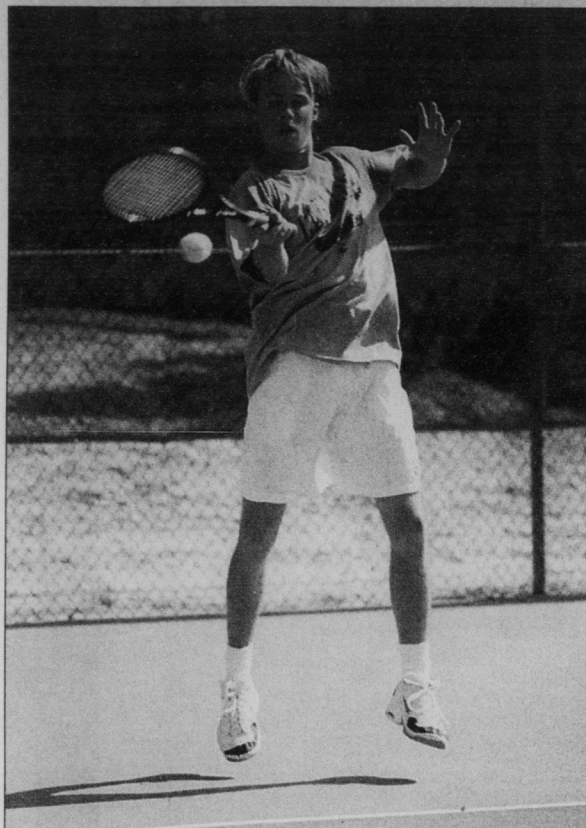


# Tennis Teams to Vie for ACC Titles



DTH/KATE MELLNIK

Senior Tripp Phillips, the No. 1 singles player on the North Carolina men's tennis team, won nine of his 11 singles matches this season.

By KELLY LUSK  
Staff Writer

If the regular season was any indication, the North Carolina men's tennis team will have an easy road to the ACC championship finals this weekend in Norcross, Ga.

Second-seeded UNC defeated every team in their bracket during the regular season. The Tar Heels face seventh-seeded Wake Forest in the quarterfinals Friday. Less than a week ago, UNC stomped the Demon Deacons 6-0, sweeping singles.

Even so, the Tar Heels aren't assuming victory yet.

"Teams have improved," coach Sam Paul said. "Everyone is peaking at this time of year. We expect a big battle."

If the Tar Heels are victorious, they'll match up with the winner of the contest between No. 3 Clemson and No. 6 Georgia Tech. UNC defeated both of those teams by 6-1 scores.

But the Tar Heels hit a couple of speed bumps on their otherwise carefree cruise down the conference road. After riding an 11-game winning streak, UNC finally faltered in consecutive matches against Duke and Virginia last week.

"(The loss to Virginia) served as a

wake-up call," junior David Cheatwood said. "Anybody can beat anybody. We have to take everybody seriously."

Senior Tripp Phillips will be the driving force in UNC's run at a tournament title. After redshirting last season, Phillips has been a blessing to the Tar Heel squad. He beat the No. 1 player in the nation and racked up a 9-2 ACC record. In his final ACC appearance, Phillips is looking for nothing but a championship.

*"Teams have improved. Everyone is peaking at this time of year. We expect a big battle."*

SAM PAUL  
UNC Men's Tennis Coach

"With this year's team, we have a very legitimate chance," Phillips said.

Although his game has been consistent throughout the regular season, Phillips recently made an

adjustment that might give him a new edge over any opponents.

"My friend Dave Corn showed me (I was breaking my wrist) on my volleys," Phillips said. "I was missing really easy volleys, but (the adjustment) has really helped my game."

Although Phillips is no doubt the star of the UNC men's tennis show, he is supported by a strong cast. The other five Tar Heel men also boast winning ACC records.

Cheatwood is expected to make a strong showing in the No. 3 slot. He finished the season 10-3 in the ACC.

Two Tar Heels will likely be making their first ACC championship appearances in singles. But Paul said the team's tough schedule has prepared both freshman Trystan Meniane and sophomore Marcio Petrone for the heightened intensity of post-season play.

In contrast to the Tar Heel men, UNC's women have a longer road to the ACC championship finals than most of their conference foes.

And there's a road block right around the first corner. Eighth-seeded UNC hopes to end its four-match conference losing streak when it plays No. 9 N.C. State today in the first round. The Tar Heels shut out N.C. State in the regular season.

If the Tar Heels repeat their regular season performance against the Wolfpack, they face top-seeded Wake Forest in the quarterfinals. The Demon Deacons trounced the Tar Heels 8-1 a week ago.

Coach Roland Thornqvist has since tweaked the lineup so that only No. 1 Marlene Mejia and No. 2 Jessica Zagazyck will be playing at their regular-season posts.

Freshman Kendrick Bunn played at



North Carolina women's tennis coach Roland Thornqvist changed his lineup, reordering seeds three through six.

No. 4 for most of the regular season, but she will move up to the No. 3 slot for the tournament. Bunn's six-match winning streak contributed to Thornqvist's decision to switch up his lineup.

"Kendrick has played the best tennis on the team lately," Thornqvist said.

The return of junior Erin Niebling also contributed to the seeding shift. Niebling battled a knee injury for most of the season but re-entered the lineup for UNC's final regular-season match against Duke. Her victory against the Blue Devils showed Thornqvist that she was ready for the tournament.

"I'm very confident going into the tournament," Niebling said. "My injury has been up and down, but I can work through it."

At the start of the season, the Tar Heels found a winner in freshman Marlene Mejia. But since Mejia sat out three matches with tendinitis, her consistency has faltered. She dropped her last two conference matches, both in straight sets.

"It's mental," Mejia said. "I need to believe in myself and focus what's on the court at that time."

While the women's road might not be as easy as the men's, both teams are driving toward the same goal.

Said Thornqvist, "We're looking at ACC championship as the start of a whole new season."

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## Golf Feels Relaxed At Course

UNC has won two ACC titles at the Old North State Club in the last six seasons and tied for second last year.

By BRET STRELOW  
Assistant Sports Editor

The Old North State Club, nestled next to Badin Lake in the Uwharrie National Forest, has been a sanctuary for the North Carolina men's golf team.

UNC has found its safety net at the course, which has been home to the ACC Championships five out of the last six seasons. The Tar Heels won the title there in 1995 and '96 and finished in a tie for second place with Duke last year.

"We've had a lot of success at this golf course," UNC senior Paul Daniel said. "Everybody on the team is comfortable where we're playing. Sometimes with golf courses, it makes a big difference."

It might have to. The 2000 campaign has not gone according to plan for a team that returned three senior starters from last year's lineup.

In four spring tournaments, North Carolina has recorded eighth- and ninth-place finishes and has finished 10th twice. The only ACC squads the Tar Heels have beaten in those tournaments are Virginia and Florida State.

"We have to forget about the disappointment and try to play hard," Daniel said. "It hasn't been from a lack of effort. We can get it turned around."

Daniel's confidence has legitimacy. A year ago, he tied for seventh place individually at the ACC Championships with a 1-over-par total of 217. Daniel led the tournament with 13 birdies and tied Duke's Marc Chatelain with a 3-under-par total at the par threes. His quick work on the greens helped the Tar Heels to a team-leading 47 birdies, six more than champion Georgia Tech had.

But Daniel and his Tar Heel teammates haven't been visiting the bird sanctuary as frequently this season. Many of the Tar Heels' putts, like their expectations, have come up short.

Senior Max Harris, who has taken home UNC's top finish in its last three tournaments, was even grounded at last week's Bell South Intercollegiate in Cary. He three-putted twice on the back nine on his way to a final-round 74.

Conference rivals Wake Forest and N.C. State beat the Tar Heels by 22 and 20 strokes, respectively, to capture first- and second-place finishes.

"I look at it as the biggest downfall, our putting," Daniel said. "We've been really streaky."

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UNC senior Paul Daniel tied for seventh at last year's ACC Championships with a 1-over total of 217.