

PETER GAMMONS

Does Miller Have ESP?

Four years ago I was one of two thousand people who crammed tiny Woolen Gym to see a high school senior scrimmage with the UNC freshman team.

A year later that same player was the star of the freshman team, and the name Larry Miller was a campus institution. He was then very shy and talked about graduate school, Jerry West and the future of North Carolina basketball.

Over a couple of beers late in May of that year he promised me UNC would win the national championship his senior year.

"Well, we're almost there now," said Miller Wednesday, "and there are only two games left. I didn't lie to you."

"I'm confident we'll do it, for we have the best team and the extra desire that last year's humiliation gave us. I'm not nervous at all, I guess because I've been through it all. If anyone else is nervous I haven't noticed it. There'll be no repeat of 1967."

The All-American refuses to look past Ohio State, because "they're a rugged team who by the fact they beat Kentucky in Lexington has to be good." But he is definitely hoping UCLA can beat Houston. "I'm sure we can beat UCLA because man-to-man we can match them, and Alcindor can be neutralized. But Hayes is tough, unquestionably the best around, and they're a tough team."

Although he doesn't know whom he'd be matched against in a game with the Bruins, it doesn't matter at all. As far as the possibility of a stall is concerned, he just shrugs it off. "We'll just play to win, whatever that entails."

"But I'm not so sure they'll get by Friday night. At Houston I thought for sure they'd win, but I don't know now. Houston is mighty good, and Hayes isn't even the center. That Spain is a horse, and the rest of them really move."

Miller is a lot different from that high school player from Catasauqua with his hair in a Chicago boxcar. He's no longer shy or awed by any Jerry West. He's confident, and knows this is the end of a great career, and he's going to do everything he can to go out a winner. It doesn't matter to him that professional scouts

are hovering around and there might be a possibility that he could use the two leagues to an advantage.

"After Saturday night I'll start to think about things like that, but not until then. This is it for me, and I can't think about anything else."

As good as the rest of the team is, Miller is the man the other players have looked to all season, and it will be no different tonight and tomorrow. He is the man that coach John Lotz calls a "born leader," the guy who a couple of times this year has made halftime speeches. If Houston or UCLA has an advantage his superiority will have to neutralize it,

and if anyone starts to get worried it is he who must make the big play.

It is fortunate he has such confidence. "I learned my lesson last year," he notes, "and this time the experience will keep me from thinking my way out of playing well."

I hope we win as much as anyone in Chapel Hill. But in Los Angeles Larry Miller wants to win more than anyone, and the fact that he cried after last year's losses in the finals testifies to that fact. Whether or not he does finish out one of the greatest careers in ACC history as a winner he will go out with class, because he IS CLASS.

It's been a long journey from Catasauqua to Los Angeles, and if he's right, I'll buy the beers in 1968.

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