

Carolina's prescription for baseball; winning

By **DAVE KIRK**
Staff Writer

Winning is a remarkable cure for most any illness. It remedies sick hitting, nagging injuries, and hard feelings between players and coaches. In short, winning baseball games leaves everybody happy.

This summer, Carolina has been playing with such a winning intensity that its players approach each game loosely confident that they will come out on top. It is, at times, amazing how the Heels have pulled off some of the wins, and at their current pace, Carolina will break the Summer League record for best percentage.

A game early this season indicated that the Heels would not be easily disposed of. Trailing by three runs with one out in the bottom of the ninth inning against UNC-Wilmington, rightfielder Greg Robinson hit a three-run homer that sent the game into extra innings, where Mike Fox won it with a two-out double. The game provided the impetus for a winning streak that carried the Heels into first place by midseason.

Twice the Heels have managed to hold off late rallies and win games in extra innings. In an important game with East Carolina, UNC blew a 12-2 lead with the Pirates tying the game in the ninth. Carolina came right back in the tenth with singles by Jim Atkinson, Kevin Caddell, and P.J. Gay to win the game, 13-12.

In a recent game at Campbell, Carolina

allowed the Camels to tie the game in the ninth on a few hits and an error. Yet, pitcher Matt Wilson and the Heels lasted until the tenth inning when they scored two runs and extended their winning streak to eleven games.

The Carolina baseball team has a unique blend of personalities that complement one another. There are those who treat each game with reverence, as if the World Series were at stake. Others spend the pre-game period casually warming up and speaking with fans. And there certainly are some unusual fans.

At Louisburg, for instance, there is an elderly man called, "Hub" who spends the entire game yelling at the opposing players in a coarse, sandy voice. He comes to life whenever Carolina is in town and encourages his Fighting Hurricanes to "beat the boys from over the Hill."

Hub teams with another loyal fan who sits next to the visitor's dugout in a lawn chair and sends a constant stream of barbs to third base coaches. In a recent UNC-Louisburg game, the Tar Heels exploded for eight runs in the eighth inning and seven in the ninth, whereupon the man threw down his chair, apologized to the crowd, and stomped off the field disgustedly. He has yet to return.

At East Carolina, the fans refer to UNC and "Chapel Hill College" and constantly remind the Tar Heel players that they have backed off the football contract, although they have nothing to do with it.

In Wilson, home of Atlantic Christian College, one man attends the games for no other reason than giving the umpire constant grief, questioning his ability to judge strikes with such verbal lashings as, "If you had one more eye, you'd be a cyclops," or "You're missing a great game ump, you oughtta watch it." This goes on for the entire game.

Driving to these games has had its moments also. The team travels in two vans and only one has air conditioning. While in Greenville for a game against ECU, players shed as much as was possible (and legal), in order to tolerate the 105° weather and still look as if they had already played in a game before they put on their uniforms.

Each trip to Wilson includes a pre-game feast at Parker's Barbeque, where the team devours a great deal of fried chicken, slaw, Brunswick stew, potatoes, tea, and of course barbeque. To put it mildly, play is somewhat sluggish and benchwarmers and coaches accept the consequences of the meal as just a part of the game. Somewhere around the fourth inning, Carolina stops playing in slow motion and pushes across enough runs to win the game, but it's not easy.

The ride home provides a final release of any tension among players. Activities vary from "mooning" to championship wrestling to mind games. Recently, assistant coaches Bobby Guthrie and Randy Warrick, who

have led the team on most road trips, hold an imaginary call-in talk show for interested listeners. The not-so-industrious usually just fall asleep.

Road trips allow the team to appreciate the friendly atmosphere of Boshamer Stadium. It is difficult to play inspired baseball before twenty fans at UNC-W when as many as 1500 have attended some games in Chapel Hill. Home crowds are very appreciative of good hustle, hard hitting, and cold beer. Young children flock around the dugout and bullpen, while men and women of all ages dot the hill and stadium observing the game in a relaxed, good-natured mood. The overpowering feeling one gets while watching a Summer League game is that everyone is having fun.

Perhaps players like Jim Atkinson and Blaine Smith typify this atmosphere. Atkinson, who plays shortstop, is hitting well over .400, has blasted some towering home runs, and is finding it very easy to smile. Similarly, Smith is in a good mood this time of year with a 7-0 pitching record. Over two years of Summer League ball, he has yet to lose a game and has run his total to 13-0. The entire team has contributed in some manner and it seems that whoever head coach Mike Roberts, Warrick, or Guthrie put in the lineup, picks the team up and maintains the winning formula.

Smith

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second home for them. In later years, he gave out free movie passes to all Carolina athletes. The NCAA has since made gestures of kindness like those illegal. However, Smith did provide luncheons for the coaches and staff of the football teams before every season. Champagne was served with the meal.

"He was certainly an avid fan. He was a man who had a great deal of pride locally," Williamson said.

"Carrington" will be missed by those he inspired with his presence. To be sure, the spirit that kept him in Carolina's corner in even the hardest of times will live on.

—SKIP FOREMAN

Statistics

Carolina Batting

	AB	H	AVG.
Atkinson	105	44	.419
Robinson	86	28	.326
Gay	75	25	.333
Fox	117	36	.308
Lloyd	86	22	.256
Lowry	95	22	.232
Griffith	94	20	.186
Caddell	102	19	.186

Carolina Pitching

	W	L	ERA
Johnson	0	0	1.08
Greg Norris	4	2	1.87
Kirk	1	0	2.12
Smith	7	0	2.29
Wilson	5	0	3.41
DeRatt	4	0	3.75
Brewer	2	1	5.12
TOTALS:	AB—916;	H—259;	HR—19;
	RBI—169;	AVG.—.282;	IP—236;
	ERA—	2.78	



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