

Tar Heel baseball one year wiser



DTH FILE/STEPHEN MITCHELL
Levi Michael moves from his spot at third base last season to shortstop after leading the team in on-base-plus-slugging percentage in 2009.

BY AARON TAUBE
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

The North Carolina baseball team opened its season in California this past weekend a year older and charged with the increased responsibility of returning the program back to its previous level of success.

After last year's inexperienced squad missed the College World Series for the first time in four years, this year's No. 21 Diamond Heels (4-0) think they have the maturity and the depth to make it back to Omaha, Neb.

"We felt a little momentum coming into this season and motivation in the offseason to get back to Omaha," junior catcher Jacob Stallings said. "We didn't want to miss it again."

Last year's squad featured 17 newcomers who improved as the season progressed, but missed the ACC Tournament for the first time since it switched to its current format in 2006 and lost to Oklahoma in the regional finals of the NCAA Tournament.

Chief among UNC's flaws a year ago was a young bullpen that at times lost its composure in

key spots, most notably a ninth-inning meltdown that resulted in a Georgia Tech sweep.

In four wins this past weekend, one against No. 8 Cal State Fullerton, four freshman relievers helped the bullpen post a sterling 1.17 ERA in 15 1/3 innings pitched.

Leading the charge was senior righty Greg Holt, who earned wins against Cal Poly and CSF in striking out six batters in 4 2/3 innings of scoreless work.

"It's early, so the jury's still out," UNC coach Mike Fox said. "I thought last year we had a young bullpen, we had a thin bullpen. I think our bullpen's deeper and if it's deeper, it's usually going to be fresher."

The bridge to the bullpen will rely heavily on the performance of junior Patrick Johnson, who will compete for the first starter slot after Matt Harvey was selected in the first round of the MLB draft by the New York Mets.

Johnson was second among UNC starters with a 3.71 ERA last season, but the other two starters who will take the mound for UNC this weekend against Seton

Hall — Michael Morin and Chris Munnelly — both had ERAs above 5.00 a year ago.

At the plate, the Tar Heels will be paced by junior shortstop Levi Michael, who moves from third base after leading the team with a 1.055 on-base-plus-slugging percentage last season.

In the outfield, UNC will look to replace the defense of graduated center fielder Mike Cavasinni and production of talented freshman right fielder Brian Goodwin, suspended for this season for academic reasons before transferring to Miami Dade College.

Senior Ben Bunting slides to center field, replaced in left by freshman Parks Jordan, a member of UNC's sixth-ranked recruiting class that Johnson says will be pivotal to UNC extending its win streak.

"We played a lot of young guys, but they're mature for their age," Johnson said. "Last weekend we stepped up getting big hits in big situations and made big pitches in big situations."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@dailytarheel.com.

BASKETBALL
FROM PAGE 4

The Tar Heels are now left scrambling for answers as to what has gone wrong. Despite the losing streak, Shogog knows this group has what it takes to make the necessary amendments before the postseason.

"I'm more confident than I've been in the past because we don't have a lot of underclassmen," Shogog said. "The majority of the team has been through what we're going through now so it's nothing new for any of the players."

Hatchell had a possible solution for getting the team on track — getting Breland back to form. The senior forward had just four points Thursday night and Hatchell believes she is the key to the team's success down the stretch.

"We've got to get Jessica playing better," Hatchell said. "She's not playing very well, offense, defense, everything."

But Hatchell knows all is not lost and Breland and the rest of the team can get right in time for the postseason.

"The last game is Sunday, then the ACC Tournament is like a new season."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@dailytarheel.com.

DTH PICKS OF THE WEEK

The DTH SportsFriday staff and one celebrity compete to pick the winners of the biggest ACC and national college basketball games each week.

If you've read this section any time during the past month or so, you can just skip this next paragraph about Assistant Sports Editor Aaron Taube dominating the competition.

Though Taube was outpaced last week by Editor-in-Chief Sarah Frier's 6-2 record, Frier's .500 picking percentage still leaves her eight picks behind the North Shore Soothersayer.

Though Frier picked up a game on Taube, he still managed to increase his lead over second-place Sports Editor Jonathan Jones to seven due to Jones' putrid 3-5 week.

It was a down week for the pickers, with five panelists finishing at .500 or below. Not a single one of them correctly predicted Virginia's victory against rival Virginia Tech.

Senior writer Louie Horvath's 2-6 record dropped the D.C. ambassador below .500, meaning a trained monkey that knew nothing about sports would likely outpick him if given the chance. DTH sports is in search of funding for this project.

Between Jones and Horvath is a four-way tie between the remaining pickers at 26-22, making this week a pivotal for middle-of-the-pack positioning.

This week's guest is Joe Ovies, who co-hosts the top-rated sports talk show in the Triangle on 99.9 The Fan weekdays at 3 p.m.

Ovies likes Steve Lavin's St. John's Red Storm to continue its surprising success this week at Villanova, saying "Fueled by copious



Radio talk extraordinaire **Joe Ovies** returns to picks of the week to provide his snark during basketball season. Check him out on Twitter @joeovies and his show on 99.9 FM The Fan.

amounts of hair gel, the Red Storm are dangerous."

Ovies fears the wrath of all-world BYU guard Jimmer Fredette's posse, picking the Cougars to take down San Diego State because "the Jimmer is like Bieber, say something bad and his minions will come after you, so I'll take BYU."

Maryland
(18-10, 7-6 ACC)

Maryland vs.
No. 19 North Carolina
Smith Center, 7:45 p.m.

(21-6, 11-2 ACC)

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Backcourt

With more teams using zone and becoming more physical in the paint, Kendall Marshall's passing lanes have been tougher to find. But Dexter Strickland is re-finding his form and penetrating to the basket where Marshall's passes can't fit. I'm giving this one to the Tar Heels.
Edge: UNC

Frontcourt

There's something to say for N.C. State's game plan of doubling John Henson and Tyler Zeller every time they touch the ball in the paint. Maryland's Jordan Williams is a much better player than any forward the Wolfpack put on the court on Wednesday.
Edge: Maryland

Bench

Ladies and gentlemen, the UNC bench is finally hitting shots once again. Leslie McDonald knocked down a couple against N.C. State, but it's not enough when the Tar Heels are using four players off the bench and they combine for 13 points. The Terps should exploit that.
Edge: Maryland

Intangibles

I know I used this intangible last week, but it's still just as important this week. North Carolina hasn't dropped a game at home in the past 366 days. The Tar Heels protect the home court very well no matter how poorly they may be shooting from the field on a given night.
Edge: UNC

The Bottom Line — North Carolina 76, Maryland 69
COMPILED BY JONATHAN JONES

	Jonathan Jones	Louie Horvath	Aaron Taube	Kelly Parsons	Brandon Moree	Sarah Frier	Joe Ovies
Last Week	3-5	2-6	5-3	4-4	4-4	6-2	4-4
Record to date	27-21 (.563)	23-25 (.479)	34-14 (.708)	26-22 (.541)	26-22 (.541)	26-22 (.541)	26-22 (.541)
Maryland at UNC	UNC Duke	UNC Duke	UNC Duke	UNC Duke	UNC Duke	UNC Duke	UNC Duke
Duke at Virginia Tech	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State
Miami at Florida State	BC	Virginia	Miami	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	BC
Boston College at Virginia	BYU	San Diego State	BC	BYU	BYU	BYU	BYU
BYU at San Diego State	Syracuse	Georgetown	Georgetown	Syracuse	Georgetown	Syracuse	Georgetown
Syracuse at Georgetown	Villanova	Villanova	Villanova	Villanova	Villanova	St. John's	St. John's
St. John's at Villanova	Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky	Kentucky
Florida at Kentucky							

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