

Kings sprains ankle in workouts

Clemson barrier to UNC cross country title hopes



Gary Hofstetter, Dave Drechsel and Ralph King prepare for the Atlantic Coast Conference cross country championships at 11 a.m. Saturday at Finley Golf Course. Staff photo by Fred Barbour.

By SKIP FOREMAN
Staff Writer

Clemson holds the key to Carolina's success in cross country as well as football this Saturday, but a bigger problem has arisen for Coach Bill Lam's harriers.

The Tar Heels enter the ACC cross country championships with Ralph King at about half strength. King sprained an ankle in workout during the week, but will run in the meet anyway, according to Lam.

The consensus among Carolina team members is that Clemson is the major obstacle to the title, only because it has not run against the Tigers this season. Clemson was replaced on the schedule by the Tennessee Invitational.

Despite Lam's worries, and those of the rest of the cross country team, Clemson coach Sam Colson doesn't see his team as a factor in the championship. He says his team is not well physically.

"I don't necessarily think that's correct," Colson said in evaluating the Tar Heels appraisal. "We've got a good team, but we've got a few guys who are sick and may not run this week." Colson pointed to top performers Dave Geer and George Vogel, both suffering from viral infections which may keep them from running this weekend.

"I don't know where we'll be health-wise Saturday, but if we had to run today (Wednesday), we'd be in bad shape," Colson said.

Colson's ace in the hole is freshman runner Scott Haack, who took first place honors in the South Carolina State Championships. Colson said Haack has the talent to become a national-class runner, but he wasn't going to ask Haack to run all out and burn himself out for the rest of his college career.

Lam said he thinks Colson is either holding back or bluffing. Whatever Lam said, he is worried, and with due cause. As for the rest of the conference, only Maryland and Duke command his attention.

"I haven't seen what Maryland's done since we ran them. If they're not any better than earlier in the year, I won't worry."

Lam said he hopes no team like Wake or State will come from nowhere and make a challenge, but he admits openly that he is worried about the Tigers.

Maryland's domination of the ACC cross country scene appears at an end. The Heels took care of the Terps in October with little trouble. Carolina also whipped Virginia in a tri-meet with N.C. State in their first meet of the year.

Duke usually depends on Robbie Perkins as its key performer in big races. Perkins has been absent for most of the season and is questionable for the ACC championships. Duke will place its hopes on the shoulders of Bynum Merritt who took seventh in an October meet with Carolina.

Carolina's only performance in which it finished worse than first was the Tennessee Invitational Meet, which featured former NCAA champion Tennessee, perennial power Kentucky and other top competitors from the Southeastern Conference. The Tar Heels placed third in Knoxville, but were not really upset by the finish.

After whipping the Blue Devils, the Tar Heels glided through the North Carolina State Championships with the leadership of King and Hofstetter. Their nearest competitor was N.C. State.

Now comes the championship the cross country team has been waiting for. Lam admitted that his team was taking it easy through the State Championships in order to prepare for the ACC meet. Hofstetter said this has been an easy week.

"It's been a rest we've needed," Hofstetter said. "I think Coach Lam has planned it well."

Hofstetter said that if he and King can hold their places at the front of the pack, and the other five Carolina runners can stay as close to the front as possible, there will be no problems in winning the title.

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