

after four years

Often, more times than he'd like to think about, Ford has gotten the job done despite pain. He now is playing with a sprained left wrist. Before this season, there was that night in the East Regionals against Notre Dame when his arm was caught in the impossible place between two players and hyperextended his elbow. He was crippled against Alabama in NCAA regional play his sophomore year and helped the United States to a gold medal in the 1976 Olympics on a broken ankle.

"I could've helped the team a lot more if I hadn't been hurt," he says. "But people are going to get hurt. If you play hard, sometimes you might get hurt. But I don't feel like I was cheated."

Ford measures his success at Carolina more than merely the number of points or assists he's added to the record book.

"The things I've learned at Carolina are the kind of things that will help me all my life," he says. "I'm not talking about just the comradery among us guys on the basketball team but the things I've noticed just by walking down Franklin Street, just by going to classes and meeting different people. Carolina was everything I thought it was going to be, even though I set some pretty high expectations when I came here. I'm going to be so sad to leave."

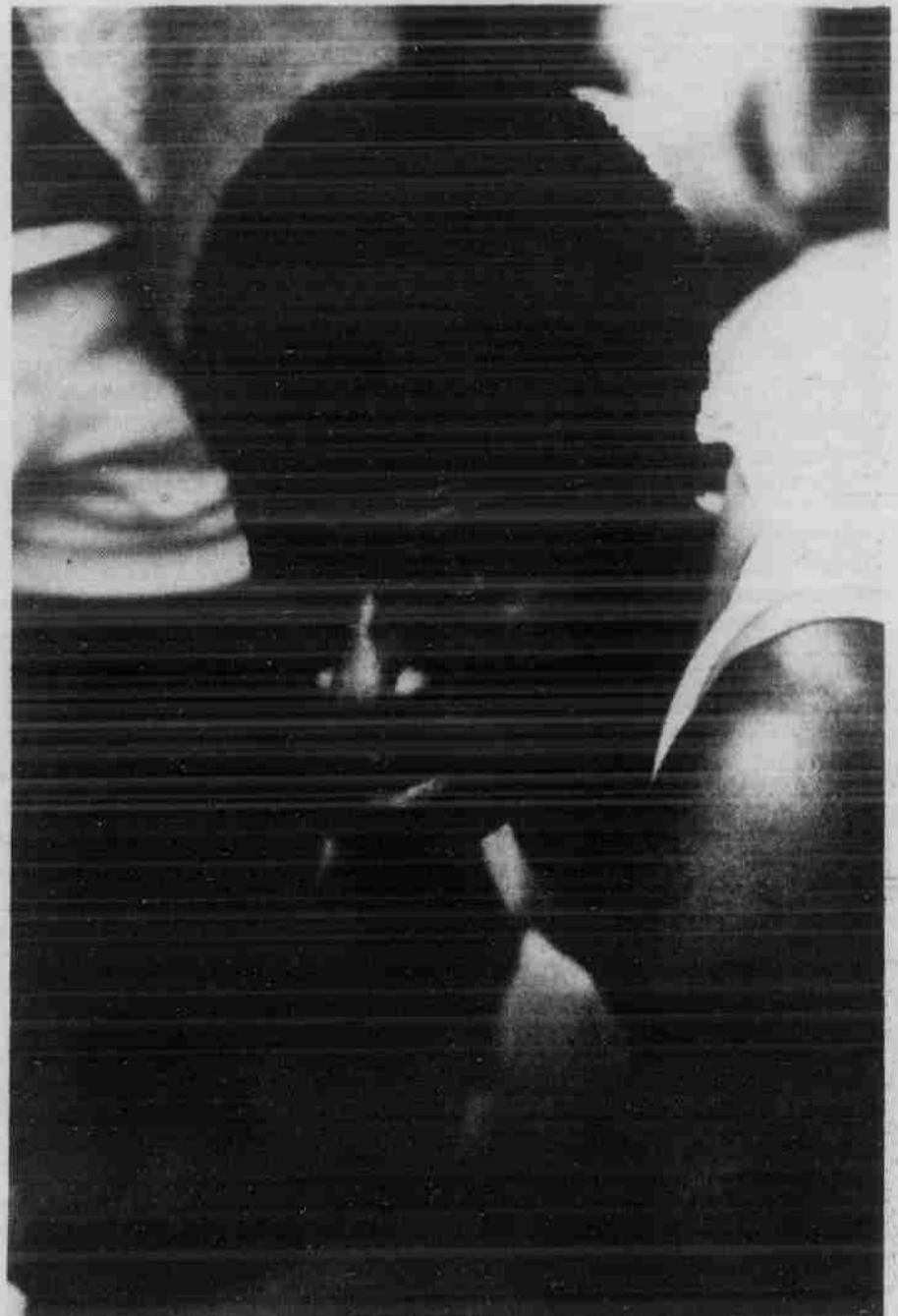
"I can't believe I'm playing my last home game."

Phil Ford now eyes the future. He doesn't like to talk about professional basketball because he says he still has a job to do at Carolina, but adds that if he said he didn't ever think about pro ball, he'd be lying. Thoughts tumble through his mind about how he doesn't want to coach, because he doesn't think he could sit still on the bench and watch other people play the game.

He talks a lot like the high school

senior did, saying he hopes he can follow in the successful footsteps of other pro rookies from Carolina who he played with, Walter Davis, Tom LaGarde, John Kuester and Mitch Kupchak. He continues to talk modestly about a professional future that sparkles with brilliance.

"I just hope I'm able to do the job," he says, echoing the thoughts of a cautious Phil Ford four years ago, when he was on the brink of his collegiate career.



Staff photo by Billy Newman

Ford listens to Coach Smith during a timeout.

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