

Heels look for excellent Wood play

Young, talented women's golf shoots for conference crown, national prominence

By Bryan Strickland
Staff Writer

The game of golf has both fascinated and frustrated scoreless numbers of normally mild-mannered and even-headed persons. Many have questioned how they could honestly be expected to hit a tiny white sphere across some 380 yards of picturesque landscape and drop it in a small hole in the ground — all in four strokes.

At UNC, a talented group of 13 women have perfected such a skill — they are the 1990-91 women's golf team.

Head coach Dot Gunnells begins her 16th year at the helm with one of her most talented and youngest teams ever. The 19th-ranked Tar Heels feature three sophomores and one freshman among their top five players.

Such youth doesn't concern Gunnells. "These girls all come from experienced backgrounds," she said. "Most have already been in tougher situations than they've faced here."

Gunnells can also count on her senior tri-captains — Lisa Antonucci, Dayna Baird and Kim Verrecchio — for any needed leadership.

If the fall 1990 season is any indication of how the youngsters will perform, the Tar Heels are in for an excellent spring campaign. Sophomore Jessica Wood highlighted the effort by claiming two individual titles during UNC's five-match slate.

Both victories were gut-wrenching, coming in sudden-death playoffs at the Lady Seminole Invitational in Tallahassee, Fla., and the Duke Fall Invitational in Durham. No UNC golfer has ever won more than three titles in a full season.

On the strength of Wood's individual crown, the Tar Heels took the team title at the Duke tourney in October. The squad's impressive even-par performance was enough to outlast the host Blue Devils in the 54-hole, 13-team tournament. Freshman Meredith Tucker placed sixth, sophomore Kim Byham eighth and junior Debbie Doniger and sophomore Meredith Quimby tied for ninth.

All told, the Tar Heels finished no



Jessica Wood

lower than eighth in their five fall events.

The success has Gunnells excited about the upcoming campaign.

"I'm very pleased with the fall season and looking forward to the spring," she said. "I think we're going to do even better."

Four players have already sewn up spots for the approaching spring schedule (only five compete in each match). Tucker, whose 76.83 stroke average was the team's best in the fall, heads the regulars. She is joined by Wood, Byham and Doniger. Quimby may have the inside track on the final slot. Sophomore Justine Richards will also contribute.

Ten Tar Heels competed in at least one fall tournament, but Gunnells doesn't expect such a pattern to continue. "In the spring, I really like to play the same five or six if possible," she said.

The challenging spring slate kicks off March 1 when the Tar Heels travel to Fort Ord, Calif., for the Jostens Invitational. The powerful field includes the nation's top-ranked team, San Jose State. Third-ranked UCLA will also be in action, and ACC foe Duke, ranked 18th, will also compete.

The bulk of the Tar Heels' schedule falls during spring break. After travel-

Women's Golf

Head Coach: Dot Gunnells (Memphis State 1951)

Career Record: 25 invitational, 26 individual championships (16th season)

Record at School: same

Starters Returning/Lost: 4/1

Top Returnees: Lisa Antonucci (Sr.), Amanda Bailey (So.), Dayna Baird (Sr.), Kim Byham (So.), Debbie Doniger (Jr.), Tara Hipp (Jr.), Merideth Quimby (So.), Justine Richards (So.), Kim Verrecchio (Sr.), Jessica Wood (So.)

Top Newcomers: Meredith Tucker (Rocky Mount)

Facility: A.E. Finley Golf Course (18 holes; par 72; 5,980 yards)

ing to Orlando, Fla., for the Peggy Kirk Bell Invitational March 11-12, North Carolina will challenge second-ranked Arizona at the Betsy Rawls Longhorn Invitational March 15-17 in Austin, Texas.



Justine Richards

UNC finishes the regular season much closer to home. The women venture to Greenville, S.C., April 6-7 for the Lady Paladin Invitational before wrapping up the season by hosting the Woodbridge Intercollegiate in Shelby April 12-14.

Gunnells has set lofty goals for her young squad.

"One of our goals is to finish in the top 10 of every tournament we play in, but our real goal is to just play our best," she said. The UNC coach said the team could possibly win two of its five tournaments.

Gunnells fully expects her team to make the NCAA Tournament, where UNC placed eighth two years ago. In fact, she has already made reservations for the event, which is being hosted by Ohio State University. Seventeen teams will receive bids.

Despite the team goals, golf is inherently an individual sport, Gunnells said.

"When they're out there, they are playing against the golf course," she said. "They shouldn't be thinking about what their teammates are doing or what their competitors are doing. Their job is to play the golf course."

Gunnells said her team had a chance for a great season.

"I've got a good group of hard workers that really pull for each other. I'm really excited."

Tennis

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spotlight, a number of upperclassmen have something to say.

The most prominent is Bryan Jones, a junior who last year split time at the No. 1 position with then-senior and captain Don Johnson. The Kings Mountain native is an All-ACC returnee, coming off a 31-17 record (6-1 in the ACC) and a No. 59 national ranking. He is the only current Tar Heel to have participated in the NCAA singles competition last season. Despite some tough times in the fall season, expect Jones to give Webb and Lindqvist a run for their money in the team seedings.

Fortunately, this North Carolina team is not entirely top-heavy. Talent abounds throughout the ranks. Senior co-captain Andre Janasik had an exceptional fall season with a 13-4 mark, winning a consolation singles championship in the Region II tournament.

Janasik played at the No. 4 position throughout most of last year and finished with a 16-4 mark. He ended the 1990 season with a No. 19 ranking in Region II singles. Janasik is also considered one of the team's best doubles players and is expected to make big contributions in that area.

The other co-captain is senior Thomas Tanner. The Rocky Mount native served primarily as the No. 6 seed last year en route to a 21-6 record (6-1 in the ACC), enough to garner him the league title at that position. Tanner and sophomore Sean Steinour will anchor the bottom of the singles lineup.

Steinour played last year at No. 5 and compiled a 31-14 record, 6-1 in the ACC. He is a top-notch doubles player.

Other expected impact players include Chris Mumford, who won most-improved honors in 1990 and had an outstanding doubles record this fall at 7-1. Mumford went 6-0 in his doubles outings last spring. Joe Frierson provides solid depth.

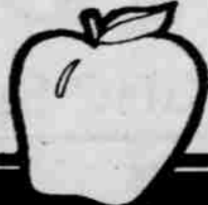
The combination of fresh talent and seasoned experience which Morris has brought to Chapel Hill has led to high expectations for the Tar Heels this year. The team is ranked 15th nationally by the USTA/ITCA poll and is the pre-season favorite to win the ACC.

Coming off his best season in his 11-year tenure at UNC, Morris seems ready to move on to even bigger achievements and very likely his first berth in the NCAA Tournament.

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