

Fencers optimistic for season

BY BRANDON COWARD
STAFF WRITER

A strong group of newcomers joins a veteran core as the North Carolina fencing team kicks off the season with its first dual meet this weekend at Northwestern.

Last year, only one fencer on the team qualified for NCAA competition, junior Wesley Newkirk in the sabre.

Coach Ron Miller says this year's team has a chance to qualify more fencers for nationals.

Last year, Newkirk earned the team seven points by finishing 20th in the sabre, a finish good enough to place the team 26th in the nation.

"Last year's season was good during the regular season, a little frustrating at the end," Miller said. "We were very inexperienced on the women's side. Some of the men that were seniors had great seasons and just missed NAAs."

Three of those seniors, Matt McMurray (foil), Josh Webb (epee) and Seth Axford (epee), will be sorely missed on the men's side.

The loss of Axford and Webb, longtime starters, makes the men's epee squad much thinner this year.

Only one men's epee returner, senior Matt Jednak, finished in the top 10 in the Tar Heels' first tournament of the year, the Temple Open.

The return of junior Yin Song would have bolstered the strength of the epee team, but Song tore his anterior cruciate ligament and will be gone until January.

While the men's epee contingent might be somewhat thin, the sabre and foil squads are deep and finished well at Temple.

Sophomore Steve Piantadosi and senior C.J. Webster lead the men's foil group.

Piantadosi is coming off a stellar freshman year, while Webster is hoping to finish out his UNC career with his first NCAA berth.

Newkirk, the standout junior, is the best of a deep sabre crew that includes freshman Joe Pipkin, junior Nick Beckett and junior Whitney Reeds, who transferred from Drew University.

Pipkin and fellow freshman Courtney Krolikoski already had shown Miller great promise before their first college bouts, competing in the Junior Olympics in Colorado Springs this summer.

Pipkin turned in a 27th place finish, while Krolikoski placed 24th.

Krolikoski and fellow epeeist junior Ivana Ferrer head a women's epee squad that placed three fencers in the top 20 at Temple.

The Tar Heel women's team is deepest in the sabre, with senior Liz Rainbolt, sophomore Jennifer Kling and junior Jennifer Hunt all finishing in the top 15 at Temple.

The women's foil squad is headed by senior Ivona Puzkarczuk, who could compete for an NCAA berth.

Newkirk said this year's team, though youthful and somewhat inexperienced, can learn and improve quickly.

"This year's team is very young," Newkirk said.

"They're going to have a larger challenge this year because of the skill differentiation. (The younger fencers) will have to pick up the slack, which I have no doubt they can do."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

N.C. State defeats UNC in penalty kick shootout

BY BRANDON PARKER
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

CARY — North Carolina's first-round ACC Tournament match against N.C. State was not very different from the regular-season meeting between the two schools.

After 110 hard-fought minutes, the N.C. State 0 Tar Heels and UNC 0 Wolfpack still were tied.

N.C. STATE WINS, 4-3, ON PENALTY KICKS

But this time, the game proceeded to a shootout in order to decide which team would advance.

And in the end, N.C. State won 4-3 on penalty kicks.

Wolfpack forward Aaron King missed his first-round attempt, allowing UNC to go up 1-0 on a Jamie Watson goal.

Both teams connected in round 2, but Michael Harrington's shot was denied in the third round, tying the score at 2-2.

After N.C. State made its next two penalty kicks and Marcus Storey scored for UNC, it came down to junior defender Ray Fumo to tie the score.

But N.C. State goalkeeper Jorge Gonzalez knocked the shot away and clinched the upset win.

North Carolina (12-3-4, 2-3-2 in the ACC) controlled the ball for the majority of regulation and held a 15-10 advantage in shots against N.C. State (9-7-2, 2-3-2).

However, Gonzalez would not budge — he had nine saves.

With the Wolfpack players dropping like flies due to a various array of injuries, it seemed that the team was playing for a shootout once the game entered overtime.

"You could tell toward the end that they really wanted to go to penalty kicks," said UNC co-captain Grant Porter. "They were kind of sitting back and relying on the long punts and hoping that one of their guys could kick one and get a runner for a goal."

The Tar Heels were hit with the injury bug as well. Freshman Wes Shull had to sit out the game because of mononucleosis, and junior defender Tim Merritt was forced out of the game after sustaining a gash under his eye during a midair collision in the first half.

"With Tim, you are not only losing a good defender, but you also lose a very good offensive weapon on those restarts," said UNC coach

Elmar Bolowich.

Nevertheless, the defense, anchored by seniors Porter and Sean McGinty, was very efficient, as it held N.C. State scoreless through regulation.

Freshman goalkeeper Justin Hughes also was impressive in his first ACC Tournament appearance, making six saves.

"I thought our defense did very well," Bolowich said. "Grant Porter did a great job along with the other backs we had in there. It was just that we could not connect offensively."

The Tar Heels had a number of opportunities to end the game in overtime, including three combined shots by forwards Storey and Watson that went just above the goal.

N.C. State will face No. 1 Maryland on Friday, while UNC will have to wait until Monday to hear its NCAA Tournament fate.

"We lost in the ACC Tournament in the same year that we won the national title," Porter said. "It's a tough tournament to win, but we will bounce back."

"I'm not worried about that."

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