

DONALD WILLIAMS

Soph looks to lift game from whisper to scream

By Amy McCaffrey
Assistant Sports Editor

Hear that?

Maybe it was a cotton ball dropping to the ground. Or ants. Bickering ants. It may have been Snuffleupagus. No, it was Donald Williams talking. Definitely Donald Williams.

"I've always been kind of quiet and laid back," Williams says. The 6-foot-3 sophomore is seated, his chin resting on his folded hands. His gaze is focused on the ground.

The loudest thing about him is the 2-inch gold charm of a basketball player extended for a layup that dangles from a necklace. As he speaks, Williams occasionally covers his mouth with his fingers, making it even more difficult to hear him.

And when he does speak, it is with the stinginess of a 5-year-old holding an ice cream cone.

When asked who his favorite basketball player is, Williams indicates the poster over his bed and answers, "David Robinson."

"But he's a center."

"Yeah, a center," he echoes.

How do you get this guy talking? Talk about the upcoming season.

Williams will move from point guard, a position he had to pick up last season and from which he scored an average of 2.2 points, to shooting guard.

The decision to move him back to the two-spot pleases Williams. "They knew I wanted to. I know they can tell. I'm having more fun this year."

And his performance is getting noticed. "He's definitely shooting the ball well this year," Derrick Phelps said.

Added senior Henrik Rödl, "He's going to surprise a lot of people in the next few years."

Williams' main competition for playing time should be Rödl, who may be tabbed the second-quietest guy in Chapel Hill. At that suggestion, Rödl smiled and replied, "I don't know — you tell me. We both are quiet. We both take pride in our private lives."

Williams' pride may make it difficult to discuss the problems he had adjusting to the UNC basketball system. "I was never disappointed," he says. "At times frustrated, but never disappointed."

"I had a lot of learning to do. There were good days and bad days."

But the point is, Williams was floundering in a position he didn't know in a system that, willingly or not, fosters incredibly high expectations.

UNC head coach Dean Smith had seen it all before. "He came in with the reputation of being an excellent outside shooter, and I think that's unfortunate — that puts more pressure," Smith said.

Williams set a state record in his senior year at Garner High School by scoring 35.6 points per game. He averaged 26 ppg for his high school career.

"I would call him a streaky shooter coming out of high school — he can light it up and make 10 in a row, or he can miss 10 in a row," Smith said. "It's

a lot easier in high school, where you're going to get 40 shots a game. You'll miss 10 in a row, and it doesn't bother you — you know you might make the next 10."

Williams came to UNC as the first native Tar Heel recruit since Jeff Denny, who first suited up in 1986. Despite the hype, Williams said he realized 30-point games would be a thing of the past. "I knew (it) as soon as I chose Carolina. If I'd chosen another school, I might have thought that."

Instead, Williams said he came to UNC expecting to become a better player. A better player, yes. A player sitting the bench 35 minutes a game, probably not.

Williams reached a low point around Christmas and New Year's, when he considered transferring. Yet he stayed, largely because of advice from his family and teammates.

Williams singled out Phelps and Brian

Reese as especially helpful.

"Our freshman year, we started a little down, too," Phelps said. "We just told him it's going to take time. We told him that you get comfortable in your sophomore and junior years. He just needed to relax."

Williams now brushes aside thoughts of transferring. "I think it was just a freshman thing," he says.

Because of his experience last year, Williams can sympathize with this year's freshmen. "I talked to them," he said. "I know they can look to me as an example, because it got better."

He even carries this message to recruits. "I told them not what to expect the first year, but the last year."

Williams' last year will be 1995. He will be the team's sole senior, a natural for the leadership spot. He may not be the voluble Douglas MacArthur-type, but he will lead.

In a Snuffleupagus kind of way.



Donald Williams

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