

UNC's Center of Attention

UNC senior Brendan Haywood ignores talk that he's one of the best big men in the nation to focus on his team.

By WILL KIMMEY
SportSaturday Editor

Brendan Haywood might just be the nation's best at his position. North Carolina's 7-foot, 262-pound center is certainly the best big man east of the Mississippi.

People out west might argue for Arizona's Loren Woods, but he's more slender (7-1, 251) and has battled

through injuries during his career.

"Some people say I'm one of the best big men in the country, and some people don't," Haywood said. "I don't go out there and focus on that. I go out there and focus on playing hard and being a benefit to this team."

When Haywood is at his best, the Tar Heels are national title contenders. When he's on, no one can stop him.

Haywood shot 69.7 percent from the field last season, an ACC record. Although he averaged 13.6 points per game, he didn't look to score enough, and UNC went 18-12 in the regular season.

Then he got aggressive in the NCAA tournament. And North Carolina advanced to the Final Four. Haywood

averaged 15.8 points and 9.6 rebounds, putting to rest his haunting no-point, one-rebound performance the year before against Weber State.

"I didn't have anything to prove to anybody, but at the same time I felt like I silenced a lot of critics that I had," Haywood said. "I just felt good to go out there and do the best that I could and help the team move on."

And after his dominating performance in the tournament, Haywood gave some consideration to moving on himself. To the NBA.

NBA scouts projected Haywood to be drafted between the sixth and 12th selections. He met with Dean Smith and Bill Guthridge after the season to discuss his professional prospects.

"They said, 'Any way you go, you can't make a bad move,' and they supported me throughout," Haywood said. "... But it was a situation where I felt I could improve myself and could definitely help this team if I came back."

So he did, and come next year's draft, Haywood could have several million reminders that his decision paid off. Given the lack of good centers in the NBA, an impressive senior season could vault Haywood to the top of the draft.

But for now, Haywood is concentrating on this season. He worked hard over the summer to improve his game.

"The coaches just tell me to work on everything," Haywood said. "They want to see me become a better free throw shooter, they want to see me step my game out, too. And at the same time, they want to see me become a better rebounder. If you're grabbing eight rebounds, grab 10. If you're getting 10, get 11. No matter how good you get, they always want you to improve something."

So Haywood, who led UNC with 7.5 rebounds per game last year, worked on it all. He shot plenty of free throws, hoping to get better than his 60-percent mark from the stripe last season.

He improved his ball handling and 15-foot jumper. Every one can remember Haywood's freshman season when he would catch the ball at the top of the key and look lost. He would pivot incessantly until a guard came to take the ball from him or the referee called a five-second violation. Now, Haywood is not so shy away from the goal.

Most importantly, however, Haywood worked on his conditioning. It's a change that's easy to see. He's



DTH/MILLER PEARSALL

Haywood threw home a number of dunks last season en route to setting an ACC record with a .697 field-goal percentage.

quicker. He can play longer stretches of the game. His arms look more muscular. He's stronger and can be more physical. "I'm just cock diesel," Haywood quipped.

"I've been very impressed with how

hard he's gone at it in the workouts and in the running," UNC coach Matt Doherty said. "He made his mile time in 5:58, which is hard for a guy his size. You see him trucking around, and he runs hard."

Brendan Haywood's Career Statistics

Year	GP	FGM-FGA	PCT	FTM-FTA	PCT	OFF-REB	AVG	A	TO	B	S	PTS	AVG
1997-98	38	35-66	.530	40-63	.635	37-91	2.4	6	23	33	12	110	2.9
1998-99	34	160-247	.648	88-131	.672	85-235	6.9	33	66	60	10	408	12.0
1999-00	36	191-274	.697	106-176	.602	96-271	7.5	37	68	91	7	488	13.6
Totals	108	386-587	.658	234-370	.632	218	5.97	76	157	184	29	1,006	9.3

1999-2000 ACC Field Goal Percentage Leaders

1. Brendan Haywood, UNC .697
2. Lonny Baxter, Md. .533
3. Darnous Anderson, FSU .508
4. Chris Williams, UVA .507
5. Shane Battier, Duke .496

ACC Season Field Goal Percentage Leaders

1. Brendan Haywood, UNC (1999-00) .697
2. Dale Davis, Clem. (1988-89) .670
3. Bobby Jones, UNC (1971-72) .668
4. Horace Grant, Clem. (1986-87) .656
5. Rasheed Wallace, UNC (1994-95) .654

Haywood is now in shape to bang with the NBA's big boys next season. And he should be able to dominate college centers. His progress should force opponents to double-team him in the low block.

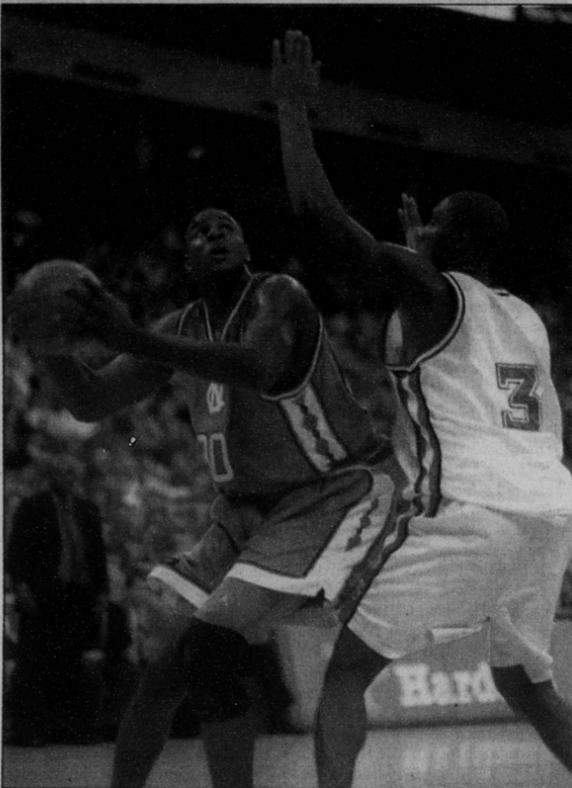
"If you get it into Brendan, the defense is basically going to have to collapse," Doherty said. "If they don't, he'll have a field day. And when they do collapse, he's unselfish and can find the open shooters."

Haywood proved that in the Blue-White game. He scored 22 points and dished out six assists. Yet Haywood still has things to work on and refine. He can get better. And it could be scary.

"If Brendan can play the way he played toward the end of last season, I don't think there's anybody who can stop him," junior Brian Bersticker said.

And Haywood, whose motivation has been questioned in the past, has to be excited about what his future holds.

"When you're a senior at Carolina, you've got a chance to do great things and have a great, long career ahead of you in the NBA," Doherty said. "He has all that ahead of him, so if he's not excited about that, something's wrong. But it certainly looks like he's fired up."



DTH/JEFF POULAND

Haywood stayed in school for his senior season so he could improve his game, as well as help the Tar Heels contend for a national championship.




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