

HENRIK RÖDL

The married man draws respect from teammates

By Steve Politi
Assistant Sports Editor

It might have been the tallest wedding party in Chapel Hill history.

When Henrik Rödl and his wife Susan tied the knot July 27, 1991, the UNC senior looked to teammates George Lynch, Matt Wenstrom and Scott Cherry for support.

A local tuxedo shop probably had to work overtime to fit the 6-foot-7, 7-foot-2 and 6-foot-4 Tar Heels, but they were there, extra-extra-long black jackets and all.

"It was my first time being in a wedding," Lynch said. "Henrik asked us to be involved, and I think that shows what he thinks of us."

Rödl, at 23 the oldest member of the Tar Heels, has his teammates' respect.

"He's a married man," Lynch said. "You have to respect that."

After all, marriage probably isn't on the mind of most of the team members.

"I think he's handled it well, especially being married, going to school and putting in the minutes we put in at practice," said Cherry, one of Rödl's closest friends on the team.

"I don't really envision myself doing that," Cherry said. "That's a lot of stuff to worry about."

Rödl isn't worried about what people think, though.

"Different people have different desires that they want to lead their life," he said. "Not everybody wants to get married at 22. I've chosen that way, and I'm sure that my teammates respect me for that."

This year, the reserved reserve is a senior leader.

"He's not wild and crazy," Wenstrom said. "He's a down-to-earth guy — if you need some sound advice, then Henrik's the one you go to. He'd never lie to you, even if it would hurt your feelings a little bit."

"As a player, he's going to help you on the court if you're helping the team. If he feels you're working for a good cause, he'll help you out."

His role as a leader is assured. But his role as a player isn't as clear. Rödl will compete with emerging stars for playing time — including Donald Williams, Dante Calabria and Larry Davis.

Rödl played 14.8 minutes a game last season — eighth on the team — and averaged 3.1 points per game with a .534 shooting percentage.

"Everybody wants to play 30 minutes and score 30 points, but I'm very happy with the way things have gone here," he said. "I could have gone to a smaller school and played 40 minutes

and scored a lot of points, but I wouldn't have had as much fun."

Rödl's not known for scoring — UNC counts on his hard-nosed defense. And this summer, he had the opportunity to play defense against the game's best.

The Heusenstamm, Germany, native was one of the few college players who had an opportunity to play in the Olympics — he played for the German National Team.

"Henrik played point guard some with the German National team, but with the exception of one game, he didn't see much pressure," said UNC head coach Dean Smith. "But that one game was a lot of pressure."

That one game came against the game's best — Michael Jordan and the Dream Team.

"The whole experience was a great honor to play against this level of competition," Rödl said. "Since I hadn't met Michael before that, it was neat to play against him. That was just a very good experience."

"Playing against quality competition and having a lot of playing time, and just playing in a lot of games improves your overall basketball skills. That experience has given me more confidence."

But Rödl was disappointed with the United States' decision to let professional players into the Summer Games.

"There's enough talent in the U.S. on the collegiate level, especially last year, to compete for a gold medal," he said. "Then maybe NBC could air a whole game instead of just a half."

Rödl will graduate in May and will have to make a choice. He has two homes now, and two families.

"There's a spot in Germany waiting for Henrik," Wenstrom said. "I think he wants to raise his family there."

But Rödl's not sure. He regrets not seeing much of the U.S. except for what he's sees out of a bus window.

"We get to travel a lot with the team, but other than that, I have very few chances to get around, because during the summer, I usually go back to Germany to visit my family or play in competitions like I did this summer," he said.

"I really want to go travel out West and see the Rockies and things like that. I've seen lots of North Carolina, the mountains and the beach, and I really like the climate."

Rödl's not new to the Chapel Hill area. As an exchange student in 1987, he led Chapel Hill High School to a 4-A title, earning state player-of-the-year honors from The Associated Press.

That's when he met Susan.

"I love 'em both to death," Wenstrom

said. "They're a perfect couple. They're a lot alike, both are very good people. They always help you out when you need it."

Cherry added, "Since he's been here, he's always been with Susan."

"I enjoy the social life too much," Cherry said. "Not that he's missed the social life, but that's something I enjoy. There's plenty of time to settle down after school."

They don't have to agree with Henrik Rödl, but they have to respect him.



Henrik Rödl

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—Matt Wenstrom
UNC center

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