

# Dream Team deserves fan appreciation

There have been some unbelievable American story lines at this summer's Olympic Games.

Michael Phelps wowed the world with his charm, poise and grace en route to an unprecedented eight swimming medals.

Paul Hamm and Carly Patterson matched each other vault for vault in the gymnastics competition, giving the United States its first all-around sweep in Olympic history.

Mariel Zagunis provided a stunning victory in the women's individual sabre competition for the first American fencing gold medal in a century.

And the U.S. men's basketball team... OK, so the "Dream Team" hasn't exactly been so dreamy this time around.

After the team steamrolled its way through Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney, this go-round never seemed to get off on the right foot.

It began at the 2002 World Championships, when the American team of NBA stars finished a humiliating sixth, forcing the team to qualify last summer in Puerto Rico.

Then, the player refusals began. Citing injuries, personal issues or security fears, a seemingly endless list of household names withdrew from the games — Kobe Bryant, Jason Kidd and Tracy McGrady among them.

But few could have predicted that the team USA Basketball Committee Chairman Stu Jackson assembled would travel across the Atlantic and lose an exhibition to Italy — by 17 points.

Next came a couple of close exhibition victories before the trip down to Athens.

Two losses to Puerto Rico and Lithuania later, this once untouchable American unit now faces an uphill battle simply to medal, let alone hear "The Star-Spangled Banner" on Saturday night — which is one reason that this team is worth rooting for.

No longer a prohibitive favorite, there's now a reason to watch Team USA other than waiting for the next fast-break alley-oop. Head coach Larry Brown and his assistants, including North Carolina's Roy Williams, have their work cut out for them.

Now, the coaches' job is no longer is to put on a Harlem Globetrotters exhibition and give everyone playing time. It's to figure out how to help the team work cohesively as a unit, and it is worth rooting for this all-star coaching staff to finally succeed.



JACOB KARABELL FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

Another reason to root for this team is that, though the perception of selfishness abounds, Tim Duncan and Allen Iverson want to win.

They really want to win. The co-captains, also the team elders at 29 and 28, respectively, both have a tremendous drive to win the gold. Duncan brings the experience and confidence of two NBA championships, while Iverson, despite his much-maligned shortcomings, would kill to win a title.

And as for the rest of the players, these Olympics have created a challenge unlike any other they might ever face again.

It's worth rooting for this team to watch it attempt to overcome a greater adversity than the players ever envisioned when they accepted their invitations.

No one remembers a specific shot that Michael Jordan or Larry Bird took in the original Dream Team's 117-85 dismantling of Croatia in the 1992 gold medal game, but we would remember a Carmelo Anthony 3-pointer or a Stephon Marbury driving layup that gives Team USA a spot in the final.

This team has the opportunity to carve a place in Americans' hearts in response to all of the naysayers.

Try to root for this team — by Saturday, it might just be the story line of the Athens games that we'll all remember.

Contact Jacob Karabell at karabell@email.unc.edu.

## VOLLEYBALL PREVIEW

# Last year's woes fuel Tar Heels

BY MARY DUBY ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

For some teams, a 20-win season and a third-place finish in the ACC would be a noteworthy accomplishment.

But for the North Carolina volleyball team, those numbers serve only as a motivation to reclaim the NCAA Tournament bid that slipped through its fingers in 2003.

"Last year did not meet our expectations at all," said senior co-captain Katie Wright. "We're more so using that for fuel this year. We know what it's like to lose when we definitely shouldn't, and so having been in that position, I know it's ignited a fire."

That fire will be further fueled by the return of five of last year's six starters. Aside from Wright, the list includes fellow co-captain and outside hitter Molly Pyles, outside

hitter Dani Nyenhuis, defensive specialist Caroline deRoeck and setter Norma Cortez.

For the UNC team that gave up two matches to Virginia last season, which squandered the team's NCAA hopes, defense could be the key to returning to the spotlight.

DeRoeck will anchor the defense, but in a new role. In 2003, she led the team with 3.53 digs per game in the libero position. This season, Sagula plans to possibly utilize her at middle or right back.

"She's such a great athlete — we need her on the court," Sagula said. "I expect her to play defense in different positions."

DeRoeck, who was a hitter in high school, welcomes the opportunity to move around on the court.

"My whole thing is doing what I can for the team to help them win," she said. "If I can go out and

hit and be one of our top hitters, I'd love to do that."

Stepping in to fill deRoeck's role as libero will be junior Taylor Rayfield and senior Jayme Mitchell.

But the offensive trio to watch is Wright, Pyles and Nyenhuis.

Pyles and Nyenhuis could be the best combination of middle hitters in the ACC.

"They're going to be a factor whether they're front row or back row," Sagula said. "They're going to make people know who they are."

Wright averaged 0.98 blocks and 2.76 kills per game in 2003.

"She's one player when the team warms up that people will ooh and ah when she hits the ball," Sagula said. "I expect (Wright) to be one of the top three middle hitters in the ACC."

Behind these experienced veterans lies a core of underclassmen that

should make large contributions as the Tar Heels face a strong ACC conference, which includes powerhouses Georgia Tech and Maryland.

"As a coach, it's going to be a dilemma to find the court time for a number of these people, but as a coach, it's a good problem to have," Sagula said.

The role of starting setter is still a race between McKenzie Byrd and Cortez, who both exhibited strong play throughout the spring.

For now, the team is focusing on the first game against High Point Sept. 1, which Sagula hopes the team won't overlook even though UNC is expected to win.

"I hope to just come out and kill (High Point)," Wright said. "I'm excited to come out big."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

# Pyles strives to lead team by example

BY ANDY WALES STAFF WRITER

Molly Pyles is ready.

She thought the same thing a year ago, but she ended the season believing she had not fulfilled her potential as a team leader.

Despite leading the North Carolina volleyball team in kills with 405 and placing second on the team in digs with 375, Pyles felt she could do more.

Last season, the coaching staff gave Pyles an opportunity to help lead the team. She soon realized that she worked too hard.

"I was in that leadership position last year, and I took it extremely seriously," Pyles said.

"I spent a lot of time thinking about how I could do it," she said. "I spent a lot of energy on different facets of the game. I overdid it. Because of that, I lost my own game."

Pyles put much effort into taking care of her teammates on the court. But, toward the end of the season, the Tar Heels lost their consistency.

This season, though, she and Coach Joe Sagula believe that by her playing her own game, the team will enjoy more success.

"Last year, she was worrying

about helping everybody else," Sagula said. "Now, she realizes that by her playing at the highest level, she'll help the team more."

This season, Pyles will share the team captaincy with Katie Wright.

"You see them hitting hard and you want to do the exact same thing," fellow senior Caroline deRoeck said of the captains. "They're just very good role models."

At the top of her game, Pyles exhibits skills honed for most of her life.

Her two older sisters played volleyball at Furman and Wake Forest, so it seemed inevitable that she would play at the collegiate level. Pyles remembers watching her sisters play in college. They helped her learn the nuances of the game.

"They've had loads of advice and tips for me," she said. "My older sister took me out into the backyard when I was in fifth grade and taught me how to set. Little things like that give you a love for the game."

That family history molded Pyles into a great volleyball player.

Being six feet tall doesn't hurt either.

"(In high school) I hit the ball really hard and that was enough to win games and to get a lot of praise

from a lot of people," she said.

With three seasons of UNC volleyball behind her, Pyles is ready to show off all she can do. "I expect this season to be the fruit of all the work of the last three seasons," she said.

Sagula added: "Molly's a gamer... She has a good knack for the game."

"Now she's learned how to compete. She's always been a good volleyball player — now she's learned how to be a better player at a higher level."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

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