

Out of the Past & INTO THE FUTURE

when the red-clad spectators roared
r than their counterparts.
strange season for sure and a peculiar
for Capel and Kris Lang, who entered
n. Ronald Curry as McDonald's All-

anything I expected it to be and more," Lang
what I mean by more is this season. You
ected North Carolina to be in this situ-
they were and so I'm glad I was a part
ese guys."

the guys didn't stick around.
ber, 7-foot-5 redshirt freshman
on transferred. In January, foot-
s Curry and Julius Peppers
they wouldn't return to
eam. Capel wore their basket-
s on his shoes throughout the
ring Spring Break, sopho-
Brian Morrison decided to
ow three juniors and seniors
e in the fall - Adam Boone,
olmes and Will Johnson.
transfer all the time," Doherty
turned around to point out pic-
wall - much like in a fraterni-
f former players who had trans-
e past. "Was that a cause for con-
think kids come here and realize
er reasons they want to leave. In
it's a good decision, and I understand

y, the biggest change after everything has
nd done has been how the hard-
players went through changed
result of losing while wear-
orth Carolina" name

veys. r
l, but life's tough
ohnson said in
lem. "It's just
where you've
ugh and keep

the Tar Heels go
as they again lose
and most experi-
ers is what everyone
until the next round
comes next year.
the future is going to be
s program just for the fact that
ned so much this season," Lang
ready shedding tears following his
ato game. "They've built a lot of
th what's happened this year, so
eat thing with what happened."
who probably has more pride
his teammates, fouled out of
against Duke and left the floor
anal goodbyes and hopes that
one, things might change yet

he's hurting inside, and he just
and hugged every last one of
d us. "Don't let this happen
elman Melvin Scott said. "We
at we love him. It was a very
point in the game, and he just
ep playing hard. And then he
almost had them.
ere his last words, and then he
bench."

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Swingman Rashad McCants is one
of three All-American recruits in
the Tar Heels' incoming freshman
class for the 2002-03 season.

McCants, Raymond Felton and Sean
May will play together for the first time
in the McDonald's All-American Game
on Thursday night at Madison Square
Garden in New York. The game, to
be broadcast on ESPN, will be
played at 8 p.m. In his senior
season at New Hampton (N.H.)
School, the 6-foot-3 McCants
averaged 25 points, seven
rebounds and five assists. His
athleticism and aggressive,
hard-nosed on-court
demeanor have earned him a
reputation as the kind of
player opponents hate to face.

Checking In With the Nation's Most Talented Trio of Signees

JAMIE AGIN
Assistant Sports Editor

The future of North Carolina
basketball is running late.

Raymond Felton, message board
messiah, Tar Heel savior du jour,
wanted to leave for his girlfriend's place in Florence,
S.C., a half hour ago.

But late on a Friday afternoon, hours after
being dismissed from Latta High School for
the weekend, the 2002 Naismith High School
Player of the Year is back in the parking lot,
coolly nailing every last question.

How often do you talk to Coach Doherty?

Have you played against LeBron James?

Have you seen Hoop Dreams?

If Felton's good at dealing with situations like
this, it's because he's used to them by now.

He was first noticed at about the age of five, when
he would pour in 40 points in youth league games.
It continued through his adolescence, during which
he's given more interviews and been courted by more
schools than he can name (when asked which colleges
targeted him, Felton deadpans, "All of them.")

Thirteen years after terrorizing his kindergarten
class, the 6-foot-1 point guard's slipped a bit. He
averaged only 29.5 points per game his senior season
- but it was good enough to lead Latta High to its second
consecutive state championship.

"He's basically head-and-shoulders above the rest of the
guards in the country," said Clint Jackson, a recruiting
analyst for TheACC.com. "He can shoot the 3, he can take it to the
hole, he can dunk, he can absorb body contact. He's very mature
in his mindset that he really doesn't need to show off or make someone look
bad. He just does what it takes to win."

According to those who have seen him play, he does it when it counts.
"When it comes down to crunch time, he answers the bell," said
Dave Telep, director of basketball recruiting for TheInsiders.com.
"And that's not something you can measure."

When the bell tolls midnight come a crisp night this October and
UNC begins its practice season, the freshman will face the most
formidable challenge of his career. Felton will be responsible for
restoring marks that prior to last season seemed like layups.

One straight 20-win season. One straight top-3 finish in the
ACC. One straight NCAA tournament appearance.

Of course, he won't exactly be on his own.

He'll be joined by Rashad McCants, an explosive, chiseled, 6-3 wing forward out of New Hampton (N.H.)
School with a disproportionately wide wing span and a
mean streak cut from the Rasheed Wallace mold.

"He intimidates a lot of people," Jackson said. "McCants
is the type of player that I think all of the other teams are
going to hate and Carolina fans are going to love. He's got that
on-court personality that's just cocky and mean and nasty."

And they'll be joined by Sean May, a 6-8 power forward
from Bloomington, Ind., with a wide body and a soft touch.

"Sean May is an important piece of this puzzle because he
is the true low-post scoring option that they need," Telep said
of the Bloomington North High School senior, who averaged
22 points and 14 rebounds per game this season.

The three are only half of the six-man recruiting class set to
join the Tar Heels in the fall, yet they receive almost all the atten-
tion. As well they should.

While interior players Damion Grant and Byron Sanders have
already been labeled projects, and walk-on swingman David Noel is
an ex-football recruit, Felton, May and McCants are three of 10
Parade Magazine first-team All-Americans - for the entire country.

"To be honest, it really wouldn't matter what way it was," Felton said.
"I don't choke under pressure. Pressure doesn't bother me."

Said McCants, who averaged 25 points and seven boards per game at
New Hampton this season, "We don't really have to say anything. Just let
our games do the talking."

May is not as brash, but he is just as enthusiastic about coming to Chapel Hill.
Or maybe it's leaving Bloomington.

His father Scott is a Hoosier legend. He was a two-time All-American and
the 1976 Player of the Year on Indiana's unbeaten championship team. After
choosing UNC instead of IU in November, Sean suffered a backlash that
included phone calls and letters, comments from friends at school and
strangers at shopping malls - and that continues five months later.

"I just went out yesterday, went to get a bite to eat, and
I at least had four or five people come up to me," said the
265-pounder two days after Indiana disposed of Kent
State in the Elite Eight. "And they're like 'What about
those Hoosiers? They're in the Final Four. I bet you
wish you would've went there.'"

"I don't think there's any way that this year could have been any harder on me."

Said Scott May: "I think that he's grown up since the decision,
and I think it's opened his eyes about people, about people that
he thought were his friends. As far as next year and the pressure,
being a freshman on a team that had a losing record, I tell him
all the time what a great situation he's going into as a young player."

Next year's "great" situation will likely entail Felton seizing the role of the team's
starting point guard, May starting at either power forward or center and McCants
with a chance to earn a starting spot at either shooting guard or small forward. In
addition to minutes and points, they'll be counted on to drive up the intensity of an
8-20 team that at times looked lost last season.

"What you forget is, when you bring in guys like this, there's guys like Jackie
Manuel who are going to go, 'Whoa, wait a minute,' and all of a sudden, hope-
fully, that competition will raise everyone's level of play," Telep said.

Felton might have already made his presence felt in UNC gyms.

"I remember hearing
stories about him coming
down as a junior and play-
ing pickup games with the
Tar Heels and you know,
just taking it to Joseph
Forte," Jackson said. "Forte
was the best player on the
Tar Heels at the time. He
could come in there as a
16-year-old and just go
right at Forte without even
thinking about it."

Recruiting analysts do
their jobs by spreading
stories like that one.
Basketball coaches keep
theirs by doing the oppo-
site, deflecting the hype
and letting young players
develop.

Enter Matt Doherty,
who has begun shielding
his three McDonald's All-
Americans from the super-
sized pressure that comes
along with "saving" North
Carolina basketball.

"I think they might hear
that from other people, but
they don't hear that from
me," said Doherty, who
himself played in the
McDonald's game in 1980.
"I hope that people listen,
people listen to me. Some
people are realistic and say
next year could be a rough
year, too, because we are
so young and so inexperi-
enced. Our most experi-
enced post man next year
will be Sean May. Scary."

Still, some of the Tar
Heel faithful have already
made up their minds.

"He's just like
Stackhouse," spouted one
spectator to no one in par-
ticular while watching
McCants will his way to 30
points in a Feb. 23
scrimmage against an over-
matched UNC junior varsity team. "Only stronger."
And three inches shorter than the 1995 first-team All American.
And 28 pounds lighter.
McCants, echoing advice he said he's received from Doherty and UNC for-
ward Jawad Williams, best sums up the heralded trio's situation.
"We're going to have to grow up fast."

If they do?

For us to come in, and if we turn the program back around to what every-
one's used to seeing it as," May said, "it just makes all of us, and the coaching
staff, and the players that are already there look so much better."

And if they don't?

For now, it's a possibility that everyone involved with the program, includ-
ing Felton, would rather not think about.

"It's not going to be what everybody's thinking. It's not going to be easy. I'm
not going to say we're going to go there and beat 'em," said Felton, referring to
Duke, staring down at the concrete, shaking his head - then grinning.

"But that's the plan."

Star Trios

Three of North Carolina's six incoming freshmen -
Raymond Felton, Rashad McCants and Sean May - earned
2002 McDonald's All-American honors, marking the sixth
time a UNC recruiting class has included three McDonald's.
Following the worst season in school history, Felton,
McCants and May will be expected to contribute
immediately. Here's how the other five Tar Heel classes
with three All-Americans fared:

Incoming season: 1985-86

All-Americans: Steve Bucknall, Jeff Lebo, Kevin Madden.
Achievements: The trio helped UNC to a 116-25 mark
during a four-year span, including regular-season ACC titles
in 1987 and 1988, and made it to the Elite Eight twice.

Incoming season: 1986-87

All-Americans: Pete Chilcutt, J.R. Reid, Scott Williams.
Achievements: Even though Chilcutt would redshirt
his freshman year, he came back to help the 1988
ACC champion and Elite Eight team.

Incoming season: 1990-91

All-Americans: Eric Montross, Derrick Phelps, Brian Reese.
Achievements: This group was the core of Dean Smith's
national championship team in 1993. The group won 114
games in its four years and played in two Final Fours, losing
to Kansas in 1991 before defeating Michigan two years later.

Incoming season: 1993-94

All-Americans: Jeff McInnis, Jerry Stackhouse,
Rasheed Wallace.
Achievements: The first class to come in after UNC's title
year, McInnis, Stackhouse and Wallace led the Tar Heels
to a Final Four in 1995. That year, North Carolina dropped
its national semifinal game against Arkansas.

Incoming season: 1998-99

All-Americans: Jason Capel, Ronald Curry, Kris Lang.
Achievements: The first recruiting class of former UNC coach
Bill Guthridge, the group reached the 2000 Final Four
a year before Coach Matt Doherty took over.
Curry played only two years before concentrating
solely on football.

bigger,
a shoote-
including
bulk up in
rebound.

03. The