

North Carolina coach John Bunting received a two-year extension on his contract after his team finished the regular season 6-5. UNC made it to the post season, but lost to Boston College in the Continental Tire Bowl.

Bunting disproves doubters

BY DANIEL MALLOY
SPORTS EDITOR

As soon as the final whistle sounded, the North Carolina football team sprang into action.

Across Wallace Wade Stadium sat the object of the team's quest — the Victory Bell. All the Tar Heels rushed to claim the Bell, taken from their possession a year earlier by a pesky Duke squad. And they came armed with spray paint.

The Tar Heels painted the Bell powder blue on Nov. 20, just as they had painted the town blue all season, inspiring what had been an apathetic fanbase and earning support for much-maligned Coach John Bunting, who minutes later was toasting a contract extension.

Never has 6-6 looked so good. That record was far better than any prognosticator not wearing an N.C. on his shirt could have predicted, and the six victories included two of the most memorable wins in school history.

The Tar Heels started 2-2, but the wins against Division I-AA William & Mary and a mediocre Georgia Tech team were offset by embarrassing blowouts against Virginia and Louisville.

The Cardinals especially humiliated UNC, handing the Tar Heels

a 34-0 loss at Kenan Stadium that put Bunting's job in jeopardy.

But a last-second victory against hated rival N.C. State on Oct. 9 was a sign of things to come for the Tar Heels. Their defense, which had been woeful for much of the season, stopped Wolfpack running back T.A. McLendon on the one-yard line in the waning seconds to secure the win.

McLendon had seemingly scored on the previous play, but the points were taken off the scoreboard after the referees conferred and overruled the initial call, much to the delight of the home crowd.

Freshman defensive lineman Khalif Mitchell forced McLendon to fumble on the next play, preserving the 30-24 win.

"I wanted (McLendon) all night, and I didn't get a chance to hit him all night," Mitchell said. "And I was like, 'If I get my hands on him, I'm going to go get him.'"

But the Tar Heels were on the road to improvement, and the dramatic win proved to be only a stepping stone.

"(The players) are a very resilient group," Bunting said after the N.C. State game. "Are we the best football team? Are we even an average football team right now? Probably

not. But we certainly try hard, and we might get better. We might surprise some people."

UNC certainly surprised the college football world three weeks later when it humbled then-No. 4 Miami. Freshman Connor Barth's game-winning field goal soared through goalposts that fell seconds later as the jubilant crowd stormed the field.

The surprise win was the result of a North Carolina team that refused to be intimidated from the opening kickoff. On the first series of the game, quarterback Darian Durant delivered a strike to wide receiver Mike Mason, who out-lept Miami's All-American cornerback Antrel Rolle for a touchdown.

"Our guys are as equally or better than their guys, bottom line," said sophomore wide receiver Jesse Holley. "We had to come out there and show them, 'We're not afraid of you.'"

And though the season ended with a disappointing loss to Boston College in the Continental Tire Bowl, the fact that UNC was still playing at the end of December was a victory in itself.

And a victory for Bunting.

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

Latta leads Tar Heels to ACC Championship

Season ends just shy of Final Four

BY DEREK HOWLES
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

Apparently, there's a pretty simple recipe for college basketball success, and the North Carolina women's team followed it this season.

The Tar Heels started with a devastating pressure defense good enough to hold their opponents to a paltry 59.0 points per game.

Then they sprinkled in a bunch of talented, athletic players such as forwards Erlana Larkins, Camille Little and Nikita Bell.

Finally, they employed a blistering fast break that helped them outscore their opponents by 20-plus points a game — second-best in the nation.

"(We focus on) intensity ... pushing it up the floor (and) keeping the tempo," said Coach Sylvia Hatchell.

But in order to get the recipe just right, UNC used the one ingredient no other team had: a whole lotta Latta.

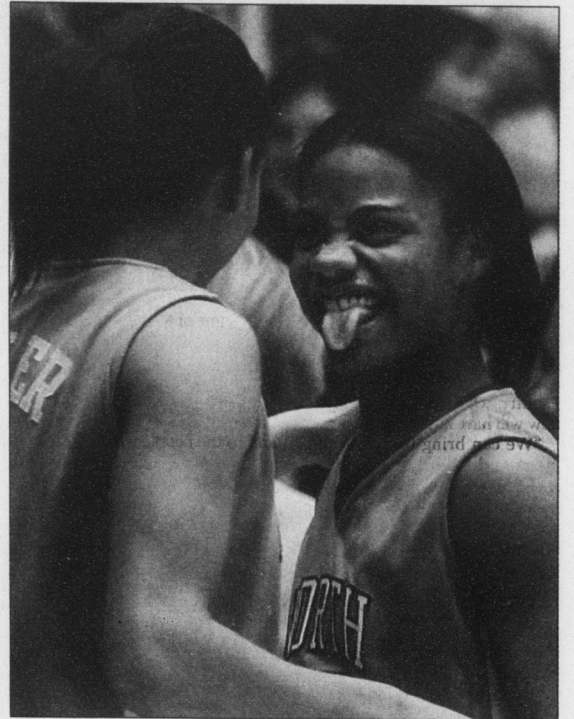
More than anything else, Ivory Latta, the sophomore point guard — who at 5-foot-6 looks like she wouldn't be allowed to ride some roller coasters, let alone direct an elite college basketball team — was instrumental to the Tar Heels' success.

She jumped in passing lanes. She racked up assists, many of the spectacular variety. She canned 86 percent of her free throws and almost 40 percent of her 3-point attempts. And most importantly, she ran. Fast.

Latta's unparalleled ability to spearhead the fast break was probably the biggest asset in a season that saw UNC climb to No. 2 in the national polls.

"I haven't seen anybody better," said Coppin State head coach Derek Brown. "She's a great 3-point shooter, a great passer — she's just one heck of a player."

And the Tar Heels (30-4, 12-2 in the ACC) had one heck of a season, winning both the conference regular season and tournament titles and going 3-for-3 against arch-



North Carolina point guard Ivory Latta was the team's spark all season, leading the Tar Heel fast break and firing away from 3-point range.

rival Duke.

Glimpses of the juggernaut that UNC became were evident in only the second game of the year, when the Tar Heels defeated Connecticut 71-65 in the Jimmy V Classic in Raleigh.

"(UConn head coach Geno Auriemma) told me that two years ago, three of the four teams in this tournament went to the Final Four," Hatchell said.

Four months later, the Tar Heels almost made it there themselves.

Playing in the Smith Center, top-seeded UNC pummeled Coppin State 97-62 and George Washington 71-47 to advance to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament.

Next up was No. 5 Arizona State on its home floor in Tempe, and despite an overwhelmingly hostile

crowd, UNC managed to pull out a hard-fought 79-72 victory thanks in part to solid defensive pressure.

Said Duke head coach Gail Goetsenkos earlier in the season: "They get in passing lanes, they get all over you, they pressure you (and) they anticipate very well."

That's as far as UNC got, though, falling to eventual champion Baylor 72-63 in its next game to miss the Final Four.

But UNC has the potential to be even more successful next season. The team returns everybody who played significant minutes except for Bell and guard Leah Metcalf.

The recipe won't change in 2005-06, but the result could be even better.

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

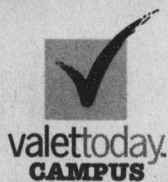
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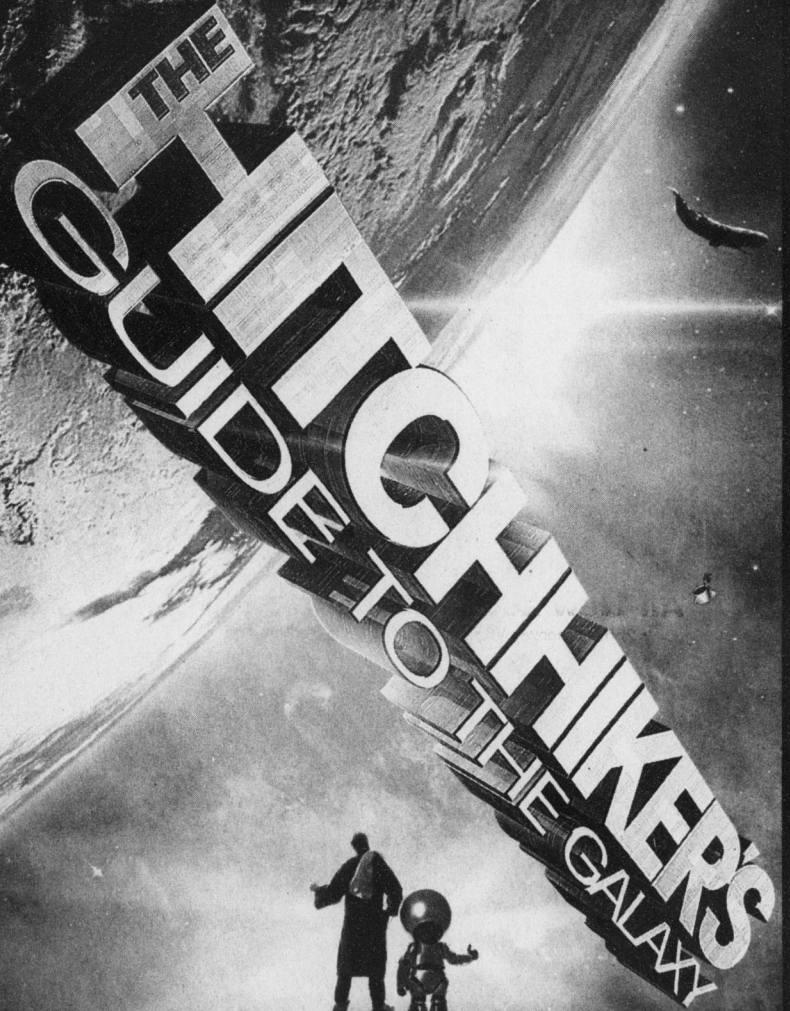
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