

A dose of reality

By Frank Heath  
Sports Columnist

Maryland dealt UNC a dose of reality this past weekend, aggressively wrangling an 82-80 win over the Tar Heels at the Smith Center. For Carolina, this ended dreams of an undefeated season and bumped the Heels from the No. 1 spot in the country down to No 5, right behind hated rival Duke, in the latest AP basketball poll.

Perhaps more importantly, UNC also now trails the Blue Devils in the ACC standings, which could ultimately determine who gets to play in North Carolina throughout the NCAA Regional play. There is a lot of time to rectify this situation, but recent close outcomes against conference rivals Clemson and Georgia Tech have shown the Tar Heels to be vulnerable to more potential losses.

So what now?  
A patient fan asks: What, if anything, could be the matter with Carolina basketball, and can it be fixed?

Some of Carolina's issues have been circumstantial. Given the fact that UNC had four decent shots at the end of the game to tie or win, the Tar Heels could just as easily have emerged victorious Saturday and held onto their No. 1 ranking, and there would probably be articles out now about how great clutch performers these guys are. The Tar Heels did maintain their poise down the stretch against Maryland - so there isn't a big question about their ability to handle the pressure of tight situations — at least not yet. In this case, the ball just didn't bounce into the basket. You're not going to win all the tight games, as the Virginia football team found out in their bowl game.

What is more troubling for UNC is that league opponents seem to have figured out some things about the Heels — namely, that they may be able to out push Carolina, be more aggressive than the Tar Heels and even out run this team now that Bobby Frasor is not available as a capable backup for both Ty Lawson and Wayne Ellington.

Carolina is still going to be able to blow some people out and win a majority of its games just by having more offensive weapons and better rebounders than most opponents. But when the Tar Heels have encountered opposition that is playing well, and fearlessly, and "leaving it all on the floor" as they say, the Heels are finding themselves in a vulnerable spot. The three ACC teams that have played Carolina tight have all used more bench players for more minutes than UNC has and all three have been very physical with multiple defenders on Tyler Hansbrough.

This way of attacking the Tar Heels presents a difficulty for North Carolina when it gets into a tight second-half game, because Carolina's domination this season has depended heavily on a couple of things: Hansbrough's unrelenting will to out work opponents and the ability of Lawson and the UNC break to beat opponents down the floor for easy, momentum-shifting baskets.

If either of these angles gets compromised in the course of a game, Carolina's advantage over decent opposition can become significantly reduced. And when opponents are running three physical guys at (and over) Tyler all night on both ends of the court, and fast-breaking effectively right back at UNC, there

is danger for both of these situations to crop up.

The UNC half-court offense is just not as dominating a force as last season, when we had Brandon Wright also on the court. And Carolina's defense shows the effects of using a pair of guards out front who are expected to play most of the game and who also have to carry a large weight on offense.

So there are weaknesses evident in the façade. Carolina did not defend well enough against Maryland's dribble penetration, and that became a deciding factor down the stretch, as Greivis Vasquez took over the game on Maryland's final possessions with his driving ability.

Now it is time for the Heels to react. Roy's teams bounced back well the past two seasons after other league teams "figured them out," making adjustments that seemed to take the legs out of some of the main things their opponents tried to do.

During this now half-done season, one simple way for Carolina to improve and to recapture its on-the-court dominance is for the second-tier players to step up, allowing Ty, Tyler and Ellington a bit more confidence that they can go all out while they are in the game and not see their efforts go to waste when they check out for a three-minute breather.

Player fatigue has become a more obvious concern since the Frasor injury cut into Carolina's depth; but some recent developments have made this Tar Heel fan hopeful that it may not be a permanent and fatal weakness for this team.

That said, three things I'd be happy to see during the next stretch of games — which, incidentally, are not going to be easy for UNC — are:

(1) Marcus Ginyard taking, and making, a few three-pointers. The junior wing player made two treys on Saturday, his first two of the year, and looked a lot more confident once that first one fell.

(2) Alex Stepheson becoming more of an equal rotating partner with Hansbrough and Deon Thompson in the post. Stepheson looked really comfortable in the game Saturday and did some good things on defense, and Tyler really could use as much help as possible absorbing some of the banging down low and running lanes on the break.

And (3) Quentin Thomas getting to be a reliable cog in the guard rotation, at least during the first half. The senior playmaker has shown signs the past few games that he may be out of an earlier turnover funk, and his athleticism on defense and sometimes-ability to create scoring opportunities for himself and teammates could become highly valuable resources for UNC, especially if it allows Roy to rest, and push, Lawson and Ellington a bit more.

Q.T. is a tough case to figure. But with confidence-building performances in his past two or three games, this could be the right moment for the senior to break through and really play some of that basketball Tar Heel fans know he's capable of.

If just two of these three things happen over the next few weeks, look for Carolina to move upwards and onwards. The main thing these Tar Heels need is a boost of energy and aggressiveness on defense and on the fast break, and more participation and ownership from Thomas, Ginyard and Stepheson could be a key to making both of these things happen.



photo by Kirk Ross  
Undaunted by UNC's first loss of the season to Maryland on Saturday, James McCleary of the Shrunken Head boutique hangs a Tar Heels banner. The Tar Heels lost 82-80 to the Terrapins.



PHOTO BY GEORG T GORDON  
Haley Hegedus (25) of the Carrboro varsity Lady Jaguars releases a shot during the game against Northwood on Friday, Jan. 18 in Carrboro. Northwood won, 56-34.

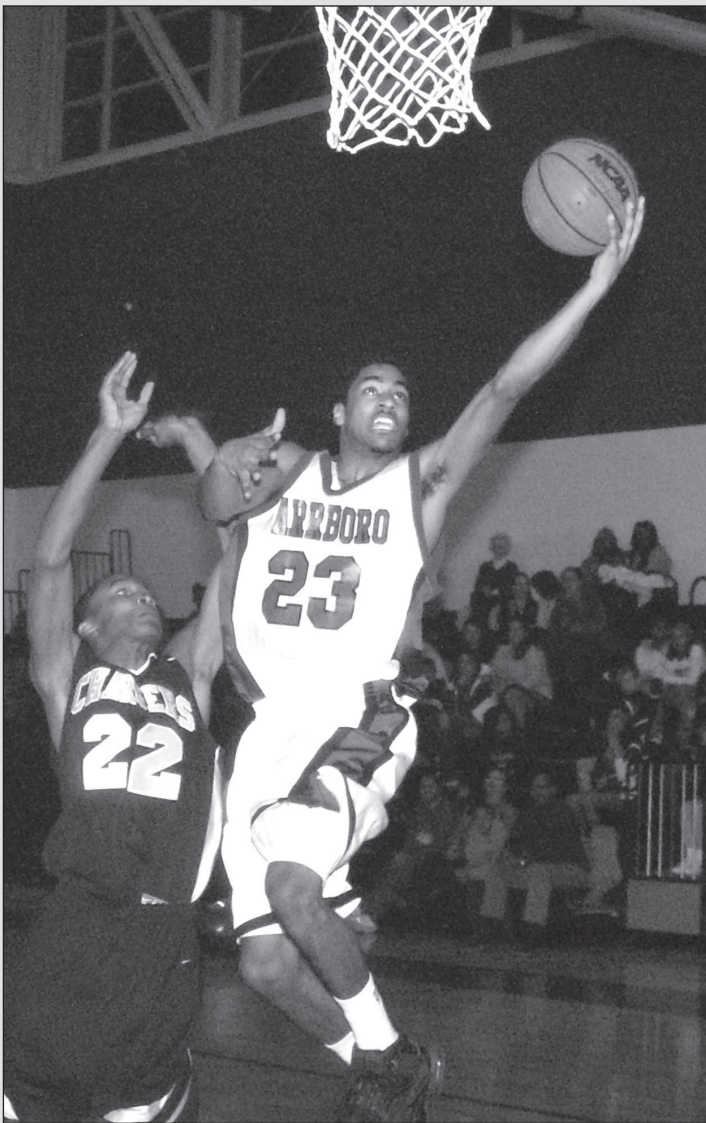


PHOTO BY GEORG T GORDON  
David Brooks (23) of the Carrboro varsity Jaguars reaches for the basket during the matchup against the Northwood Tigers on Friday, Jan. 18 in Carrboro. Brooks led the Jaguar scoring with 32 points, including four 3-point buckets. The Jaguars lost the game 62-73.

Scoreboard

CARRBORO HIGH MENS' BASKETBALL

Friday, January 18  
(via Georg Tudryn)  
Car: 14 9 20 19 =62  
Nor: 15 21 17 20 =73  
David Brooks was the top scorer for the carrboro Jaguars, shooting 32 points including four 3-point buckets. Brad Dimac scored eight points for the Jaguars.

CARRBORO HIGH WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Friday, January 18  
(via Georg Tudryn)  
Car: 9 6 8 11 =34  
Nor: 10 22 9 15 =56  
Layne Mishoe led the scoring for the Carrboro Lady Jaguars, hitting two 2-point baskets and making seven of 12 free throws. Allison Ropp contributed 10 points on two 2-point baskets and six free throws.

Next home game: Cummings, Friday January 25. Women at 6, men at 7:30.

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Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

		5		1	2			
	1			7				9
4			9			8	7	
9		3		6			8	
5			2			3		
	8				4			6
	7		5					2
8				2	6		1	
		4		3	9			

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ★★

★ Moderate    ★★ Challenging  
★★★ HOO BOY!

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In Brief

Coaches wanted

The Carrboro Recreation and Parks Department is accepting volunteer coach's applications for the 2008 Youth Baseball Program and for the 2008 Youth Girls Volleyball Program. Coaches must be able to organize practices and communicate effectively with players (ages 6-15 years old), parents and Recreation Department staff. They must also be able to teach proper playing skills, fundamentals, sportsmanship and provide an enjoyable atmosphere at practices and games. To receive a volunteer coach's application or additional information, please

contact the Recreation Department at 918-7364.

Basketball Challenge

The Carrboro Recreation and Parks Department is sponsoring a Basketball Challenge on Sunday, February 10th. This event has players competing against one another in a variety of basketball skill events. Age group categories include 9-10 and 11-12 male and female. The fee is \$12 per player. Registration is being accepted at the Recreation Department, 100 N. Greensboro St., Carrboro. Pre-registration is required. For more information, please contact the Recreation Department at 918-7364.

Super Crossword FOR THE BIRDS

- ACROSS
- 1 Sagan or Sandburg

5 Swarm sound

9 Montana city

14 Monterey Mrs.

17 '58 Pulitzer winner

18 Piece of fencing?

19 He was "The Thing"

21 Pipe part

22 WREN

25 Brooding-nagian

26 For — (cheaply)

27 Comic Costello

28 — Na Na

29 Mascagni opera

30 Poet Wilcox

33 Lohengrin's bird

37 African antelopes

39 LARK

44 "The Optimist's Daughter" author

45 Bonanza material

46 Coveleski or Musial

47 Vichyssoise veggie

49 Tip one's topper

51 Long-tailed parrot

54 Sanford of "The Jeffersons"

56 Scandinav-ian city

59 Griffon greeting

61 Fool

63 Missouri airport abbr.

64 Valuable instrument

66 Stowe sight

67 Screen-writer Nora

70 Elf

72 Dash

73 Sarah — Jewett character

74 Inland sea

75 QUAIL

78 Depravity

79 Easy stride

80 Bit of gossip

81 Parenthesis shape

82 Physicist Fermi

84 Corset part

85 Alfredo ingredient

87 British big shot

89 Monsarrat's "The Cruel —"

90 Tulsa commodity

91 Cheat at hide-and-seek

92 Preposterous

95 Sweetheart

99 Turn over

101 Daringling dress

103 Invasion

105 Frankfurter's field

106 Rent

109 CRANE official

113 Church

114 Oriental staple

115 Big rig

116 Channel

117 Actress Hagen

119 Plutarch

122 Tole material

126 Be important

127 PAR-TRIDGE

133 Actor Novello

134 Kindie

135 Heart burn?

136 Time for a sandwich

137 According to ridge

138 German port

139 Racing legend

140 Guy Fri.

3 "— Man" ('84 film)

4 Not as fatty

5 Neighbor of Ger.

6 Prosperous times

7 Non-chalance?

8 Nil

9 Crank's comment

10 Swiss canton

11 Explosive initials

12 Goller's gadgets

13 Avoid

14 DUCK

15 Toomey or Philbin

16 Iowa city

20 Musty

21 Japanese religion

23 Hard on the eyes

24 Astrology term

31 Brown or Baxter

32 Vno center

34 Corduroy

35 Writer Rogers St. Johns

36 Formerly known as

38 Moro of Italy

39 One who no's best?

40 Distinctive period

41 — room

42 Singer Elliot

43 Bete noire

48 Adorable

50 Tenor Corelli

52 One of the Judds

53 Tolstoy title start

55 Coalition

57 Play ground?

58 Bedding

60 At large

62 Word with dog or state

65 "Never on Sunday"

66 Good-humored

67 Amatory

68 CARDINAL

69 — Dame

71 Anaconda, for one

74 As well

76 Pursues

77 Coffee pots

83 Ring

86 Andretti or Cuomo

88 Fiber source

91 Swamp suffix

93 "Death of a Salesman" son

94 Pad

96 Ryan's "Love Story" co-star

97 Bud

98 Fluffy female

100 Crime writer Colin

102 PC key

104 SHAEF commander

107 "The March King"

108 Whole

110 Stamping ground

111 TV award

112 Strauss

113 Debonair star

116 — coffee

118 source

120 One of a pair

121 South Seas

123 New Mexico resort

124 John of "Roots"

125 Expected back

128 Bossy's

129 Sugary suffix

130 Guys

131 College growth

132 Empower