

DTH/JEFF POULAND

New Attitude

Doherty Puts Own Mark on Program

By T. NOLAN HAYES
Sports Editor

Matt Doherty knows what it's like to be the new coach in town. He experienced it for the first time last season, when he left his job as an assistant coach at Kansas to become the head man at Notre Dame.

He felt pressure to win because coaches always do, but expectations for success weren't extremely high. The Fighting Irish had posted losing seasons in conference play in each of their four years of Big East play.

Things will be a little bit different for Doherty this year. After one season with the Irish, who won 22 games and went 8-8 in the Big East with him at the helm, Doherty has returned home to Chapel Hill. Waiting for him was a team that went to the Final Four last year under Bill Guthridge.

Doherty is starting over again, but this time the stakes are higher. "There's anxiety. There's excitement, nervousness. There's all those kinds of things, all those kinds of emotions that you feel," Doherty says. "But the neat thing is that my staff and I have gone through this before. Last year we were in the same boat, but now we've been through it together. That will really make our transition easier."

And no doubt about it, there will be a transition. True, Doherty is part of the UNC basketball family, having played for Dean Smith from 1980-84 and coached under former UNC assistant Roy Williams at Kansas from 1992-99. But that doesn't mean he is a clone of either man. Doherty subscribes to Smith's

main basketball philosophies — popularly known as "the Carolina way" — but he will put his own signature on the bottom line.

He wasted little time in getting that point across after taking over as head coach July 11. He brought his staff with him from Notre Dame, leaving Guthridge's three assistants — Phil Ford, Dave Hanners and Pat Sullivan — without jobs. He moved UNC's weight room to a new location, one that allows all of his players to work out together at the same time. He increased the difficulty of the team's preseason conditioning program.

The list continues, but perhaps the biggest change Doherty has brought to the program is a new attitude. At age 38, he has a perspective different from that of Smith and Guthridge, who were 66 and 62, respectively, when they retired.

"He's cool to talk to," junior forward Kris Lang says. "I'm not necessarily going to say he stoops to our level, but he understands us very well. He's a younger coach. It's like he lives in our shoes."

Doherty prides himself on that. He wants to know what the newest fads are among his players and the UNC student body because he says that kind of knowledge keeps him young.

And Doherty is a quick learner. Shortly after getting his BMW — one of the perks for being the main man in Chapel Hill — Doherty had a discussion with junior forward Jason Capel.

"Man, a lot of trees," Capel said, looking at the car. "Yeah," Doherty said, pretending to know what Capel was talking about.

But after a few seconds, Doherty's curiosity got the best of him. "What do you mean, 'a lot of trees?'" he asked.

"You know, the wood in the car," Capel replied.

Doherty can now be heard saying "nice trees" when he sees a fine automobile on the street. Kind of difficult to imagine Smith or Guthridge saying that, isn't it?

"It's something that he's changed," junior center Brian Bersticker says. "He tries to form a relationship with the team off the court."

Doherty has made the same effort in the community. He has been a visible presence since school started, giving speeches in the Pit and eating occasionally at Lenoir Dining Hall on campus and Sutton's Drug Store on Franklin Street. Doherty also played three-on-three with his staff against a team of students at Midnight Madness on Oct. 14. And with the election year in full effect, he and his wife, Kelly, spent time in the Pit promoting voter registration.

Doherty could have bypassed all of those things, and no one would have thought twice about it. But he didn't. Maybe it's because he doesn't have the 879 wins that made Smith almost God-like and unapproachable. Or maybe it's because he doesn't have the desire that Guthridge had of avoiding the spotlight at all costs.

Whatever the reason, UNC men's basketball now exudes an aura of accessibility that has been missing in recent years.

"I just think it's in my nature," Doherty says. "If I'm in the elevator with somebody, I say hello. If I'm sitting next to somebody on a plane, I'm going to say hello to them. It's my nature to be friendly and get to know people."

But that's not to say that Doherty is always Mr. Nice Guy. He is known as a players' coach — a guy who looks at things from players' perspectives and is fun to play for — but he is still a coach.

And he is demanding.

"When he says something, you just do it," Capel says. "There's no saying anything back, and there's no even questioning it because he's only going to ask you nicely one time. And after that, it's not going to be quite as nice as it was the first time. That's as kindly as I can put it."

Comments like Capel's are a sure sign that Doherty has the respect of his players. Part of what has helped Doherty gain that trust so quickly are his understanding of what his team can control and his desire to perfect those things. Doherty's opinion is that the Tar Heels can control two main aspects of their play in every game this season: how hard they play and what kind of physical shape they're in.

His preseason conditioning program reflects this philosophy. The Tar Heels are running more this year than they ever have before. "He likes to run you till you puke," Lang says. "He's good at that."

Recent history shows that UNC needs it. The Tar Heels have not used many substitutes in recent years, and fatigue has been a factor that has hurt them in up-tempo games against the likes of Duke and Florida. One of Doherty's goals is to eliminate that problem. He also likes the idea of his players gaining confidence through conditioning that they can use to get through tough situations in games.

And as much as anything else, all the running brings the team closer together. Players were pulling for each other as they struggled to make their times on all of their sprints and runs.

"You knew four days out of the week it was basically going to be a gut check, and you had to respond to it and learn how to get through it," Capel says. "There wasn't any punking out, and there wasn't any getting around it. You had to get through it or else you were letting the team down. We did that, we got through it, and I think that makes us a lot closer team and more prepared team."

Doherty knows all about putting in work to achieve a goal. Every day he wakes up and looks in the mirror, he sees the benefits of it. Growing up in East Meadow, N.Y., Doherty spent countless hours on the courts of Prospect Park trying to improve his game. On a typical day, he would get up at 8 a.m., walk the three blocks from his home to the park and play until lunch time. He'd then stroll over to a place called Meadow Dairy, where he'd order a bologna gyro, Linden's chocolate chip cookies and a quart of milk for lunch.



North Carolina men's basketball coach Matt Doherty took the helm July 11. Here, he does a dem...

Doherty would then head back to the park until lunch time to eat and return one final time to play pickup basketball. The cycle was the same every day. Doherty didn't mind the monotony because he was doing what he loved. And he was getting paid off. He earned a scholarship to North Carolina during his career as a forward and a national championship ring.

But basketball would not be a part of his future. Doherty, a sixth-round pick of the Cleveland Cavaliers in the 1984 NBA Draft, didn't make it in the pros.

He went to work for three years on Wall Street for Kidder Peabody. That part of his life was a piece of times.

"I think deep down was for the wrong reason. I think I did it for the cool thing to do."

How come you didn't make it in the NBA? "And you could say, 'No, I'm not in the NBA,' but on Wall Street, and I think that was a cool thing to do to start a career, but you don't know at that time."

Doherty soon found that out, so he left Wall Street for Charlotte even though he had no job there, and he was selling bonds, so that was out.

Doherty decided that he needed to get back into basketball. He worked for a couple of years as a color commentator on the Davidson radio network in addition to some high-

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MATT DOHERTY
UNC Men's Basketball Coach

The Doherty File

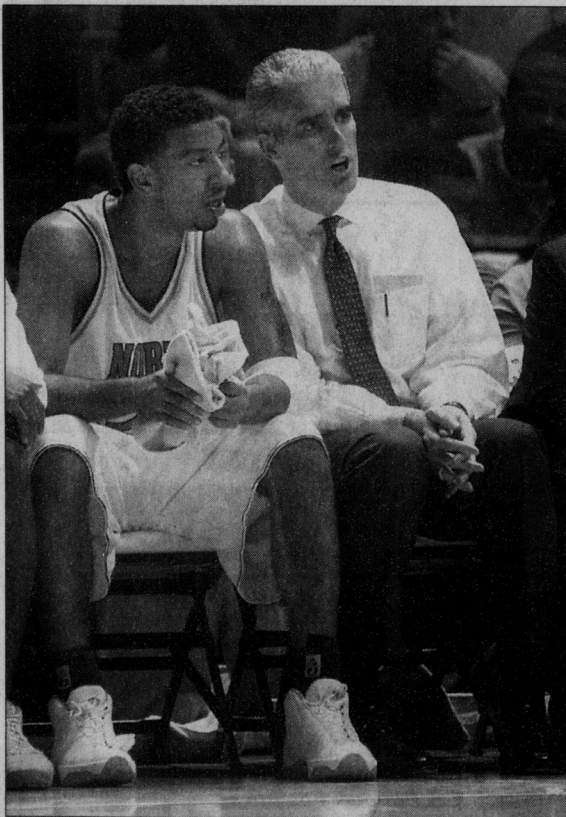
Full Name: Matthew Francis Doherty
Born: Feb. 25, 1962, in East Meadow, N.Y.
Education: B.A. in business administration (UNC 1984)
Wife: Kelly Propst, of Concord
Children: son, Tucker, 3; daughter, Hattie Fitzgerald, 1.
Coaching Experience: assistant, Davidson (1989-92); assistant, Kansas (1992-99); head coach, Notre Dame (1999-2000)

Highlights During UNC Playing Career (1980-84)

- Played on teams that combined for a 117-21 record (.848 winning percentage)
- Won the 1982 NCAA championship
- Won three ACC regular-season championships
- Won two ACC Tournament titles
- Participated in two Final Fours
- Led the team in assists in 1982-83 (150) and 1983-84 (124)
- Became the second player in UNC history to accumulate 1,000 points, 400 rebounds and 400 assists
- Averaged 9.0 points, 3.5 rebounds and 3.5 assists per game for his career
- Played in all 101 games his final three seasons

Highlights During Stint at Notre Dame (1999-2000)

- Posted a 22-15 record
- Guided Notre Dame to most wins in a season since 1986-87
- Ranked second in NCAA in wins among first-year coaches
- Guided Notre Dame to wins against five ranked opponents
- Coached Troy Murphy, consensus first-team All-American and Big East Player of the Year



Go Tar Heels!

