Tar Heel Volleyball Chases 4th Straight ACC Title

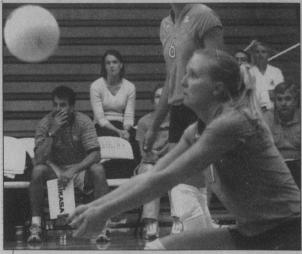
Senior leadership will be key for season

Amid high expectations, the North Carolina volleyball team is raising its own bar even higher.

Despite compiling a three-year string

Tar Heels were voted by the conference coaches to be the preseason favorite.

But as senior outside hitter Laura Greene says, "The past three years we expected to win, too. If we didn't vote, it's not our decision."



Senior setter Eve Rackman will lead the Tar Heels in their quest for a fourth consecutive ACC title. She ranks first all time in assists for UNC.

break into and finish in the top 25 and also reach the Sweet 16 for the first time in school history

But Coach Joe Sagula is trying to keep the team focused, despite the

weight of outside expectations.

"What we're trying to do is keep our focus right now," he said.

"Just playing the first match, each game, each match and trying not to think about all those things right now." think about all those things right now. Because we really can't - we can't get consumed with that."

The Tar Heels are led by four seniors: outside hitters Greene, who was named first-team all-ACC last season, and Malaika Underwood, the reigning ACC tournament MVP, middle hitter Holly

Strauss and setter Eve Rackham.
Sagula said the seniors are the backbone of North Carolina's team and that he is counting on them to be consistent and set a high standard for the program. Rackham said she is looking forward to assuming a leadership role.

"I'm really looking forward to my senior year," Rackham said. "Knowing that I need to be a leader, teaching the young kids basically the way of Carolina volleyball."

With 10 letter winners returning, the Tar Heels can spend more time jelling as a team rather than learning the ropes. And the team will need plenty of time to hone its skills, because North Carolina is facing a tough schedule this season.

prise the Tar Heels' nonconference schedule, UNC faces four teams that appeared in last season's NCAA tourent - No. 6 Wisconsin, Minnesota San Diego and Oregon State – as well as several other solid teams, such as New

Mexico State, St. John's and Ball State.
The ACC will also present a challenge for North Carolina. Notably,
Duke and Georgia Tech will push the Tar Heels for supremacy in the confer-

Rackham said she thinks the team thrives on pressure and good competi-tion. Underwood said she thinks this will be a successful year.

"Yeah, we do have a tough schedule," Underwood said. "But we have a really good team this year, so everyone's excit-

ed to play, ready to compete."

To round out their starting lineup, the
Tar Heels need to find a replacement for
junior middle hitter Nicole Reis, a member of the All-ACC first team last season. Reis is sitting out the coming year to focus on academics.

Sagula mentioned four players he thinks are primed to step up this season – middle hitter Aletha Green, outside hitters Camila Ihenetu and Molly Pyles and defensive specialist Caroline

"I think one of the characteristics of this team right now is just going to be our depth," Sagula said. "I think we've got a good second team that day-in and day-out will challenge our first team, and our first team will get better. And as a whole we'll make ourselves better as

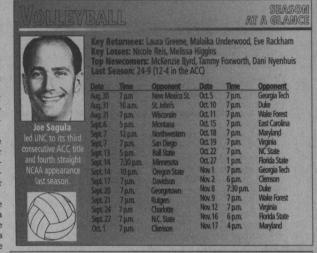
the season goes on."

But no matter who steps up, and what the expectations are, for North Carolina it all comes down to the win column.

"This year, our mission has been

everything should be about winning," Rackham said.
"And that's basically going to be the bottom line for everything."

The Sports Editor can be reached at



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Child Care

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