

Ready for action

Sue Harnett battles back from devastating knee injury

By BEAU DURE

Post players of Atlantic Coast Conference women's basketball teams must have breathed a sigh of relief when facing the Blue Devils last year. The Blue Devils had a powerful perimeter game, featuring All-American Katie Meier, but no dominating offensive threat right under the basket.

Things are a little different this year. Duke opponents will glance over at the Blue Devil bench and pause, realizing that something is different, horribly different.

She's back.

The "she" in question is 6-4 senior center Sue Harnett. Harnett returns for a fifth year after suffering a severe knee injury and taking a medical redshirt last season.

Harnett's schedule is considerably more difficult than that of the most Duke students or student-athletes. Harnett graduated in May and is now enrolled in a Master's of Health Administration program, balancing six classes in the Fuqua School of Business with her rehabilitation and her playing schedule.

"[The workload] is much harder than I anticipated," Harnett said. "Mondays, I get out of class at 12:45, run down here, get taped, get out on the court and play, and I have class at 3:00."

Adding more difficulty to this schedule is the burden of expectations. Harnett had an outstanding junior year, averaging 19.5 points per game and 8.2 rebounds per game. She was tabbed a second-team All-ACC selection.

"I wanted to stay here, but only if I could also be satisfied academically," Harnett said. The health administration program appealed to her because she had been interested in business, but soured on Wall Street after summer internships.

"My plans originally were to go to Europe or Japan and play professionally for a year, and come back and get my MBA

on the Duke bench. Harnett gave advice to frontcourt players Monika Kost and Marcy Peterson, an experience that gives Harnett an edge in filling her role as co-captain.

"She's the obvious leader of the team," Leonard said.

Leadership is important on this Duke team, as five freshmen are on a shallow roster. The team has been picked low in several polls, with some predictions placing the team last in the ACC.

Harnett, however, disagrees with the local pundits. "I expect great things from this team, I think we're going to surprise a lot of people," Harnett said. "I think we have a lot of talent on this team."

The ACC, with two top-five contenders in Virginia and N.C. State, will be difficult competition for such a young team. But the competition is part of reason Harnett chose Duke in the first place.

"The ACC is, if not the top, at least one of the top two conferences in the country," Harnett said.

Harnett also cited Duke's academics and the opportunity to play with the likes of Chris Moreland and Meier as deciding factors when she chose Duke over Stanford, Boston College, Villanova and Northwestern.

"She was a very fine high school player, one of the most sought-after recruits in the country," Leonard said. "She's always been a very good offensive player."

Harnett has also gotten a lot stronger under the boards and become an intimidating defensive player.

"Over the years, she has grown from a

total finesse player who couldn't take a lot of contact," Leonard said. "She learned to be more of a power-type player."

"I'm really looking forward to finally getting to play with her," said Kost, a senior forward who was injured during Harnett's junior year.

Harnett also has the ability to completely dominate a game. Just ask Virginia Commonwealth, who saw the powerful center score a school-record 37 points while grabbing 18 rebounds during her junior year.

"Her teammates see her desire to rehab fully from the injury and be a dominant force in the conference again," Leonard said. "I think she has the potential to come back and have as good a year as she had her junior season."

Harnett was one of the players Leonard called "assistant coaches."

somewhere," Harnett said. "That kind of fell through when I got hurt."

Yet Harnett has risen to her multiple challenges so far, surprising coaches with a strong recovery, despite additional knee problems and arthroscopy in August.

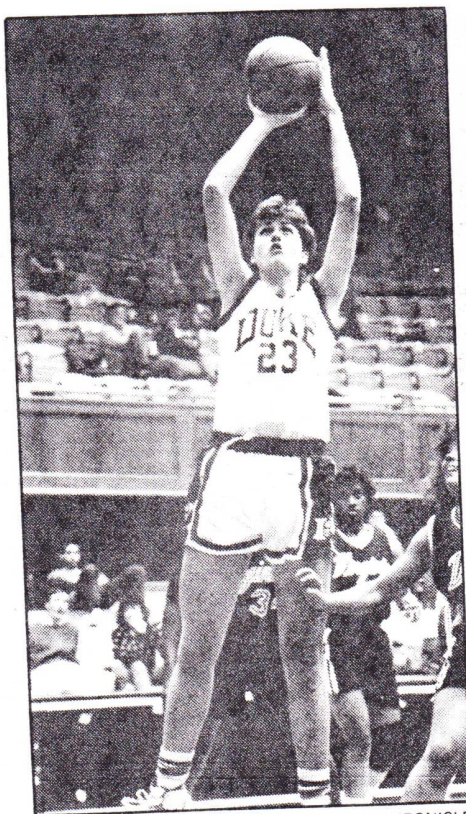
"Usually with an [anterior cruciate ligament] tear, it takes at least a year to get back to 80-85 percent playing ability," said head coach Debbie Leonard. "I'd say right now, she is probably 80-85 percent." Harnett injured the knee in January.

"She still has some weakness in that leg," Leonard said. "You can see it in her jump shooting, but I'm very pleased in her mobility on the floor."

Harnett's situation is very similar to that of close friend and former teammate and roommate Katie Meier, an All-American who injured her knee midway through her junior year, sat out for a season, and played last year as a graduate student.

"Katie is my model that I'm trying to strive for," Harnett said. "Just to see her go out and be successful gives a lot of hope to me."

Last year, Harnett was one of the players Leonard called "assistant coaches," joining injured guard Robin Baker and transfer Celeste Lavoie in street clothes



FILE PHOTO / THE CHRONICLE

Sue Harnett, a fifth-year senior, has recovered from major knee surgery.