

Middle Hitters Vital to UNC Success

Tar Heels lead the conference in blocks

By BEN COUCH
Staff Writer

Their main job is to be a decoy, which can be a thankless task. Once they establish themselves as a scoring threat, their job goes beyond statistics. They can change the game's momentum, although other players usually receive the credit.

But the middle hitters of the North Carolina volleyball team's stellar performance this year has commanded attention.

The Tar Heel foursome, which is comprised of senior Holly Strauss, juniors Aletha Green and Tammy Foxworth, and sophomore Katie Wright head a North Carolina team that is leading the ACC in blocks, with 3.09 per game.

And by drawing away opposing teams' blockers, the middle hitters open up lanes for the outside hitters to spike the ball. This strategy has resulted in UNC placing third in the conference in total kills.

The quartet feeds off of each other's strong play.

"I think everyone's play makes everybody else a lot more competitive," Green said. "Everyone else is playing well, so then you have to play better. I think that's better for the team overall."

UNC's record backs Green up. The Tar Heels have jumped out to one of the best starts in team history, winning 11 of their first 12 games.

The middle hitters spearheaded North Carolina's two wins against Georgetown and Rutgers this weekend.

Wright led the way, totaling 19 kills and three blocks. Strauss slammed 14 kills and had 3.5 blocks. Green scored five kills and three blocks on the weekend, and Foxworth added three kills against Rutgers on Sunday.

Strauss is the leader of the group, averaging an ACC-best 1.33 blocks per game.

"She's the player who gives us a consistent performance day in and day out," said UNC coach Joe Sagula. "Great blocking, great hitting, you know, just a steady performance. We just need that. We know we can always go to her, and we know we can depend upon (her). And you can't ask more than that."

When questioned about her performance so far this season, Strauss casually deflected attention away from herself.

"It's a team effort," she said. "I wouldn't be getting my block assists if it wasn't for the outsides coming in. With volleyball, the team makes you look good, no

matter what skill you're doing."

With Strauss recovering from off-season ankle reconstructive surgery, the depth UNC has at middle hitter has been key. It has allowed Sagula to ease Strauss back into the lineup, where she has regained her old form.

Each of the four middle hitters brings a different strength to the court. Wright offers an offensive mindset and a jump-float serve, while Green contributes athleticism and defense. Foxworth provides North Carolina with a more versatile combination game, and Strauss has a strong service game to go with her solid all-around play.

Sagula said the group's diverse talents give the Tar Heels an advantage on the court.

"It allows us to change the tempo of



Tar Heel senior Holly Strauss leads the conference in blocks this season with 1.33 per game.

the game," he said. "It allows us to change the speed of the game, the blocking of the game. Some have particular strengths more than others. That keeps the opponent off guard."

The emergence of Wright and Green this season bodes well for the Tar Heels.

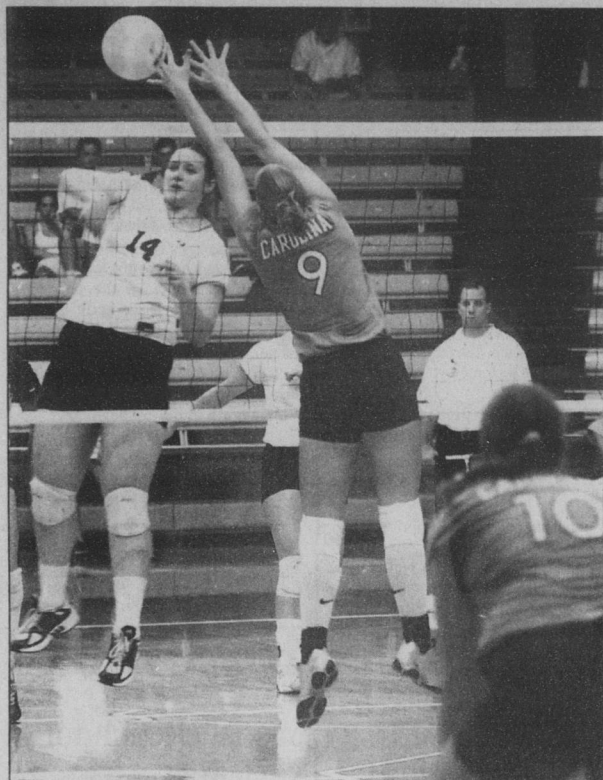
Sagula noted that Wright has been improving her blocking and Green, her offense. This combination means two things for UNC.

"It means we're getting great contributions this year, and the future looks bright for the program, too," Sagula said. "The coach is always thinking about the big picture and down the road, so we're excited about that."

Strauss realizes that things won't always be as smooth as they have been so far this year.

"Sure, there are going to be games where our outside hitters aren't hitting the ball," she said. "But our job as middles is to draw the blockers, so if they're getting their kills, that means we're doing our job well."

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DTH/ANNE PHILLIPS

UNC sophomore Katie Wright rises for a block against Georgetown's Anna Kleinsorge in UNC's 3-1 win against the Hoyas on Friday.

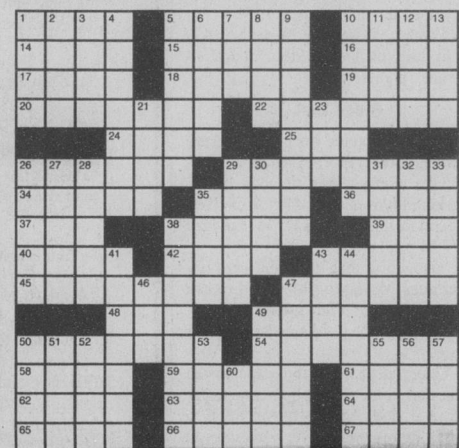
THE Daily Crossword

By Roger Jurgovan

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- ACROSS**
- 1 Pauper's plea
 - 5 Play part
 - 10 Unsettles
 - 14 Mob meleé
 - 15 Leslie of "Gigi"
 - 16 Toward shelter
 - 17 Part of a plot?
 - 18 Apprehension
 - 19 Third power
 - 20 Best Actor, "Life is Beautiful"
 - 22 Best Actor, "The French Connection"
 - 24 Understands
 - 25 Negatives
 - 26 Unattractive
 - 29 Best Actress, "Room at the Top"
 - 34 Separated
 - 35 Gloomy effect
 - 36 Russian river
 - 37 D.C. VIP
 - 38 Best Actor, "It Happened One Night"
 - 39 Combine
 - 40 H.S. dance
 - 42 Fire-sale caveat
 - 43 Swiftly
 - 45 Best Actress, "Dead Man Walking"
 - 47 Flora
- DOWN**
- 1 Part of U.A.E.
 - 2 Parasitic
 - 3 Dawn 'til noon
 - 4 Best Actor, "In the Heat of the Night"
 - 5 Meager
 - 6 Celestial dog
 - 7 Work unit
 - 8 Snack
 - 9 Twist together
 - 10 Best Actress, "Women in Love"
 - 11 Grad
 - 12 Singer
 - 13 McEntire
 - 13 Observed
 - 21 Yiddish money
 - 23 Swindle
 - 26 Window catches

- 27 La Scala show
- 28 Landed estate
- 29 Polio vaccine developer
- 30 Woes
- 31 Staff again
- 32 Dislodge?
- 33 Levies
- 35 El ___ TX
- 38 Contraptions
- 41 Best Actress, "The Rose Tattoo"
- 43 Jai ___
- 44 Best Actress, "Shakespeare in Love"
- 46 Bobbey twin
- 47 Tines
- 49 Spout thoughts
- 50 Used leeches
- 51 Great review
- 52 Actor Montand
- 53 Black sheep
- 55 Jot
- 56 Issue forth
- 57 Break
- 60 Greek letters



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