

IN THE NEWS

Profile: Dexter Feaster

Cool of pool pulls manager back again

M-JUN. 10, 91

By DAVID PERLMUTT

Staff Writer

It never fails.

Let the days grow long and hot and the bittersweet odor of chlorine fill the nostrils of Dexter Feaster and he feels the pull.

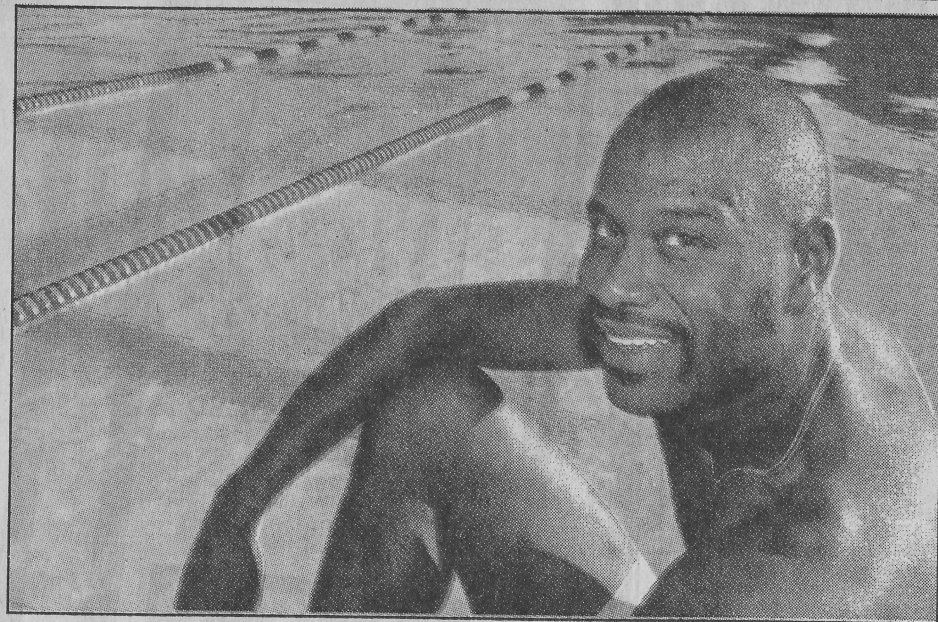
Back to the blue coolness of one of Charlotte's pools.

Back to memories of growing up in public housing and finding shelter from sweltering heat in the Double Oaks or Revolution Park swimming pools.

The chlorine is a tonic, and, for long-time pool rats like Feaster, it carries a message:

"That summer is really here," he said, pouring a bucket of chlorine in the baby pool at the city-run Revolution pool, which he manages. "That the work is upon us. I've smelled it a lot of summers."

He will this summer too. Throughout



JEFF SINER/Staff

"Summer is really here": To Dexter Feaster, pool manager at Charlotte's

Revolution Park, the smell of chlorine is one sure sign of summer.

the Carolinas, managers such as Feaster readied their pools last week for the stampede of kids this week as most schools closed for summer.

Tuesday, the four outdoor pools run by Charlotte Parks and Recreation — Revolution, Double Oaks, Greenville and Cordelia — open full time. The Learn-to-Swim program goes from 10 a.m. to noon, and

then open swimming runs from 1 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 1-6 p.m. Sundays. Pools close Mondays.

Dexter Feaster grew up in that system of pools.

He is a 36-year-old teacher, girls track coach and assistant football coach at East

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Pools

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Veteran manager back in the swim

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Mecklenburg High School. He was once a swift wide receiver, all-conference and all-America in football at North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro. For two seasons, he played for the NFL's Colts in Baltimore and one season for the Washington Redskins.

But at the start of summer, the pools called him back.

Even as a boy in the Double Oaks community, he and his friends arrived before the 10 a.m. opening and didn't leave until closing at 10 p.m. — or later, if they could bribe the lifeguard with bologna sandwiches and cake.

"For a kid in the projects, the pool is a safe place to be and a good thing to be doing," Feaster said. "For 50 cents, a kid can come and swim all day."

Young Dexter marveled at the lifeguards' control. When they blew whistles and barked orders, there was immediate compliance.

So at 15, he put on the whistle and climbed the chair to stand watch, usually at Double Oaks. Soon he was head lifeguard, then assistant manager, finally manager. A couple of summers he was pool supervisor, roving the city's four pools to make sure they operated properly.

Even during college summers, he came back to stand watch. He missed the three summers when he was in the NFL.

Last week, he started his 18th summer of working at a pool.

And when the pump for the wading pool broke, he fixed it. When a filter at another pool wasn't working, the manager called Feaster. Probably backwash clogging it, he told the manager.

"He knows his stuff about pools," said lifeguard Brad Osborne, home for the summer from East Carolina University. "And he is very particular about us working by the rules. That the pool is watched at all times."

When he was a lifeguard, there were quiet competitions among guards, notches on belts for rescuing drowning swimmers.

"It was like gunslingers in the

Dexter Feaster

- **Age:** 36
- **Born:** Dec. 6, 1954, in Charlotte
- **Married:** Natasha Barnes of Charlotte on June 14, 1986
- **College:** bachelor's degree in health and physical education from North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro
- **Worst habit:** Talks too much
- **Greatest moment:** Marriage to Natasha
- **Last book read:** "When Bad Things Happen to Good People," by Rabbi Harold Kushner
- **Two people most admired:** Mother, Ruth Crenshaw; educator Leroy "Pop" Miller, who spent 38 years with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, many as principal of East Mecklenburg High School.

wild, wild West," he said. "Dive in after somebody and it was another notch. Sometimes, though, we dove in after people who weren't drowning. We'd claim they looked distressed. That was another notch."

But in the summer of 1988, by then a manager, he became a stickler for rules.

One day, two day camps arrived unexpectedly, and all of a sudden Revolution pool had 300 screaming, playing children in it.

Four were playing a who-can-stay-underwater-the-longest game. One passed out. As one lifeguard dived to the bottom and pulled the boy out, someone shouted to Feaster:

"Dexter, Dexter, come quick, somebody's drowning!" Feaster ran to the boy and administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

The boy survived.

Feaster doesn't have to do this.

"I could take the summer off and spend it with my wife," Feaster said. "But I really enjoy it. I also think these kids need to see that where you are from does not determine success. And that there are people out there who care about them."