

From effigy to ecstasy

They once hung a Dean Smith doll from a tree. Now it sits on a pedestal.



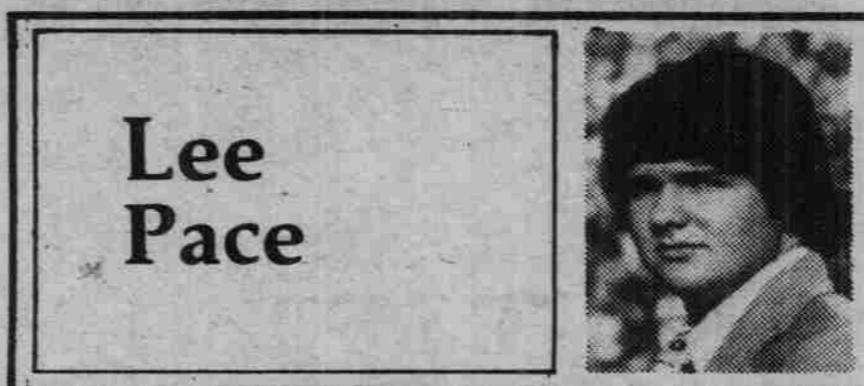
Dean Smith watches, instructs, disbelieves

An imitation Dean Smith was hanging by the neck from a tree in front of Woollen Gym one January night in 1965 as the real Dean Smith and his weary basketball team crept into Chapel Hill following a 107-85 loss at Wake Forest.

Smith pretended not to see the doll hanging in effigy, but one of his players, Billy Cunningham, did see it. It took only seconds for Cunningham to make shreds of the figure.

Dean Smith wasn't very popular that year in Chapel Hill or other towns where people worked, slept, fed their dogs and listened to Ray Reeve tell about Tar Heel basketball over the radio. People remembered names like McGuire and Rosenbluth and Kearns; people remembered 1957 and the national championship. There was too much tradition to allow a man with a 7-6 record — following a 12-12 season the year before — to continue his folly.

"My college coach, Phog Allen, once told me, 'Dean, you can't stop at every dog that barks or you'll never get the mail delivered.'" Smith says.



Lee Pace

They never got around to firing Dean Smith that year, even after a 15-9 season, or in 1966 either, after a 16-11 season.

And get this — 11 years later people were making even more of a fuss over Smith when word got out that he might be moving to Los Angeles and into the position of head basketball coach at UCLA. Only this time folks wanted him to stay, not leave. Funny creatures, those basketball fans.

By that time Smith had won 304 games, lost 113,

taken the Tar Heels to five ACC championships and five appearances in the NCAA Final Four, coached the United States to an Olympic gold medal and done nearly everything he could with a basketball except an around-the-back, double-pump, in-yo-face dunk.

Dean Smith leave Chapel Hill? You'd have thought there was a serious problem — like the Russians were coming — when that morbid question popped up.

"I like the excitement and the interest we have for the game," Smith says. "But I'd prefer to have not as much focus on the coaches as on the players in the game. I'd rather coaches not get as much credit when we win and not as much blame when we lose."

But Dean Smith is very much in focus on the basketball court and will remain that way as long as he makes his living coaching. While Smith's off-court image is blurry to all but a few friends, he carefully cultivates a spit-and-polish public image and insists that his players and associates do the

See SMITH on page 7

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