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UNC Seeks Return To Winning Ways

The women's lacrosse team is coming off the program's worst season in its four years as a UNC varsity sport.

By MATT TERRY
Staff Writer

It's understandable that the confidence of the North Carolina women's lacrosse team might be a little shaky after the team fell from back-to-back final four appearances to an 8-7 record and a first-round NCAA tournament exit in 1999.

However, senior attacker and co-captain Kristin Off sounds confident for a player who was part of the team's worst season in history.

"We have the desire to go out there and just play well, to go out and kill teams and have fun doing it," Off said.

Not only are the Tar Heels confident, but they're also cocky. And perhaps they've earned that right.

UNC has established itself as one of the nation's elite squads in only four seasons, putting up a 49-18 mark in the process and reaching the national semifinals in its second and third years.

This year's team is led by Meghann Mohler, the Tar Heels' leading scorer from a year ago. Mohler's 25 goals and 15 assists last season made the senior a preseason All-America candidate for 2000. With Off and senior Gray MacNair, the three captains make up one of the nation's top attacking units.

Off was third on the team in scoring last season with 33 points. Sophomore attacker Kellie Thompson (26 points) was fourth, and MacNair ranked fifth (21).

The Tar Heels should be able to cope with the loss of Erin McGinnis, who graduated last year as UNC's all-time leading scorer with 211 points.

"This season we're looking at a really well-rounded attack," said coach Jenny Slingluff Levy, who has led the program since its inception. "We've got a lot of kids who can put the ball in the back of the net, and I think that will be a strength of ours."

Slingluff Levy called her defense "interesting," but she said she wasn't

worried about the challenges that the departures of All-America defender Brooke Crawford and starter Katie Loois present.

The Tar Heels will be counting on contributions from several defenders, including senior Jennie Voishan, junior Meghan Stringer and sophomore Christine McPike.

"Our strength (at defense) may not be a power individual like Brooke," Slingluff Levy said. "We've got a very fast defense with the ability to really put a lot of pressure on other teams."

As UNC prepares for its season opener Feb. 29 against James Madison, several questions remain unanswered. The goaltending position is still up for grabs between sophomore Melissa Coyne and freshman Margaret Garofalo.

The Tar Heels also don't know what to expect from a heralded recruiting class. Betsy Gaines, a starter on the U.S. Under-19 team, and Katie Boyle look to add to the attack. Andy Fortino and Meghan Kelly might get the opportunity to help shore up the UNC defense.

"We've got four players right on that bubble in that freshman class," Slingluff Levy said. "If they get their focus and gain some confidence, they can earn some playing time and contribute on the field."

The Tar Heels know they must capitalize on their enormous potential — something they failed to do a year ago — if they are to regain their national standing.

Slingluff Levy said UNC is ready to take on the rest of the ACC — teams such as Duke, a final four squad last year, and Maryland, which has won five consecutive national championships.

"Other teams probably don't respect us as much as we think they should, and we value that as a motivator," Off said. "We believe in ourselves, and that's all that matters."



UNC senior attacker **Kristin Off** ranked third on the Tar Heels in scoring in 1999 with 33 points.

Women's Lacrosse



UNC women's lacrosse coach **Jenny Slingluff Levy**

Feb. 29	at James Madison	4 p.m.
March 3	Johns Hopkins	5 p.m.
March 5	Maryland	1 p.m.
March 10	Loyola	5 p.m.
March 12	Vanderbilt	1 p.m.
March 17	vs. Boston Univ. at Baltimore	7 p.m.
March 19	at George Mason	1 p.m.
March 25	at Virginia	Noon
March 29	Duke	7 p.m.
April 2	Virginia Tech	1 p.m.
April 8	at Georgetown	Noon
April 13	vs. Penn State at Baltimore	3 p.m.
April 16	Ohio State	1 p.m.
April 22-23	ACC Tournament at Maryland	TBA
April 28	at Massachusetts	4 p.m.
April 30	at Dartmouth	1 p.m.
May 10-21	NCAA Tournament	TBA