

Wrestlers missing starters as season opens Friday

By KEITH JONES
Staff Writer

After finishing a close second to Virginia in the ACC last year, things looked bright for Coach Bill Lam and his wrestling team in 1977-78. With the loss of only one senior to graduation, ACC champ Scott Conkwright, Lam's host of young talent looked extremely promising for the upcoming season. However, as in the past, key injuries plague the squad as it prepares for its first competition of the year this weekend in the Monarch Open Tournament in Norfolk, Va.

The first big blow came to Dave Casale, a 177-pound junior, (sophomore in eligibility). He will not wrestle again because of a knee injury. He injured his knee last year and was red-shirted. After undergoing a second operation on his knee this summer, doctors saw no way the ligaments in his knee would be strong enough for competition. In his freshman year, the only year he did compete, he won the conference championship at 190 pounds.

At 167 pounds another key starter is out for the year. Dean Brior, a conference runner-up last year (losing in the finals 10-9) played a big part in the team's success but is on the bench this season with back problems.

Also lost to the Tar Heels will be another conference champion, Chris Conkwright. He decided in the off-season to transfer to Virginia Tech.

Lam appears to have lost the backbone of his team from the starting lineup. Two already had proved themselves champions and every indication last year was that Brior was on his way to a title. But an experienced lineup of wrestlers will return this year and is expected to step in to fill the gaps.

The starting unit includes:

118 pounds — Rocky Wing, junior. He's seen some action as a varsity athlete behind Scott Conkwright. Lam looks for improvement from him during the year. Freshman Bob Monaghan will back him up.

126 pounds — C. D. Mock, freshman. Mock probably is the top recruit on the squad. He is a high school All-America from Pennsylvania.

134 pounds — Tim Reaume, senior. Reaume missed some action last season with a shoulder injury. Before that, he was conference champ.

142 pounds — Dave Juergens, junior. Finishing third in the conference last year, Lam expects improvement from Juergens. He has shown flashes of fine wrestling but needs more consistency. He, too, has been nagged by injuries.

150 pounds — Jeff Reintgen, senior. Reintgen probably is the top wrestler on the squad. Compiling a 28-2 record last year, his only two losses were to national place winners.

158 pounds — junior Mike Benzel or sophomore Carter Mario. Benzel spent most of last year wrestling first team, finishing third in the conference tourney. He has started for the team since he came here as a freshman, but younger Mario may get a chance.

167 pounds — Clayton Barnard, senior transfer. He is filling the void left by Brior. He's a two-time Division III All-American and should prove to be a big help in filling in.

177 pounds — Norman Walker, sophomore. Walker was the most highly rated freshman on the squad last year, finishing as a conference runnerup at 190 pounds.

190 pounds — Carl Hoffman, senior. Hoffman did not wrestle last year because he was working to get himself back

into school. Before he left, he earned an ACC championship at 167 pounds and was one of the team's top wrestlers. If he can work himself back into shape, his addition will be a big factor in making up for the injuries.

Heavyweight — Jody Truesdale, freshman. Lam always has had trouble with his heavyweights, but things should improve with the recruitment of this two-time South Carolina state champ. Another possibility is the return of football player Dee Hardison, but Lam is not sure how the pro football draft will affect his status.

ACC competition has improved greatly over the past few years. Clemson has a new coach — former three-time national champ Wade Schalles — and he used 11 scholarships this past spring to strengthen his squad. Virginia, which won the championship last year, will again be strong this year. Lam said State, which was tough last season, will be even tougher this year, and Maryland always has a good squad. It will not be easy for the Heels to improve their second-place finish last year.

"We were undefeated in the conference last year," Lam said, "but we lost to UVa in the tournament. We'll certainly be in contention again this year, but any outcome is very hard to predict. We just hope to be well and ready to go at all times."

Lam isn't too concerned about his team's performance in the Monarch Open this weekend.

"This tournament is just to help break the ice for a few people. It's more or less a warm-up. We're there to get some competition under our belts. Our real season begins next weekend when we have our Carolina Invitational," he said.

The Carolina Invitational is Nov. 18 and 19 in Chapel Hill.

Injuries force Dave Casale to bench—for life

By LEE PACE
Assistant Sports Editor

He's spent a lot of time this fall sitting atop Kenan Stadium, thinking, gazing at the sky, remembering. He enjoys getting away by himself occasionally. He has to get away by himself. It helps ease the pain.

He remembers the day he signed a wrestling scholarship with the University of North Carolina, how proud his parents were of his accomplishments and how pleased he was to have the chance to elevate his wrestling career.

He remembers the night two years ago that he won the Atlantic Coast Conference wrestling championship at 190 pounds, and the bear hug that friend and teammate Dee Hardison "damn near killed me" with after the champ galloped off the mats.

He thinks of all the time, pain and sweat he's invested over the years in striving for athletic excellence. He wonders if all the sacrifice has been worth it. But he still cherishes his past; it satisfies his psyche to remember it.

But it also hurts to reminisce — he knows that the memories he now harbors about a sport he's worshiped for 13 years are the only real ones he'll ever have. The doctors told Dave Casale the afternoon of Sept. 15 that he'd never wrestle again.

The wrestling career of David Paul Casale began modestly enough in 1964. His older brother needed a sparring partner and his father wanted Dave to be able to protect himself on the streets of suburban Pittsburgh.

"It was a pretty rough neighborhood," Casale says. "It was a middle class neighborhood, but there were a lot of tough asses running around. Everybody had their own group they ran around with. They weren't exactly street gangs — they had a little more class than that — but they were still gangs. My father wanted me to be able to handle myself."

He studied and practiced the sport through grade school, junior and senior high. He finished third in the state once, second twice. He also played football and impressed a number of college scouts with his performance at linebacker. Johnny Majors wanted him at Pitt, Joe Paterno wanted him at Penn State. But he preferred the one-on-one challenge of wrestling.

"Wrestling is much more rewarding. It's just you against one other guy. In football there are 10 other guys with you. If you screw up, you hope one of your buddies makes up for it. In wrestling you can't afford to make a mistake. There's no one else to help you," he

said.

Besides, football is a dangerous sport. "I thought I'd get hurt playing football."

Problems began for Dave Casale the summer of '75, several weeks before he entered UNC.

Wrestling in a summer tournament up north, an opponent drove his head into Casale's right knee. The knee was placed in a cast, and doctors in Chapel Hill diagnosed the injury as torn cartilage. Since injured cartilage can't get any worse, Casale lifted weights and ran to rebuild his strength, waiting until spring for corrective surgery.

He had an outstanding freshman season, winning the ACC title. His future was bright. But surgery in April that year revealed it wasn't damaged cartilage after all. The much more serious injury was to ligaments.

"I then worked all summer to get the knee back in shape," Casale said. "It was strong at the beginning of my sophomore year. I was wrestling the best of my college career — much better than my freshman year."

But in an early season tournament last December, he felt his ankle frozen with pain. Thinking it was merely a sprain, he finished the remaining 45 seconds of the match. The diagnosis indicated a fracture, and the ankle was put in a cast. But when it hadn't healed three weeks later, further examination showed a torn tendon.

"With the tendon torn, I couldn't wrestle, so I asked to be red-shirted," Casale said. "I sat out the year, had the tendon fixed and the bone chip removed."

He hobbled around last spring with a cast on his left ankle. He noticed some pain and

swelling in his bad knee, but thought it was merely a result of compensating for his ankle.

"It wasn't all that bad, it just sort of bugged me. The knee didn't bother me at all until they put the cast on my ankle. They examined it and found that I had torn cartilage. I honestly don't know when I tore it. It might have happened during the season, maybe before. I really don't know."

The knee was operated on again three months ago. That's when Casale realized he might never wrestle again.

"After the second knee operation I kind of prepared myself. After a while you know your body's getting old, and mine was getting old as far as injuries and wrestling went. But I wouldn't give it up until the doctors said so. They had to tell me I couldn't wrestle anymore."

It took several days for Casale to get over the initial shock. Normally easy-going, friendly and happy, he kept to himself for several days, saying little to anyone.

"At first I felt cheated. I've always felt I had a God-given gift, a talent that I enjoy doing. I've spent my entire life training for it. You can't imagine how much it hurts to have something like that pulled from underneath you — at no fault of your own or of anybody's. It was unavoidable; it was just bad luck."

"Now I'm just thankful I had the chance to compete. I'll cherish it for as long as I live. Wrestling's been important to me up to this point. Now my life will just have to take a different direction. I'm not sure just what direction, though."

"A lot of people have things they love taken away. You can't feel sorry for yourself."

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I've accepted it. It'll hurt at times. Wrestling was important to me, but it wasn't that important. There are better things in life than college athletics."

Casale still has his scholarship. He'll still be associated with the UNC wrestling program as a part-time assistant to Bill Lam. He's still in school and hopes to make up some of the times he's lost the last two years in his industrial relations studies.

"I've got loads of time on my hands. So much I don't know what to do with it exactly."

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