

TRAILBLAZER

By BRIAN MURPHY ■ SENIOR WRITER

Seventeen-year-old Tyrell Godwin was scared. Having just graduated from East Bladen High School in tiny Council, N.C., Godwin had a bright future. As valedictorian of his class, there was a Morehead Scholarship, the most prestigious academic honor at North Carolina, waiting for him in Chapel Hill.

As a three-year starter at tailback and a Shrine Bowl participant, there was a place on the UNC football team waiting for him.

As the state's baseball player of the year and a two-time All-American, there was a spot on the Tar Heel baseball squad waiting for him, too.

There was also a \$1.8 million offer from the New York Yankees, the team that had drafted Godwin in the first round (24th overall) in June of 1997.

And Tyrell Godwin – on an Outward Bound trip in the New Mexico desert, a “five-hour drive” from the closest town or store – was stranded.

“The maps that we used were from like 1920. They were updated in 1960, but all they did was just update the 1920 map, so we’re using maps that are almost 80 years old at the time, and we’re going through an area where a storm had hit and knocked down trees and covered up the path,” Godwin says.

“There was one point in there for two or three miles that we had to almost try to find our own way, and we were feeling our own way through, trying to use the map and hoping that we were on the right path.

“That was approaching right at the end of Outward Bound, and all I could think about was, ‘Man, you know I’m right here being at the point where I can go home and we’re going to get lost.’ The thing is if you get lost there, you’re in trouble because there’s no way you can reach outside. You’re going to have to hike to find someone out there, and that’s scary.”

Godwin and his group were on the right track, reaching a checkpoint and food just before dark. In the process, he learned a valuable life lesson.

“It taught me that you never know your limits until they’re right there. You never know how far you can push yourself. That’s something that everyone can live by, and I live by. It’s almost like a never-say-die attitude because you couldn’t give in out there, because if you gave in it could mean your life,” Godwin says from the Tar Heel dugout at Boshamer Stadium.

“Here where you got everything laid out before you, people tend to forget that. They tend to forget that drive to keep going.”

Godwin hasn’t forgotten that drive. In the nearly three years since his trip, he has not merely kept going, but kept improving.

He turned down the Yankees’ offer to attend North Carolina on the Morehead and play football and baseball.

And now as he begins his junior – and most likely final – baseball season for the Tar Heels,

Godwin is still pushing the limits.

Thanks to his team-high .371 batting average last season and his .357 performance with Team USA this summer, he has been named to Baseball America’s preseason All-America team. The same magazine named him the ACC’s No. 2 professional prospect and the league’s fastest baserunner.

“Tyrell is a genetic freak,” UNC pitcher Chris Elmore says. “He’s just a load of talent. Sometimes, I’ll be sitting next to him and want to get his autograph. He’s exciting to watch play.”

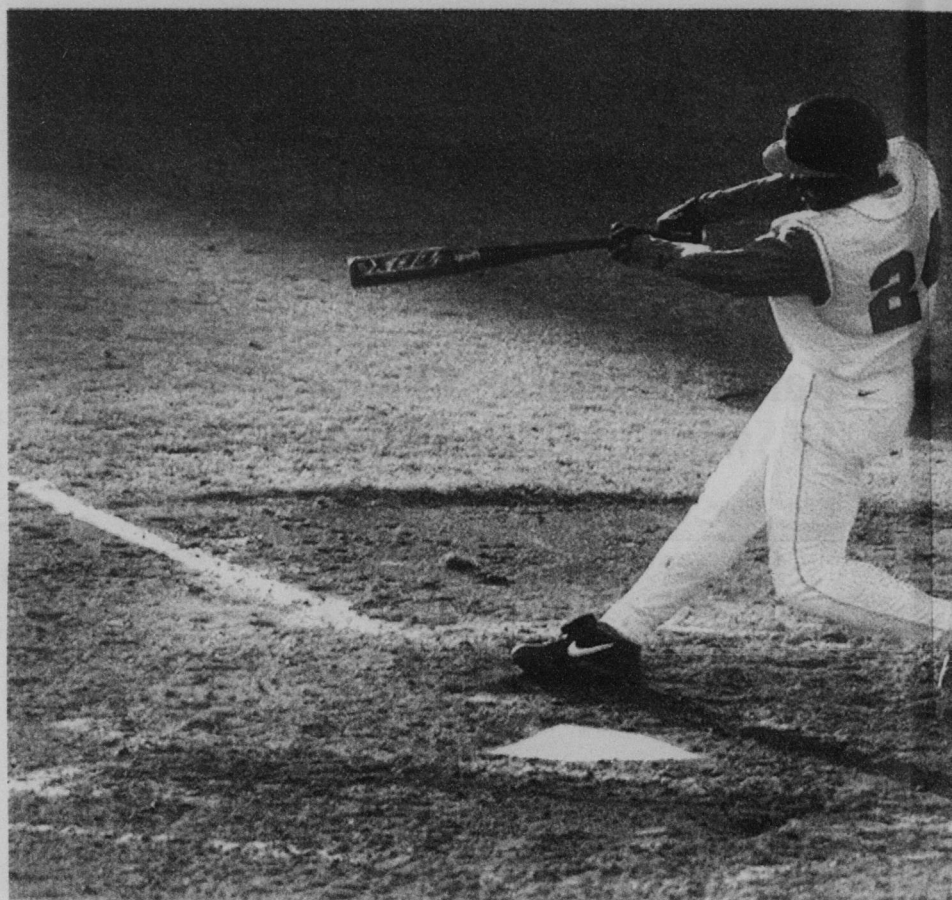
And he promises to get better. By playing football all those years, Godwin lost valuable time on the diamond perfecting the intricacies of the game, what some, like Baseball America, call “instincts.” The magazine, in its analysis of the first-team players, questioned Godwin’s baseball instincts.

He quit the football team this fall to concentrate fully on baseball, a decision in part based on June’s Major League Baseball draft, where college juniors are eligible to be selected.

Without football, Godwin attended fall baseball practices for the first time in his Tar Heel career, trying to correct his few shortcomings: judging fly balls to the outfield and his base-stealing skills.

“I’m not satisfied with where I am right now fundamentally as a baseball player,” Godwin says. “So I’ve got to keep working.”

In UNC’s 6-0 start this year, Godwin, playing left field, is hitting .261 with one home run and seven RBI. He has two steals but has been caught twice.



As a sophomore in 1999, Godwin was among North Carolina’s leaders in almost every offensive category. He led the team in batting average (.371), stolen bases (29) and triples (five).

Godwin finished tied with [unclear] He also tied for third [unclear]

North Carolina coach Mike Fox gushes when he talks about his star player.

“I don’t think Tyrell will reach his limit – he may be in his fifth or sixth year of pro ball before he really reaches his level. He’s so talented,” Fox says.

“He’s made great strides from the time I was first around him last fall until this year. But he’s still – the sky’s the limit for Tyrell – he’s got all that talent. He’s still got a long ways to go, and I think he’ll get there, but I don’t think it will be at this level. It will be at the next level.”

The next level, of course, is professional baseball. Despite the small critiques of his game, Godwin is expected to be a first-round pick again. This time, don’t expect Godwin to turn the money down. But don’t expect him to discuss the situa-

tion either.

“I’m just focusing on this season and playing the best I can for my team and hoping I can help us win games,” Godwin says.

The Tar Heels will be counting on Godwin, their cleanup hitter. Last season, batting fifth, Godwin had 58 RBI, 56 runs scored and an ACC-best 29 steals.

With UNC’s loss of center fielder Jarrett Shearin, the school’s all-time leader in runs, hits and RBI, Godwin will be expected to carry more of an offensive burden and possibly play some center, the position he played in high school and for Team USA.

But the baseball demands placed on Godwin fall short of those the Morehead Scholar puts on himself in the classroom. Godwin, regardless of his professional decision, is on pace to graduate in December with a degree in history.

“I push myself more than I do on

To Godwin, a do “my extra, my edge perfectionist. I refuse I want to be the be

It’s the reason I studying, working the future he has in

“Some days you see the next day he says. “Some days I like he’s weighed d

Tyrell Godwin	
	G-65
1998	40-25
1999	58-55
Totals	98-80