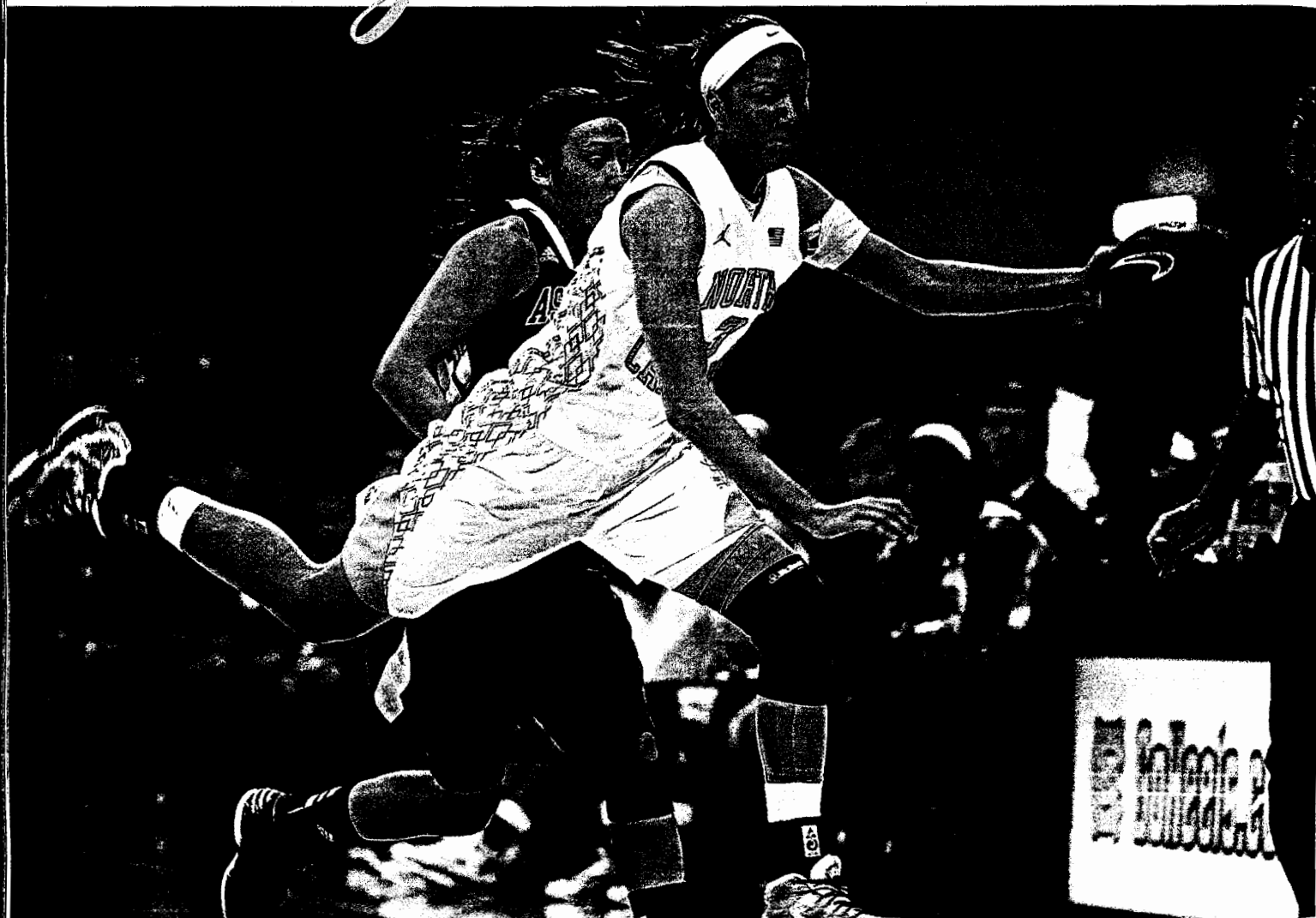


BY HENRY GARGAN

TAR HEEL SPOTLIGHT

Megan Buckland



Jeffrey A. Camarata/UNC Athletic Communications

Megan Buckland did everything she could to extend North Carolina's season.

In UNC's final game of the 2013 NCAA Tournament, which the Tar Heels lost to Delaware 78-69, she made four consecutive 3-pointers in the last three minutes of the first half, single-handedly turning a one-point deficit into an 11-point lead.

For the rest of the game, the Delaware home crowd groaned in unison every time Buckland touched the ball. Where had she come from?

No one could say for sure, but it wasn't the first time the 6-foot wing had shown what she could do when she got hot, even

though she never started last year. But she always seemed to arrive right on time when the starters were struggling.

Against Georgia Tech earlier in the season, the High Point, N.C. native had gone five-for-five from beyond the arc before fouling out with a minute and 41 seconds remaining. With Tierra Ruffin-Pratt slashing through defenders all year, that performance was a pleasant surprise, but it wasn't always necessary. This season, the Tar Heels will need to see that aggression more consistently from the otherwise soft-spoken redshirt sophomore.

They're likely to get it now that Buckland has become more confident with her body. She's endured two ACL tears and a shoul-

der dislocation, but she's hoping that this will be the season she's finally healthy enough to play the way she wants to.

"It was probably one of the toughest things I've ever been through," Buckland said. "Coming here, playing the first couple of games and getting injured, and then literally, our first practice back, my shoulder came out of place. All that was going through my mind was, 'This can't be happening again.'"

On a team with exactly zero seniors on the roster, Buckland's status as a redshirt sophomore places her squarely among the most experienced members of the team. Just minutes after UNC's season ended against Delaware last season, she was already thinking ahead to what that would mean for her and the Tar Heels.

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## "SHE'S ROCK SOLID."

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"These three seniors, I'll never forget what they've done, whether it was on the court or off," she said after that game in March, referring to the impending departure of Ruffin-Pratt, Waltiea Rolle, and Krista Gross. "Hopefully they've taught me some things that I can carry on these next few years. They've been tremendous role models for me."

Now, she said her team needs her to become a role model herself. Coach Sylvia Hatchell and Buckland's mother, Tammy, both characterized her as a natural leader, someone her teammates always knew they could rely on.

"She's rock solid. She's that kind of person," Hatchell said. "She doesn't do what she's not supposed to do. She's so grounded, and she's always interacted with the rest of them, trying to help them not just with basketball, but with life in general."

But Buckland and her coach both said they knew she'd have to become more vocal to fill the void left by Gross and Ruffin-Pratt.

"I'm definitely not a very vocal person on the court, and not even that vocal off the court," she said. "But it's something I'm working on, because I know I need to not only lead by example but open my mouth and talk to these girls."

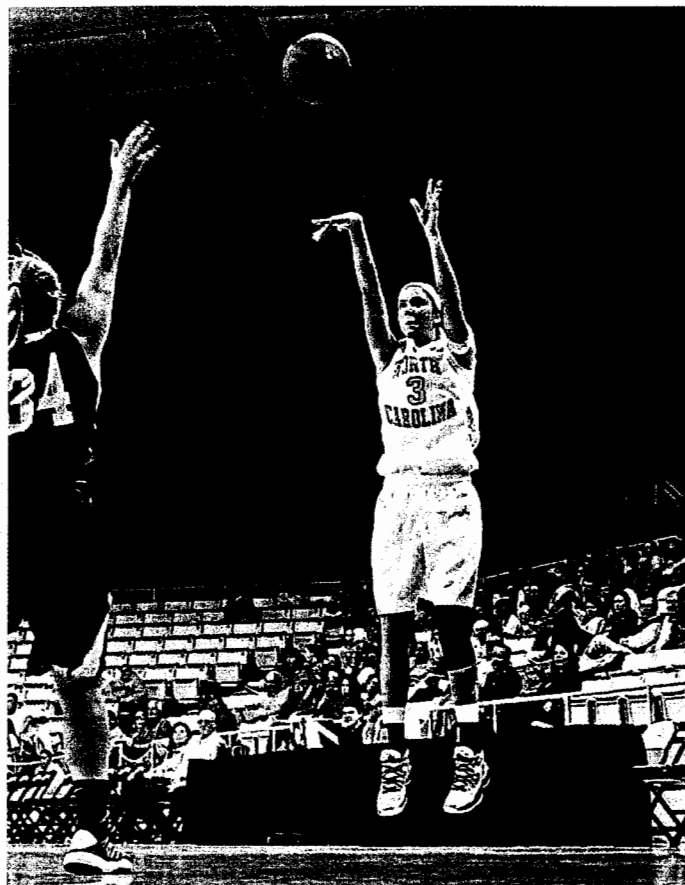
That mentality, the one that allows Buckland to slip in and out of the spotlight as she's needed, has roots in her upbringing in the church.

Buckland's faith—she's a devout Christian—has been a huge part of her development as a basketball player and a person. The ACL tears were tough, of course, but she said her faith, along with the support of her parents, coaches, doctors and teammates, was what made her recovery possible.

"I was 'that Christian girl' in high school, but when I got here, I had to make sure I put that extra effort in to make it to church on Sundays, to make it to Athletes in Action, and it was kind of almost a chore in the beginning," Buckland said. "And now, I get so upset if I'm not able to go to those things. I know that I wouldn't be able to go through the injuries I have and have the confidence I do without Christ."

Tammy Buckland, Megan's mother, said it was hard to see her daughter suffer, but that her family believes the misfortune she's suffered serves a higher purpose.

"Megan grew up in a Christian home — we went to church, giving back to the community was very much a part of who our family is. We



Jeffrey A. Camarato/UNC Athletic Communications

do put God first," she said. "With her ACL reconstructions, we don't know why that happened, but we know that God had a purpose for her."

Tammy Buckland, a UNC alumna herself, said her daughter has been reaching out to other players with similar injuries since her own and made a point of becoming involved at UNC's Lineberger Cancer center. After basketball, Megan has plans to go to nursing school, a career path her mother says would be a natural extension of her caring nature.

As she has been every year she's been at UNC, Buckland is yet again ready to fulfill whatever role she's called to play. This season, it looks like it will be a bigger one.

She's made efforts to grow out of her rather limited role from last season, in which she was simply asked to spot up and shoot open 3-pointers. Buckland said she's been working hard on finishing around the basket and working off of screens.

But even if Buckland misses every 3-pointer she takes this season, Hatchell and her mother both said she's the kind of person who makes her team better regardless of whether or not her shot is falling or her knees are healthy.

"Megan far exceeded our expectations as a person," Tammy Buckland said. "It's almost to the point where she's been an example to us more than we're being to her. She's very giving and very loving, and I think you'd hear that from any of her teammates and her friends."

You'd hear it from her coach, too.

"She's the kind of kid you want to coach," Hatchell said. "I told her mother and father if I had a daughter, I'd want her to be like Megan."

YOUTH Movement

WOMEN'S HOOPS OUTLOOK
BY HENRY GARGAN

THE ARRIVAL OF THE NATION'S TOP INCOMING FRESHMAN CLASS HAS RAISED EXPECTATIONS IN CHAPEL HILL FOR 2013-14.

At the end of the 2011-2012 season, North Carolina women's basketball coach Sylvia Hatchell was out of answers. Her team had been denied a berth in the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 10 years. Several of her players no longer had two functioning anterior cruciate ligaments. She declined a bid offered to the Tar Heels by the WNIT. It was time for UNC to leave that season behind.

But the pain stuck around. It was only compounded as the NCAA Tournament's first and second rounds paraded through Carmichael Arena.

"It was hard. I couldn't come watch any of the games, especially when they were playing here," Krista Gross said before her senior season. "I couldn't even be a part of March Madness. It just hurt too bad."

But just in time for the 20th anniversary of UNC's only national title in women's basketball, Hatchell says she has her team—and the program—nearly back to where they belong.

"As I say all the time," Hatchell said, "playing at Carolina's an honor, but winning is a tradition."

The promise this year's team holds is perhaps the clearest sign of how deserving Hatchell is of her recent induction into the Naismith Hall of Fame. Despite her team's struggles in 2011-2012, the veteran coach was able to lock down the nation's top recruiting class for this season. While Hatchell said she was pleased with the talent level of UNC's newcomers, she was quick to temper expectations of greatness.

At the beginning of last season, UNC wasn't ranked. At season's end, when NCAA bids were released, UNC received a three-seed, designating the Tar Heels as one of the nation's top 12 teams. This was the reward for a 29-7 season (14-4 ACC), a trip to the ACC Tournament final, and notable victories against Maryland, Georgetown and Ohio State. The Tar Heels went 17-1 in Carmichael Arena.

UNC is now ranked as high as seventh in some preseason polls, and the Tar Heels will have to deal with lofty expectations

none of this team's current players have ever experienced.

"We're young, young, young, young," Hatchell said. "No seniors, and only a couple juniors. We've got some talent, but we're very, very young and inexperienced. People are going to have to be patient with us."

There will be no Waltiea Rolle to lock down the paint. There will be no Krista Gross to haul down rebounds, and Tierra Ruffin-Pratt won't be there to scatter defenders like bowling pins on her way to the basket.

But there is excitement in the potential that comes with new blood. Former Tar Heel point guard Ivory Latta returns to the fold as an energetic assistant coach, replacing Trisha Stafford-Odom.

And the freshman class brings with it a wealth of talent at nearly every position.

"We have Jessica (Washington), who's one of the best point-guards I'll ever get to play with, I'm sure," Megan Buckland said.

Stephanie Mavunga, a 6-foot-3 freshman, will do her best to fill the position at center vacated by Rolle.

And then there's Diamond DeShields, the jewel in the class's crown. The 6-foot-1 All-American guard received multiple national player-of-the-year awards, and offers what teammate Buckland called "the total package."

"Just adding another shooter to the rotation with Alisha (Gray) will make us a hard-to-guard team," Buckland added. "And having Stephanie inside, she's one player that I've gotten to play with here at Carolina that listens and responds to what we tell her better than any other player, really."

Looking at UNC's roster, it's clear that the Tar Heels have compensated for Rolle's absence with increased size at every position, which Hatchell said she hopes will allow North Carolina to be more physical around the perimeter.

As the men's team did last season, Hatchell said she expects to experiment with a four-guard lineup, though she declined to go



Jeffrey A. Camarati/UNC Athletic Communications

any further in describing her team's strategy. All that's for certain, she said, is that the Tar Heels will continue to play with as much speed and intensity as anyone in the country.

"And we're going to play off the excitement of the freshmen," she said.

"WE'RE GOING TO PLAY OFF THE EXCITEMENT OF THE FRESHMEN."

But no matter how promising this year's freshman class may seem, it's clear that the Tar Heels know they'll need to prove themselves against the nation's best in order to once again be counted among that group. UNC's schedule reads like a veritable who's-who in college basketball, although with the recent addition of Notre Dame, Pittsburgh and Syracuse to the ACC, so does that of nearly every other school in the conference.

Still, UNC isn't allowing its freshmen to wait until the conference schedule to play nationally ranked teams.

The Tar Heels have scheduled bouts with Tennessee, UCLA, Nebraska and South Carolina before their conference opener against Maryland on Jan. 5.

"I'm excited to see how we're going to handle our schedule, because we do have a really tough schedule," sophomore forward Xylina McDaniel said. "Our freshmen, they're hungry. They're working hard every day, and they're listening to what we tell them. They're confident, but you need some sort of confidence. You have to have that confidence, because if you are good, you have to know you're good."

But that's the line the entire team, freshmen and upperclassmen alike, will have to walk this year in the face of increased national attention. On one side of that line lies unwarranted arrogance; on the other, fear of the expectations carried by the North Carolina name.

Even though the Tar Heels did their best to leave behind the pain of two seasons ago, it's clear that it's stuck with them, for better or for worse. And if it's taught them anything, it's done so by helping UNC's players appreciate what it's taken from Tar Heels past and present for the program to return to where it is today.

"You just tell (the underclassmen) that senior year comes, the game's over, and you look back and everybody always tell you that it goes by fast—you take every moment and it still does," Krista Gross said after her final game last season. "But you tell them to take every second of wearing this jersey and appreciate it." ■

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BY HENRY GARGAN

Q & A WITH SYLVIA HATCHELL

You had a big summer. What was it like being inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame?

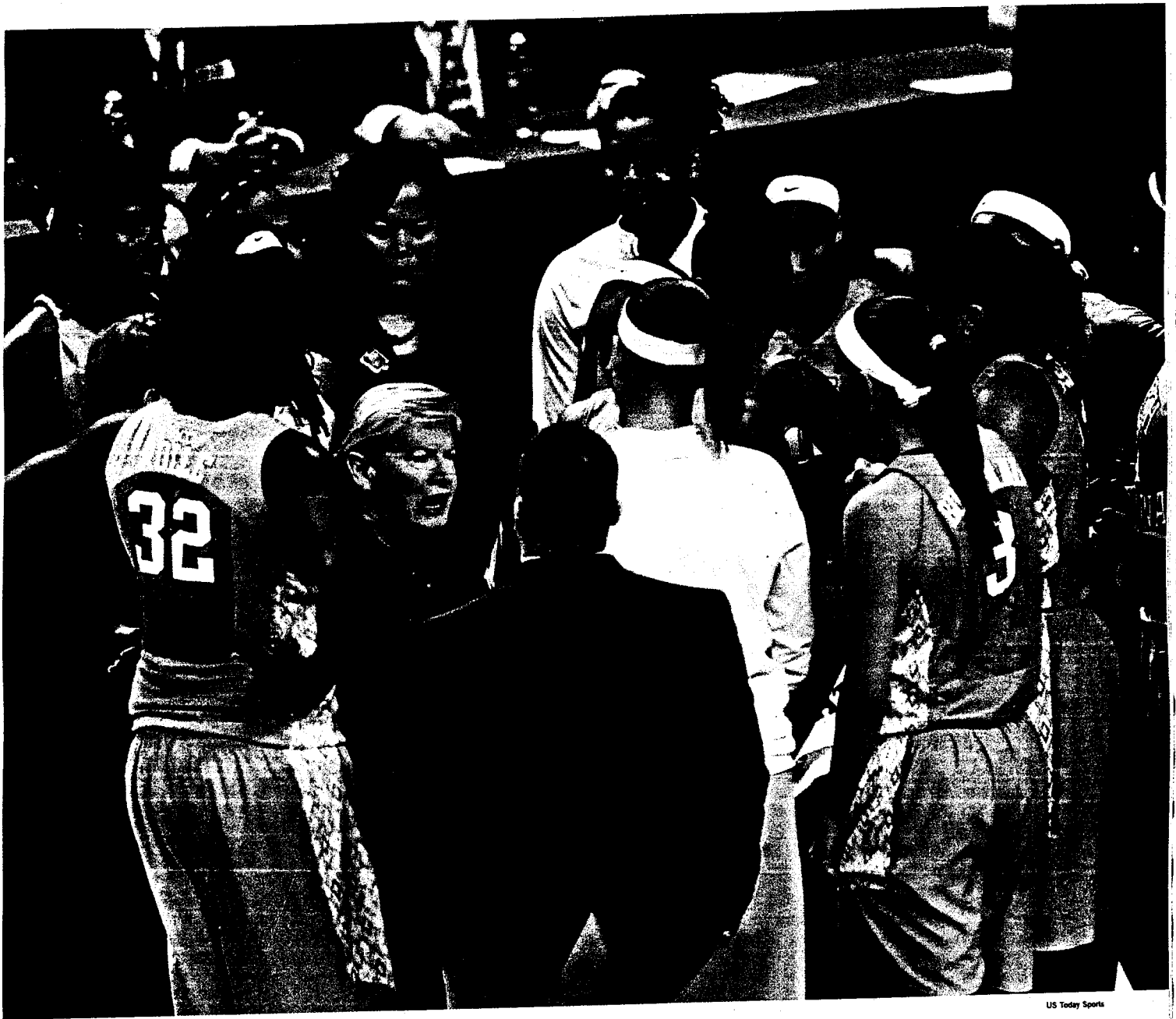
That weekend was unbelievable. But Saturday night was my favorite part: a private dinner with no media, no autographs, nothing. It was just the former members of the Naismith Hall of Fame and the new class. But all those people that were there, it didn't matter what your age was, your race was, whether you were male or female. It was just about the fraternity of basketball. And I broke the invitation list. I asked them, "How many can I invite?" They said, "There is no limit." I said, "Now, don't tell me that. I've got a long mailing list of people that are special to me, that I send stuff to every year that are supporters of mine. Now, how many can I invite?" They said, "There is no limit." So I told them, "All right now, don't tell me that if you don't mean it." They said, "As long as you send us names and

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addresses, they'll get an invitation." So I broke the record—my invitation list was 1,700 people long.

What does that distinction mean for you and this program?

I'm just thinking now, "I'm in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame." Lord have mercy. It's unbelievable. And I was about the 13th woman, and probably half of those are dead. But I'm the 10th Tar Heel, the only woman from here. And, of course, they made a big deal out of the fact that we're the only school in the country that has both the men's and women's coach in the Naismith Hall of Fame.

It's early days yet. But what are your initial impressions of this team?

I'm as excited as I've ever been about a team. Like I said, it's fun to get a bunch of new—I call them puppies—in there. They're

going to be great. But we've got some work to do. They've got a lot of growing to do, but the potential for them is what's fun. They're great kids, and they're working hard. It's going to be fun to watch them go through the process. This year sort of reminds me of when Camille (Little) and Ivory (Latta) were all freshmen. I just put them out there, and I remember we lost so many games by one point because they were young and inexperienced. But they've just got to learn. We've also got to stay healthy. If we can keep them healthy, we ought to be pretty good.

So many of your players attributed the team's success last year to great chemistry. Do you think you'll have that same asset this season?

We don't know that yet, but they're a good group. They're pretty tight, they do a lot of things together. But over the summer while I was gone, my office looked like a florists—I had probably



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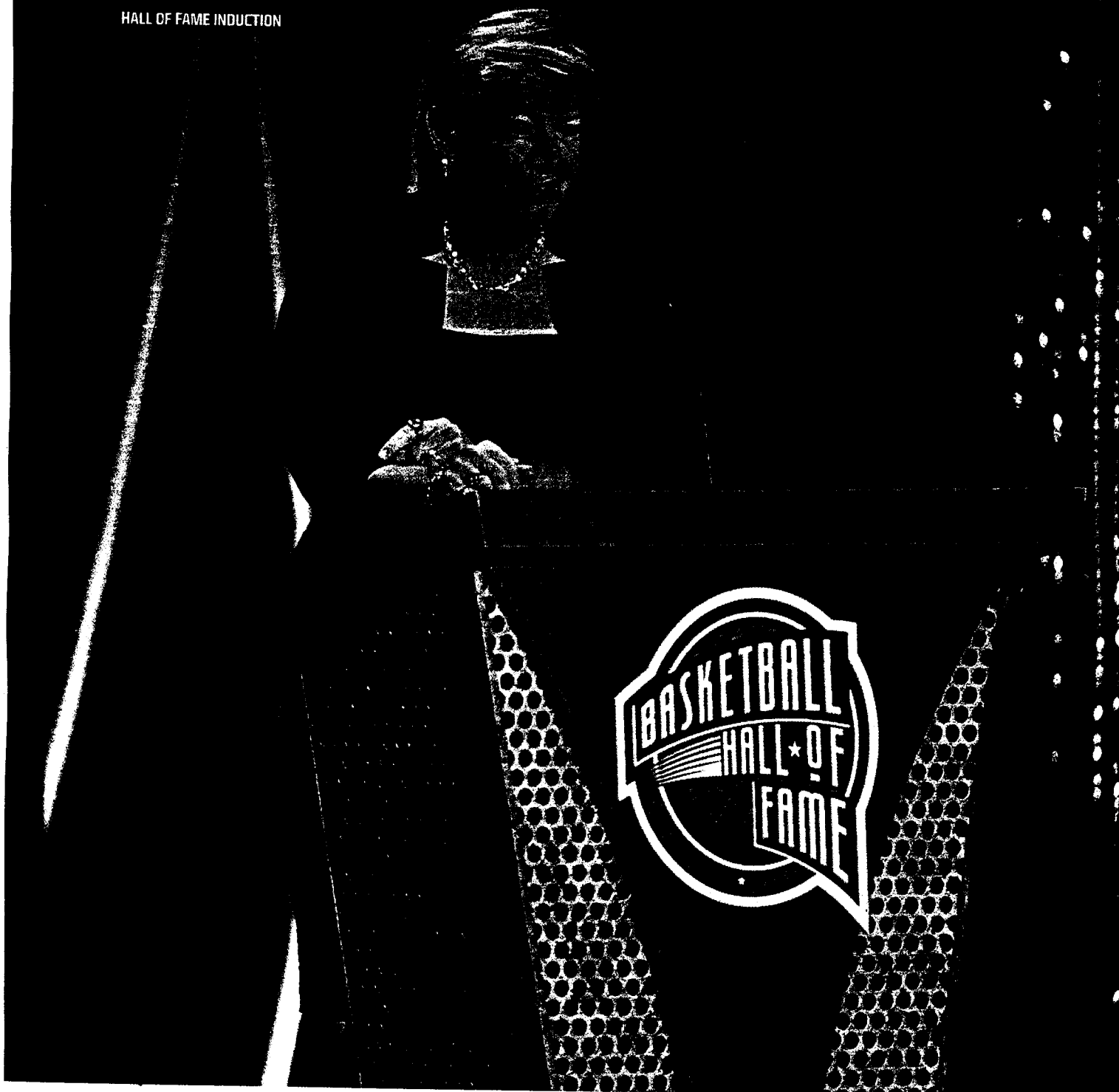
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HALL OF FAME INDUCTION



was here working camp. They worked out all summer together, and Jason did a great job with them. We've got the best strength-training coach in the country. He's always on the cutting edge of everything, and he does a tremendous job with them. So we had a great summer. We've still got a few small health issues. All the freshmen came in banged up and everything, so we've had to nurse the freshmen through the summer and all, but like I said, our training staff has done a great job of getting these kids almost

100 percent back.

You brought Ivory Latta back to UNC on the coaching staff after Trish Stafford-Cohen left to take the head coaching job at Concordia. What kind of impact does having her as an assistant have on this team, and how did that come about?

Ivory is probably one of the top three most charismatic type players we've ever had in this program. Everybody identifies with her because she's little—maybe in stature, but not in heart. Her

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"I DON'T WANT EXPECTATIONS TO BE TOO HIGH TOO EARLY. ... WE'RE EXTREMELY YOUNG. WE HAVE A VERY CHALLENGING SCHEDULE."

You're entering your 30th year in coaching this season and haven't indicated it's close to being your last. What keeps you excited about this job?

And that's just three days. I'd been gone 21 days, and been home for three. After a while it gets old. You just need a little time to go through your mail. But you only have 21 days where you can go out (recruiting), so you've got to go. I always end up getting sick from doing all that flying. I'm on steroids and antibiotics and everything, because I've got to keep going. Yesterday, I was just so happy to be back at practice. I was having a ball teaching those young kids and watching the light come on. The first few times down the floor they make a mistake, and then the next few trips they do it right.

Environ Monit Assess (2008) 142:119–130

I've got a folder I can show you: every year, I send a letter to the basketball committee, USA Basketball, the NCAA, the ACC, I've got the WBCA; I've got a list. I send them all a letter every year about how to make the game better. They're finally listening to me, because I had been preaching to them about protecting the shooter, getting the scores up, and having the top 16 teams hosting the first two rounds. The shot clock, I want it to go to 24 seconds. And we've got backcourt violations now, but we need to do international rules—8 seconds, they're doing 10. I preach that stuff every year, and they're finally going to do it! Not all of it, but some of it. But I'm going to stay on them about the 24-second shot clock. It's still at 30. And they say they're going to protect the shooter.

What are some challenges you see ahead, and what are some of the expectations you have for this team?

Thinking back to the end of the 2011-2012 season and flashing forward to now, you've got to feel light years better about the state of the program.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of your 1994 team's national championship. Do you feel like the program's headed in the right direction toward being in contention for another one?

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BY HENRY GARDNER

FAR FROM SPOTLIGHT

Xylina McDaniel



Holmstrom/Getty

Xylina McDaniel came to the University of North Carolina because she wanted to grow up.

Of course, the program's history and coaching tradition were also appealing, but when it came down to it, UNC was the only school of the three she had left on her list that gave her that opportunity, along with the safety net of home being just a three- or four-hour drive away from her Columbia, S.C. home.

"I brought it down to three schools—UNC, UConn and South Carolina," she said. "But with South Carolina, I knew I couldn't go there because it was too close to home—the campus was literally 20 minutes from my house. I was thinking that the point of going to college was to grow up. I didn't want [my parents] hovering over

my back, so I couldn't go to South Carolina. I loved the coaching staff and the team, but I just couldn't."

And even at her commanding height of 6-foot-2, McDaniel knew she had a lot growing to do. The McDonald's All-American was just 17 years old when she arrived in Chapel Hill. She'll still be 18 when her sophomore season begins.

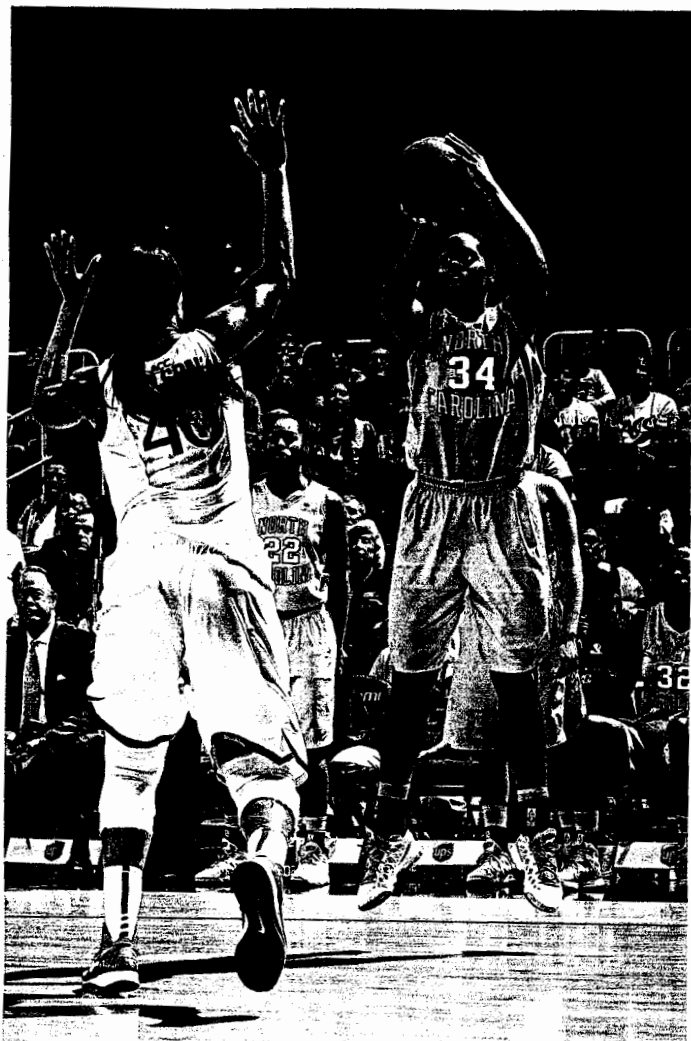
"I wanted her to stay back a year, but her mom didn't," said Xavier McDaniel, Xylina's father—known as "The X-Man" during his dozen years in the NBA. "I see a lot of girls coming in this year that are older than Xylina. She could have been the number one player in the country. But you look at her size and her body—I told her in high school: you've already got a pro body. You've just got to get your mind right."

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Joel Auerbach/Getty Images

McDaniel admits that she can be immature and even lazy at times. Her freshman year, she picked up more personal fouls—107—than anyone else on the UNC roster. She got to the line more times than anyone but Tierra Ruffin-Pratt, making just 57.6 percent of her foul shots. Her temper earned her a couple of technical fouls where UNC really didn't need them.

"That was frustration and immaturity," coach Sylvia Hatchell said. "She still might get those technicals (this year), but she's just that competitive. I'd rather hold her down than have to light the fire. If you don't have to light a fire under her, I can always calm her down."

McDaniel insists she's taken steps over the summer to realize the growth she came to North Carolina to experience. But she's not ready to abandon the aggression that defines her and her father's games. Xavier McDaniel readily admits he's taught his daughter to "put their elbow in their chest" if defenders are hanging on her back.

"You'll never have to light the fire with me," she said. "But I won't be as exaggerated as I was last year. I remember last year, me and (Duke's) Chelsea Gray had a double tech on a jump ball. I'm always going to come up with the jump ball, and I'm like, 'Well, Coach...' And she's fine with that."

And Hatchell, Xylina and Xavier all promise the sophomore's game has grown just as much as her disposition.

McDaniel received ACC Rookie of the Year honors as a freshman, averaging 11.7 points and seven rebounds per game. She made an immediate impact with the Tar Heels, entering the starting lineup right away. But toward the end of the season, teams started to figure McDaniel out. They noticed that when she drove to the basket, she always went right. They noticed that she was easily frustrated by the double-team. They noticed that the right block was her comfort zone.

"YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO LIGHT THE FIRE WITH ME."

McDaniel and her coaches knew her game would need a redesign in order for her to remain effective moving forward. During the summer, she worked on her ball-handling and 3-point shot in anticipation of a more versatile role in the coming season's lineup.

"She struggled against the better teams sometimes because they took the right hand away from her," Xavier McDaniel said. "I'd ask her if she can go left, and she says yes, but she was just so dominant with her right hand she never felt like she had to."

But the change in the sophomore's role won't just be encompassed by X's and O's. As someone who came to UNC bearing the McDaniel name and, in some respects, the weight of the program's future, she knows that she'll have to advise this year's top-ranked freshman class through the similar pressure it will face. She'll have to calm them down and teach them the ropes while working on her game.

And she'll have to do all of this while being younger than many of them. If McDaniel wanted to grow up at UNC, she's been forced to do so more quickly than she could have imagined.

"I talk to them all the time, because I know a lot of people are getting in their heads about the upcoming season," McDaniel said. "I tell them you can't let everybody outside try to determine what you're going to do. At the end of the day, you have to listen to your teammates and your coaches, because that's who you're going to be with on the court, doing everything with. I'm just trying to keep everyone calm."

Her father said he felt Xylina was the best player on the team last year, but that her belief that she was only the second or third-best player held her back.

"It's the mental part with her," Xavier McDaniel said. "That's what I tell every coach—her basketball won't be a problem. It'll be the mental part of her game."

Xylina said she's grown immensely since she arrived in Chapel Hill. Her parents and friends are always telling her that, she said. But part of that growth will have to involve the realization that she's still growing.

"I have all of my teammates to back me up, so even if I'm not having the best day or the best practice, I have them to pick me up so I can help everyone else," McDaniel said. "It's going to work out because of them."

12 or 15 flower arrangements people were sending me, all of them really nice. But I wasn't going to be here to enjoy them! So the girls took them all over to the cancer center and gave them out to patients. And then Friday night we had the big Blue Ribbon gala for the Lineberger Cancer center, and one of the head people came up to me and said, "You girls are so good. I can't tell you, they came over and brought all those flowers. We had one patient that had just had a round of chemo and was really having a bad day. Your girls came in with those flowers and just changed everything for them."

"I'M AS EXCITED AS I'VE EVER BEEN ABOUT A TEAM."

The Tar Heels lost a close game to Delaware in Newark in the second round of the NCAA tournament last year. How did you and the team respond to the way that season ended?

Well, we had a great year. If we could have gotten by Delaware, I think we could've beaten Kentucky and probably gotten to the Final Four. And that was tremendous for this team, because preseason, we weren't even ranked. Our leadership, like I mentioned, was amazing. (Tierra Ruffin-Pratt) had never been a point guard, and we made her a point guard. Her basketball IQ was so high. She pulled the games out for us and did things that made a tremendous difference. I thought we had a great year, and I think they did too. But unless you win a championship, you're never satisfied. I felt like we were going to win that game, and to have 30 wins would've really been major. But, hey, they got a lot of great memories, and they accomplished more than anyone ever thought they would. I enjoyed last year thoroughly—such a great group of kids. Oh my gosh, they were so much fun. Fun to coach, and the camaraderie and chemistry was so good. That makes it fun for me.

As you said, UNC was unranked to begin the 2012-2013 season. What changes now that you've got the nation's No. 1 recruiting class and people are expecting big things?

Oh, they do, now, but they don't understand these kids are super young. They've got a lot to learn. The difference between high school and college, especially on this level, is tremendous. And that's a big thing in practice every day. They have skills, but the tempo and the intensity is something that they have to learn. But the preseason rankings are all over the place. Some of them don't even have us ranked, but the highest I've seen is seventh. I've seen that, I've seen 12th, I've seen us at 16th and 22nd, and I've seen us not even ranked. But last year we didn't start out ranked, but we ended up a three seed in the NCAA tournament, and we ended up being 29-7. They don't mean all that much.

Who do you see emerging as your team's biggest weapons this season?

Xylina (McDaniel) has worked really hard expanding her game.

Her ball-handling has improved, and she can shoot threes out there now. She was just right down there near the basket last year, but now she's more of a face up player. She's in great shape, and people are going to expect a lot of her, being (ACC) Rookie of the Year last year, so she's going to have to step up and be a leader. But she wants that.

And Latifah (Coleman) looks really good too. Of course, she played that great game against Maryland in the ACC Tournament last year. She had that knee—it wasn't a bad knee, it was the screw they had put in there (after her ACL surgery). It bothered her the whole year. Sometimes she could go, sometimes she couldn't. But she's 100 percent right now, and she looks really good.

Waltiea Rolle gave last year's team the ability to score almost at will near the basket. How does her absence change the character of this year's team?

Well, Stephanie Mavunga is going to help us out. She's a true five player around the basket—she's got good hands, feet, and she can finish. She's got a big body, but she moves good. But we're going to miss the length and size of Waltiea. But, we're gaining some size on the perimeter, too. Diamond's big, we're going to play her on the wing, and Alisha Gray. They're both six foot, six-foot-two. Again, we just kind of need to blend all of that together.

What kind of impact do you anticipate your recruiting class having on this year's team?

All the freshmen have the potential to earn a starting spot. They're all that good, because they're all All-Americans. They all that have potential, but they've got to earn it. They're not there yet, but they have the skill level to do that. It's about the learning, the intensity, and the speed, and getting a little bit of experience under their belts so they can just go out there and play and not have to think all the time.

Do you think they feel any pressure, being the top recruiting class in the nation?

No, they love that. They embellish that. They've played USA Basketball together, and that's why they came: they want to win championships. They want that challenge.

Who among your older players will be able to step up and fill the role of vocal leader that Krista Gross and Tierra Ruffin-Pratt performed so well?

That's a good, good question. I think Megan (Buckland) could do that. Latifah is not vocal, but she'll lead by example. But Megan can do that, and they all respect Megan a lot. But that doesn't mean those sophomores or freshmen can't. Xylina could, because she's just so animated. We won a championship in '94 with (freshman) Marion Jones as our point guard, and she was a tremendous leader. I've seen freshmen come in and do it for teams. With this group, Diamond (DeShields) could do that, and Stephanie (Mavunga) has that type of personality.

Last summer, the team went to Europe to play. What has the team been doing this summer to keep busy?

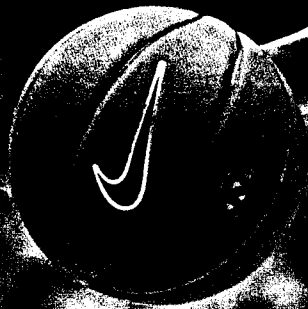
We had a great summer. The freshmen came in, and everyone

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