

SPORTS

Dynamic duo Sophs Hamm, Lilly give goalies stomach pains

By JAY EXUM Staff Writer

If you caught even fifteen minutes of that blur of a World Series, you probably saw that Rolaids commercial about four times. You know the one. The patheticlooking catcher is staring at a game film of Rickey Henderson stealing bases. "We can't win if you can't stop Rickey Henderson!" yells the coach. "Days like this make me glad I'm not a catcher."

If you felt sorry for that catcher, consider the same commercial as it might apply to women's soccer players.

Some poor woman dressed in a goalie's outfit stares blankly at the film screen. In walks the coach.

"We can't win if you can't stop Kristine Lilly!"

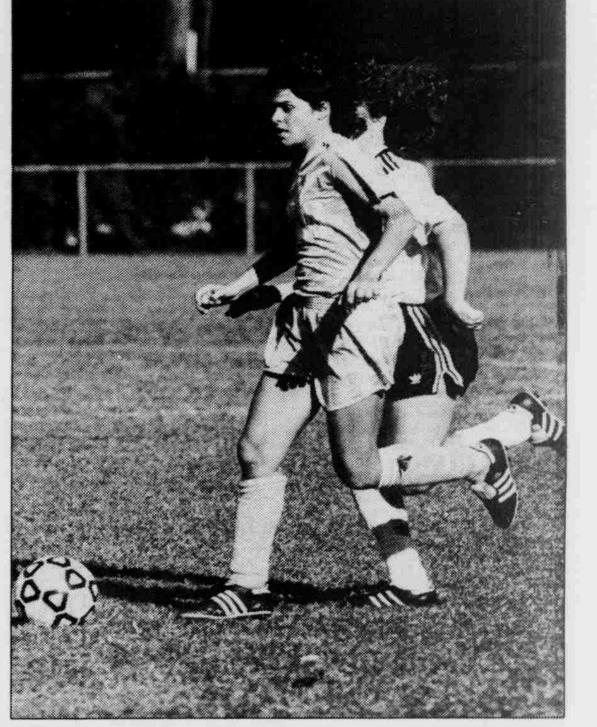
The film shows Lilly smashing a shot past a foolish-looking opposing goalie. Next comes another equally impressive humiliation of a goalkeeper. But wait. That wasn't Kristine Lilly.

"Oh, yeah," says the coach. "Stop her, too! We can't win if you can't stop Mia Hamm! This could get ugly. Days like this make me glad I'm not a goalie.' In every game North Carolina's women's soccer team plays, that

nightmare is one the opposing defense has to face.

Lilly and Hamm are very likely the two best women's soccer players in the ACC-possibly the nation. Their names appear so often on the stat sheet you'd think their grandmothers were the statisticians. Their accomplishments are awesome, and if you didn't already know, they're both only sophomores (someone please revive that goalie).

In this year alone, the two have combined for more points than all of UNC's opponents in the last four years combined. Hamm has a legitimate shot at breaking the NCAA scoring record before the season is out. She was the first player this season to reach the 50point plateau, and only the seventh UNC player to accomplish that feat.



Sophomore Mia Hamm leads the conference in goals, assists and points

last season.

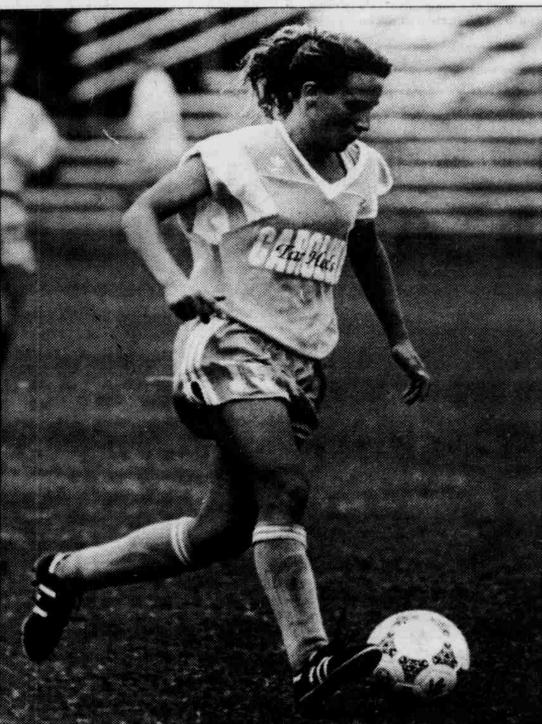
Both players humbly admit that they are a little uncomfortable being team leaders as sophomores.

the squad since 1987, and the tough international competition has helped the tandem make up for their inexperience

DTH/Kathy Miche

Hamm and Lilly's scoring totals rank 1-2 in the ACC, 1-3 nationally. The Tar Heels have not played a game this year in which either Hamm or Lilly has not had at least one point. Of UNC's14 wins, either Lilly or Hamm has scored or assisted the winning goal 13 times.

So you might expect that these two live and breathe soccer; that they don't have time for much else. Or maybe their success has spoiled them. Hardly so.



DTH/Kathy Michel Sophomore Kristine Lilly's 15 goals and 10 assists rank third nationally

"Basically juniors and seniors are looking to us and it's kind of hard," Hamm said. "They feel awkward and we feel awkward, but leadership is something that you go out there and take."

And take it they have. Not only have the two seen success as Tar Heels, but Lilly starts on the U.S. National team, while Hamm is the first player off the bench. They have played together on

In addition to making the two better players, the time they have spent on the national team together has paid off with an unusual on-field chemistry. Lilly points out that when one of them is having a big day scoring, the other is

> usually found in the assist column. Asked if they look for each other on the field, Lilly laughed and responded, "We don't really try, it happens. We've played for so long together, we've just kind of got a feel for each other."

And after all the success, internationally and nationally, the best tandem in women's soccer is as humble as ever. Hamm's answer to the what suprises have led to the team's success? "The freshman are doing more than their share right now. They've been incredible. They could just be sitting back and saying 'I'm just a freshman and I shouldn't have to carry this team,' but they have been."

In response to any given question about their abilities, Hamm and Lilly bring up the names of other players they feel have contributed not only to the team's success, but to their own.

As team leaders used to success, the two forwards had to respond to a new experience this season - losing. After the team's first loss in 103 outings Sept. 22, the duo handled defeat like the seasoned veterans they are well on their way to becoming.

"(The winning streak) was built up a lot by the media," Lilly said. "We lost the game and it really sucked, but it happened. Now we're just working hard to prove to everyone that we should be back up there. Now we have to prove it more than people are accepting it."

Hamm added, "It was the emotion of a loss and not the emotion that the streak ended. I think it was more like a swift kick in the butt, in that we're not going to win this year on talent alone. Every game we go out and play we've got to be both psychologically ready and physically ready."

The future is in good hands (or feet).





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at the collegiate level. "(On the U.S. National team) we're

playing at the highest level, and there's

no better experience than that," Lilly

said. That national team went undefeated

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