

Coming matches to test Tar Heels

By Frank Heath
Sports Columnist

The current North Carolina basketball team has played its way into a situation resembling that of a chicken drumstick in those old Shake ‘N’ Bake advertisements: all covered with delicious coating and ready to be cooked up by the opposition for good eatin’.

Cuz if the Tar Heels don’t win — and play well — in their next stretch of three games against Boston College, Florida State and Duke, that’s how Jay Bilas and all the other college big-time basketball observers around the country are going to treat the Heels. They’re going to need to prove themselves with an exclamation point.

Among the constants for UNC basketball is that the Tar Heels are always under a microscope, if only on account of Carolina’s consistent success and All-American image. But when — as they do this year — the Tar Heels field a team that is supposed to be extra-special good, no one ever seems to be happy unless Carolina grinds the neck of every opponent under a considerably heavy boot.

A 16-point win on the road against a Top 25 ACC opponent can be greeted with a shrug and calls for better play on defense (see: Miami last Wednesday). An observer, of course, is entitled to legitimate observations and the desire for more, but at some point one also has the option to stand back for a moment and enjoy the beauty of a team for what it does do well.

That’s where UNC’s next week or so of basketball could have a big impact.

Since this Carolina team can be so devastating when everything is working well, the Tar Heels have been viewed as playing in “coast” mode during stretches of games this season.

Now would be a good time for Carolina to leave the “coast” to the fishermen. Starting this Thursday night, if the Heels handle BC at home and then FSU on the road, then knock off on-the-rise Duke (in what shapes up as another of those pressure-packed, eye-of-the-nation, grip-

ping showdowns the two schools have become famous for), a lot of the pressure that is building on this team to perform could be put to rest — at least temporarily. My guess is that once Carolina proves to itself that it can run with the best, this team will settle down and play its best basketball.

If you’re a typical Tar Heel fan, you’re probably thinking, “Slow down, Heath; Carolina fans are supposed to always play one game at a time, so looking ahead to Duke is dangerous!” But here’s the thing, y’all. The Tar Heels sometimes need Duke in order to measure themselves, and, essentially, to provide a compelling reason to be excellent during the regular season. Especially in light of this year’s surprisingly rejuvenated version of the Blue Devils, this looks to be the case.

And if the Heels can’t handle their Triangle neighbors in a year when UNC has been advertised as world beaters and the Devils were supposed to still be rebuilding, then something feels wrong, and we need to know about it now rather than later.

So maybe it won’t be such a bad thing if this team starts licking its chops for Duke a week early this year. Maybe the Heels could use some of that nervous energy and rebellious pride ahead of time to show not only the Blue Devils but also everyone else waiting in their path that they are, in fact, worthy of all the hype and accolades and the No. 1 ranking they carried for nine weeks already this season.

ACC basketball, and the North Carolina-Duke rivalry in particular, is a large thing to hang on a bunch of 19 year olds, but it remains a fact of all our lives. Carolina — and its fans — may as well make the best of this. Embrace the challenge that goes along with being not quite as invincible as everyone thought, but still remaining everybody’s target.

A feisty response, beginning with Boston College at home Thursday night, could be the best way for these Tar Heels to make sure they stay off of other people’s dinner menus.



PHOTO BY GEORG T. GORDON
Carson Cone (22) of the Carrboro Jaguars junior varsity attempts to go through a Graham Red Devil during the basketball game played in Carrboro on Thursday, Jan. 25.



PHOTO BY GEORG T. GORDON
Jamika Belk (21) of the junior varsity Carrboro Lady Jaguars takes a shot during the game against Graham on Thursday, Jan. 24 in Carrboro.

Coaches’ Reports

Culbreth Middle Boys’ Basketball

(via Mike Harris)

We got ‘em! Culbreth 60 - McDougle 51.

McDougle had not lost a game all year and did not lose a game all year last year as 7th graders. This was their last regular season game. They were playing at home with a chance to complete an undefeated two years. Culbreth, behind the outstanding play of Denzel Ingram, did not allow that to happen.

The Cougars came in with changing defensive schemes and were able to hold off the McDougle scoring machine. Culbreth surely had trouble with McDougle’s running game but was able to put together some key defensive stops along with some clutch offensive plays. Drew Davis converted a four-point play after getting fouled on his three-

pointer with under two minutes to go. That put Culbreth up by four. The Cougars held strong and never let the game get any closer. After that, Ingram was virtually unstoppable pouring in a game-high 30 points including four three-pointers. Many of these points came on highlight-reel acrobatic shots between defenders. Drew Davis added nine for Culbreth, and Keenan van Name, Jacob Junker and Dylan Arant turned in outstanding performances. C. Pigsbee had an incredible game for McDougle with 27 points.

Scoreboard

CARRBORO HIGH JV BOYS’ BASKETBALL

Friday, January 24
(via Georg Tudryn)
Car: 8 14 16 21 = 59
Gra: 21 27 18 15 = 81
David Julian Van Name was the top scorer for Carrboro with 22 points. Carson Cone added 13 points. Andy Knapp gave the Jaguars nine points.

CARRBORO HIGH JV GIRLS’ BASKETBALL

Friday, January 24
(via Georg Tudryn)
Car: 12 10 2 12 = 36
Gra: 7 11 16 15 = 49
Whitney Sharp was the top scorer for Carrboro with 16 points.

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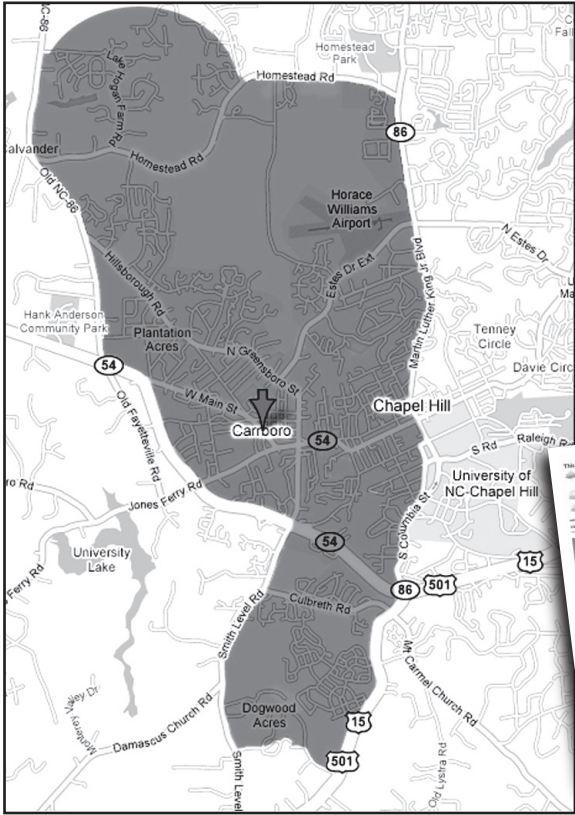
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