

Youthful Tar Heels aim to mature quickly

Women's tennis highly ranked

BY JOE MCLEAN
STAFF WRITER

Last year, the North Carolina women's tennis team saw the doubles phenomenon of Sara Anundsen and Jenna Long win the school's first NCAA championship. Now that pair has graduated, leaving behind a team deep in talent but lacking senior on-the-court leadership.

Three of the top four singles spots have been filled by underclassmen this year for No. 14 UNC, but even though the team is young, it still has plenty of experience.

UNC (6-2) began its spring season Jan. 18 with a doubleheader sweep of UNC-Greensboro and Elon, and the Tar Heels' only two losses have been against ranked opponents.

The squad fell 4-3 at No. 22 Tennessee on Jan. 21 and lost 4-0 against No. 3 Northwestern in the ITA Nationals on Feb. 9.

Sophomores Katrina Tsang and Sanaz Marand top off the roster as virtually interchangeable top-tier singles players for UNC.

"We have two No. 1 players with (Tsang) and Sanaz," coach Brian Kalbas said. "And they're both playing at a really high level, so we feel that they can (win) on any given day against any team."

Marand, who is ranked No. 14 nationally in singles play, looks to pick up right where she left off in a stellar freshman season. She's been successful thus far, knocking off last year's NCAA singles runner-up, USC's Lindsey Nelson on Feb. 9.

Pair her with junior Sophie Grabski, and you've got the No. 8 doubles team in the country — and a duo that has the capability to follow in Anundsen and Long's footsteps.

Tsang underwent hip surgery in the spring of 2007 and had to miss the entire fall season of individual matches, which cast some doubts on how she would play in January. But last month her first action since last year's NCAA tournaments showed there was no reason for Kalbas to worry.

Despite not playing tennis for more than six months, Tsang was able to reach the finals of the 2008 Freeman Memorial Tennis

Women's tennis

Key players:

- Sophomore Sanaz Marand
- Freshman Jelena Durisic
- Sophomore Katrina Tsang

Key matches:

- Feb. 17 vs. Florida
- Feb. 24 vs. Notre Dame
- April 13 at Virginia Tech

Championships in Las Vegas in her first event back from surgery.

"I wanted to get matches," she said Jan. 18 of her tournament play. "That was purely what I went out there for, and I definitely got as much tennis as I could. It was really, really exciting being out there — it's Vegas."

The biggest addition to the Tar Heels' roster this year has been 6-foot-2-inch freshman Jelena Durisic, who began spring competing in the No. 4 singles spot. Durisic has an intimidating and powerful style — though that hasn't prevented the newcomer from being taken aback by the pressure of team play.

"I'm still not used to the whole match phase, because in the fall we played all on our own," Durisic said Feb. 3.

The Tar Heels fill out their lineup with three juniors — Austin Smith at No. 3, Laura Reichert at No. 5 and Meg Fanjoy at the No. 6 spot.

And as the nature of team tennis matches is such that any one of the singles players could be the difference between winning and losing, UNC is fortunate to have experience and depth along with its young talent.

UNC faces early struggles

Men's team drops two, falls in polls

BY JORDAN MASON
STAFF WRITER

It was April 11 before an upstart Tar Heel tennis team full of youth lost its first regular season match last year.

That start, and a spirited run to the championship match of the ACC Tournament, propelled the Tar Heels to the No. 10 spot in the preseason Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) rankings this time around.

But all that seems like ages ago, as the team already has lost its last two matches and its No. 10 ITA ranking.

But it is hard to imagine UNC missing its lofty ranking. As far as the team was concerned, it never existed in the first place.

"We're not the No. 10 team in the nation — we've told our team that," coach Sam Paul said Feb. 3 after a loss to Rice. "Our preseason ranking right now is based off of what we accomplished last year."

"We have a brand new team — we don't care. We're not even looking there."

But despite early season losses to Rice and Ohio State, the Tar Heels still are capable of living up to the expectations they created for themselves last year.

The team is still virtually the same squad that was runner-up only to then-No. 2 Virginia in the ACC last year, as UNC returns all but one player from 2007.

That includes sophomore Chris Kearney and junior Taylor Fogleman who together make up one of the best doubles teams in the nation. But that tandem was not even the Tar Heels' No. 1 doubles team from a year ago.

"I wouldn't have any problem interchanging Lenny (Gullan) and David (Stone) and Stefan (Hardy) and Clay (Donato) at one," Fogleman said. "That's why I

think that once we get everything together, our doubles are going to be a really big asset for us."

And Kearney and Fogleman, along with the sophomore Hardy and senior Benjamin Carlotti, make up four of the Tar Heels' top six singles players from last year as well. The senior Stone and sophomore Donato have filled out the rest of the top six this year.

But as UNC learned against Rice and later at OSU, their success from last year can serve as great motivation for opposing teams.

"We're starting to get to be one of those programs that people get up for," Fogleman said. "(Rice didn't) even need anymore motivation than what we did to them last year."

The Owls were one of the Tar Heels' victims in their 20-0 start last season and formed a mosh pit on the first court after clinching their win Feb. 3.

But that is life for this team — no longer are the Tar Heels upstarts.

Men's tennis

Key players:

- Senior Benjamin Carlotti
- Sophomore Chris Kearney
- Sophomore Stefan Hardy

Key players:

- March 18 vs. Wake Forest
- April 4 vs. Virginia
- April 9 at Duke

Instead, every loss will be questioned.

But the Tar Heels are not panicking. Rather, the team is staying its course and trying to improve in every aspect of the game.

"We've all got strengths and weaknesses," Hardy said. "The goal of playing tennis is to hit your strengths into somebody else's weaknesses."

"That's what we've got to do."

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