seven ACC teams will descend upon Chapel Hill for the 22nd ACC Women's Swimming and Diving Championships. The meet will be held at UNC's Koury Natatorium for the first time since 1997.

"For me, it's exciting to have it at Carolina because we have the home-crowd advantage," UNC junior Summer Mack said. "You know your pool, you have your locker room, you have your parents sitting closer to you. It's blue and



DTH/LAURA GIOVANELLI

The 17th-ranked North Carolina women's swimming and diving team pushed Virginia to the brink of defeat Jan. 23 at Koury Natatorium.

white, not orange and whatever." Mack's allusion to the color orange is a not-so-subtle reference to No. 7 Virginia, which will attempt to win its third straight ACC Championship.

No. 17 UNC believes it has the best shot at dashing undefeated UVA's hopes for another title, especially after pushing the Cavaliers to the last race before losing its dual meet 158-142 Jan. 23.

In that contest, the Cavaliers consistently finished first in the majority of

events, while the Tar Heels' depth – often allowing UNC to finish two-three-four in an event – kept the meet close.

"Championships are so much more based on depth, and a dual meet is based on your two to three top swimmers," senior Kelly McLaughlin said.

Comfort said it was difficult to compare a dual meet and a postseason meet because of the increased intensity level.

"Every team has their own stars, and they will affect where everyone places,"

Comfort said. "For us to be successful, our top swimmers need to perform at a very, very high level and our entire team needs to do their absolute best times."

"Virginia is going to be at full strength, five other teams are going to be at full strength, and I certainly believe we'll be at full strength. I think it's going to be a blast."

Indeed, UNC will at last race on a full tank of gas. The team has been tapering its workouts during the past several weeks in preparation for the conference championships.

This is yet another difference between the regular season and the postseason, Mack explained.

"We swim tired through all of our dual meets, and then at ACCs, everyone rests, (we) shave our hairy legs, and it's time to go fast," she said.

Many of the Tar Heels have enjoyed individual success at the ACCs in the past three years, but Mack said personal achievement was secondary to the team's ultimate goal.

"I think the reason why we have such a good chance of winning is because everyone's personal goal is to win the meet," Mack said. "I want a ring. I've been here for three years, and I want my ring."

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

By WILL KIMMEY
Assistant Sports Editor

The Wake Forest women's basketball team hasn't won an ACC game since it defeated North Carolina 69-56 on Jan. 16.

But the Deacons don't have the luxury of facing that same UNC team again.

Gone is the Tar Heel squad that lacked confidence and offensive efficiency. North Carolina shot a woeful 30 percent in the loss to Wake, which dropped UNC into the conference cellar.

"We're a completely different team now, there's no question about that," UNC coach Sylvia Hatchell said. "That (loss) was a very low point for us, but now we are probably the most complete we've been all year – physically, mentally and emotionally – as a team."

Since that loss – the team's fifth straight overall – North Carolina has gone 4-4. The Tar Heels picked up their game along the way when point guard Nikki Teasley returned to the lineup on Jan. 30.

Teasley was named ACC Player of the Week on Monday after averaging 17.7 points and 6.0 assists in three games. Her ability to run the offense and get teammates open looks has restored the team's confidence.

"We're more confident now in our game at this point, whereas then we were

kind of down on ourselves because we didn't have all our plays together, and it was just a bad time for us," UNC forward LaQuanda Barksdale said.

Barksdale was symbolic of the team's struggles. The ACC's leading scorer managed just two points on 1-of-12 shooting against the Deacs.

"I've been in the gym shooting a lot lately," she said. "I just wasn't feeling up to par that day at all. I'm ready for them this time, defensively, offensively."

The Tar Heels (13-11, 5-8 in the ACC) had better be ready because each game the rest of the way carries post-season implications.

"It's very important," Barksdale said. "We have to win this game and then two games after that to have a .500 season and probably even to get looked at by the NCAA people."

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UNC junior forward LaQuanda Barksdale went 1-for-12 from the field in the first game against Wake.

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Announcements
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- Today is a 6 - You want to get moving, but you're stuck. You can't travel because you have to work. You want to stretch your legs and your mind, but you're trapped in a box. Try not to bite anybody's head off; just go for a long walk when you can.
Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
- Today is a 7 - Money, money, money. Your money, other people's money, taxes and investments. What to do? Well, you're going to grow up to be good at this, if you're not already. You have a natural talent. Today, study.
Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
- Today is a 6 - There could be a bit of a struggle today. You may want to delegate some of your responsibilities, but you may not be sure how. You and your mate could get into an argument about who's doing what. Share the load, but keep the responsibilities if you can.
Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)
- Today is a 7 - You've been getting along fine with your friends and loved ones, but you might get a little more reserved for the next few weeks. Focus on your work today, and the romance should take care of itself. You don't have to be aggressive. It'll come to you.
Linda explains what's going on in greater detail at (800) 960-9000, for 99 cents per minute. To leave a message, call (888) 522-9633 for free.
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HOROSCOPES
by linda c. black

Today's Birthday (Feb. 17)
You're lucky in love this year, and that could lead to a commitment. You may start out with an argument in February, though. Buy a nice gift in March, but don't spend your life savings. Learn a quicker route to your goal in April and take your time to do things right in May. Let a child distract you in June, but settle down with a grown-up in August. Find a treasure in December and new confidence in January. To get the advantage, check the day's rating. 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.
Aries (March 21-April 19)
- Today is a 7 - You've been under a little bit of stress lately. You may not have even noticed, but now that it's gone, don't you feel better? It's like not having a headache any more. Only trouble is, you want to do two things now. Choose the easier one.
Taurus (April 20-May 20)
- Today is a 6 - You've had a few busy days. Now you'll be wiser to settle down, relax and mull over what you've recently learned. This is a good night for reviewing the material. It's also pretty good for entertaining, but not on an intimate level. Save that for this weekend!
Gemini (May 21-June 21)
- Today is a 5 - Don't launch a new endeavor quite yet. Do a little more planning first. If you think out all the various scenarios, you'll save yourself a lot of trouble. You might save a lot of time and money, too. Learn vicariously.
Cancer (June 22-July 22)
- Today is a 6 - You have a few big decisions to make. Trouble is, they can't make up their minds! Guess you're not going to let them decide for you. It would be nice, but not really. You're the only one who really knows what's best for you. Do it.
Leo (July 23-Aug. 22)
- Today is a 5 - You may feel cramped. Why should you have to modify your magnificence, just because of somebody else? Well, it might be a good idea if you did. You have just about everything figured out, but there could be one last thing. This will give you fits until you get it.
Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
- Today is a 7 - You're under pressure at work. Crank, to make sure everything gets done perfectly and on time. You always like to do the best job you can, but you don't have to do it all by yourself. Get a team working with you, and your success is even more assured.
Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)
- Today is a 7 - A lot is going on today, and you're popular. Everybody wants you to be part of their team. You could entertain at home. That's the best location for a romantic interlude - if that gives you any ideas.
Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)
- Today is a 6 - This will be one of those days when you will think things over carefully. Don't let anybody push you into moving more quickly than absolutely necessary. A couple of people want to give it a try, but do what's right for you.
Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
- Today is a 6 - You want to get moving, but you're stuck. You can't travel because you have to work. You want to stretch your legs and your mind, but you're trapped in a box. Try not to bite anybody's head off; just go for a long walk when you can.
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