

Chilcutt ready

His role will expand in sophomore year

By NEIL AMATO
Staff Writer

If Pete Chilcutt thought the pressure to perform early last season was tough, he ain't seen nothin' yet.

Whereas last year he was pressed into service in the opening game against national power Syracuse because Dean Smith suspended J.R. Reid and Steve Bucknall for disciplinary reasons, this year Chilcutt will assume a larger role in light of Reid's left-foot stress fracture.

Chilcutt, a product of Eutaw, Ala., is an academic junior with three years of eligibility remaining. After being redshirted, Chilcutt averaged five points and three rebounds while playing only 17 minutes per game. If his performance in North Carolina's 109-100 exhibition victory over Marathon Oil is any indication, it looks as if the 6-foot-9, 225-pound sophomore can handle the responsibility of starting.

Chilcutt believes the key to his preseason success is offseason work.

"In the offseason, I've really improved my strength while keeping my weight down," Chilcutt said. "I'm down from last year's playing weight, but I think I'm stronger and have less body fat. I've worked on my rebounding and defense, especially. Defense is something coach Smith really stresses."

As evidence of these improvements, Chilcutt recorded three steals and grabbed 12 boards against the Oilers.

But don't get the impression he played poorly on offense. Chilcutt scored 23 points in a variety of ways. Chilcutt admits he was slightly gunshy last season when he had the open shot, even though it was his 17-foot jumper at the buzzer that tied Syracuse and sent the game into overtime.

"This year, I'll feel more comfortable on the court," Chilcutt said. "I'm going to look to shoot the ball more when I'm open."

Being open includes outside the three-point arc, where Chilcutt went 2-for-2 last Saturday against the Soviet Union. When asked if he would have the green light to shoot the trey this season, Chilcutt was a bit hesitant.

"I wouldn't say the green light," he cautioned. "In certain situations, like the secondary break, I guess you could say I have the yellow light. I think I can make that shot. I always like to work on my three-point shot because this year coach Smith told me I could shoot it from the top of the key on the secondary break."

Last season Chilcutt saw more

"This year I'll feel more comfortable on the court."
— Pete Chilcutt

action than expected in the Tipoff Classic versus Syracuse. Of his game-tying shot, Chilcutt said, "It definitely gave me confidence for last season. It changed my whole outlook."

Chilcutt says his confidence level is up even more this year.

"As far as helping this year, my confidence level is up enough to where I know I can respond to situations where coach Smith needs me, whether it's a big game or a little game," he said.

Chilcutt's teammates and coach believe he'll be able to handle the pressure situations due to his improvement.

"He lost a lot of body fat," an injured Reid said. "He looks slimmer and stronger. We used to call him 'Meaty Petey' when he got back this fall because he likes to eat so much. Everyone was surprised he ran his mile fast enough to get out of the first week's sprints in practice. It shows the type of attitude we have on this year's team."

Added senior Steve Bucknall: "Pete has improved on all aspects of his game 100 percent. He's come into his own and he's going to have a great year."

Smith thought Chilcutt's offseason work had really made a difference in his preseason performance.

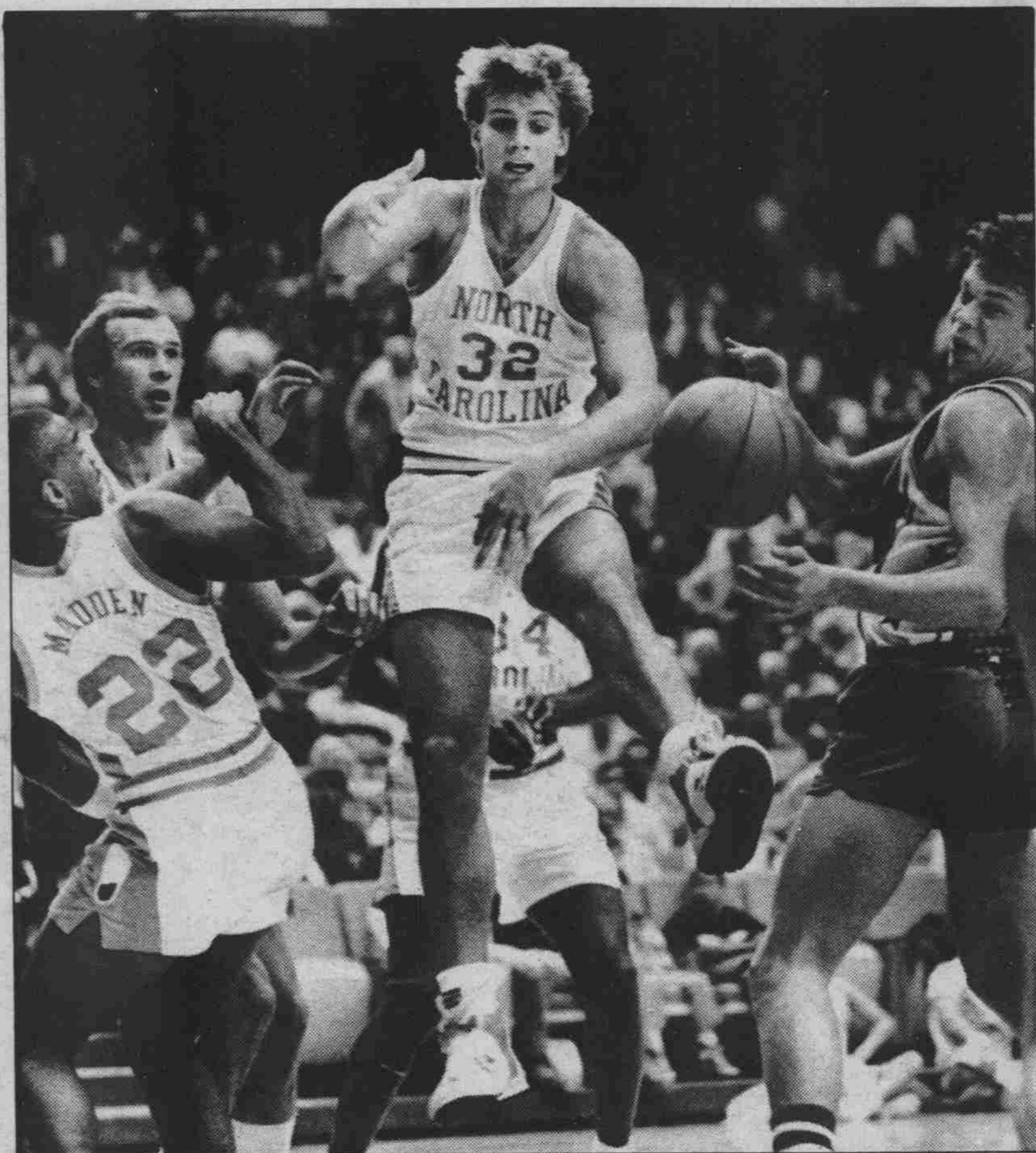
"Pete did everything we asked," Smith said. "I've seen improvement in practices. His body looks a lot better, a lot quicker."

To become a more versatile part of the Tar Heel attack, Chilcutt is currently trying to learn the 3-spot (small forward). He's already been playing big forward and center.

"I feel if I can learn the 3-spot, I can help out the team a lot more," Chilcutt said of his expanding role. "I'm looking to be sixth man most games, but it depends on the situation."

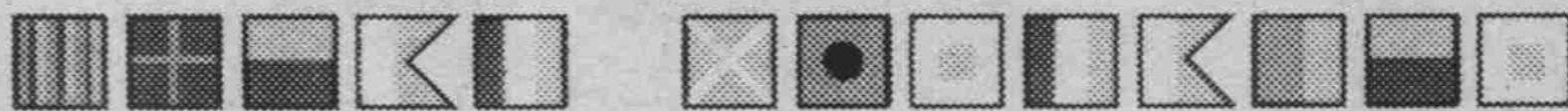
That was before Reid's injury. Now, over the next six weeks, Chilcutt has a chance to step into the limelight.

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Sophomore forward Pete Chilcutt will be counted on to provide some help in the paint for UNC

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