

By WILL WILSON
Staff Writer

With three games most weeks during the season and practice nearly every day since October, UNC women basketball players seldom get to visit the folks back home. That's why this weekend will be a little special for Joan Leggett, Fran Hardison and Jackie Allison.

The Tar Heels play at 7 p.m. Saturday in East Carolina's Minges Coliseum. And while Greenville is still approximately 25 miles from the players' various hometowns, it's much closer that they come at any other place they play.

But besides the reunions, the trio of reserves and their teammates will face a more important game than they are accustomed to on their annual trek down East.

The Pirates have their strongest team since seniors Leggett and Allison and junior Hardison were in high school. They've been in second place in the North Carolina AIAW Division I standings since Christmas.

However, the Tar Heels, with four straight divisional wins, including a 72-64 win over ECU two weeks ago in Chapel Hill, have tightened the race for the runnerup spot behind N.C. State enough so that this game should decide it.

If history means anything, all the relatives and friends of the UNC players should see a close game. Last year in Greenville, the Pirates survived five UNC shots in the final 25 seconds to win by one point. Three years ago, when Allison and Leggett were freshmen, Carolina pulled out a triple-overtime thriller.

Leggett, a 5-foot-11 Pinetown native, missed the last UNC shot as time ran out last season. But if ECU coach Catherine Bolton had had her way, Leggett would have been happy with the outcome — she would have been a Pirate.

"I graduated the year before scholarships were available," Leggett says. "She (Bolton) all but promised me some aid for when it became available."

Bolton didn't get Leggett, but she did get April Ross, a teammate from Bath High, a year later. Ross started in the game at Chapel Hill two weeks ago, while Leggett, the UNC captain, is playing less this year than any since she's been here.

"It's kind of bad for me seeing her play," Leggett said.

Ross was not Leggett's only schoolmate who chose East Carolina.

"Everybody I knew went down there," she says. "Yeah," they come to the games. They cheer for me and East Carolina."

Hardison, a 5-foot-9 forward, played for Williamston High, which met Leggett's Bath squad in regional play.

"It's a little special because there's a little more people there that know me than usual," she says. "A whole lot of them (classmates now at ECU) come out. Last year, my high school basketball team came."

Hardison says she doesn't get kidded about losing to ECU when she goes home after the season.

"I think people realize that I take it seriously enough," she says. "It's not like football, since by the summer no one's thinking about it."

Allison, a 5-foot-7 forward from Kinston, is playing at ECU for just the second time, since she didn't make the varsity squad the past two seasons.

"My mother comes up here a lot," she says, "but for the rest of my folks, it's the only time they get to see me play."

Allison, like Leggett, almost attended East Carolina.

Homecoming for Leggett, Allison and Hardison



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— Joan Leggett

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