

Georgia ends North Carolina's season

The softball team advanced to the regional final before being eliminated.

By Henry Gargan
Staff Writer

North Carolina softball coach Donna Papa has stressed the importance of consistent offense all year. Looking at the numbers from her team's weekend in the Athens regional, it's easy to see why.

The Tar Heels managed a two-game total of just five hits against Bulldog pitcher Erin Arevalo. In wins against Georgia Southern and Coastal Carolina, UNC combined for 15. Sunday's loss to the Bulldogs ended UNC's season, and the team finished with a record of 43-15.

On Friday, UNC squeaked by Georgia Southern 2-1 in eight innings. Saturday, the Tar Heels lost to Georgia 3-2 but bounced back later in the day to defeat

Coastal Carolina — but only 5-3. In the regional final on Sunday, the Bulldogs eliminated UNC, 2-1.

"We were right there with a team that was a top-10 seed," Papa said. "But our bats kind of lacked in the postseason for us, which was disappointing, because that was one of our fortes during the regular season."

But Papa said she was still thrilled with her team's effort. Georgia, the tournament's 10th-seeded team, presented a formidable challenge. But UNC proved it could hang with Georgia in front of a Bulldog crowd.

"We competed at a level I wanted us to compete at," Papa said. "Everyone left everything on the field, whether they were on the bench, in the dugout or out on the field, we left it all there. You can feel good about a performance when you do that."

Instead, it was the little things that kept UNC from advancing in both games. On Saturday, two costly errors in the first inning allowed Georgia to score two

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Donna Papa, UNC softball coach

quick runs.

Too often the Tar Heels left runners stranded. On Sunday, in the top of the third inning, a Constance Orr single gave UNC its first baserunner. Chelsey Butler, pinch-running for Orr, stole second and reached third on a sacrifice bunt, but advanced no further. Tisha Mahon struck out and Kelli Wheeler popped out in foul territory to end the inning.

"We were making good contact, but just hitting it to a lot of their defense, and their defense was making plays," pitcher Lori Spingola said. "We just couldn't come up with those timely hits to score the runners."

And when Haleigh Dickey homered for her team's only run in the top of the seventh inning on Sunday, the bases were empty.

Though she acknowledged the difficulty her bats faced

— in Arevalo's breaking balls, especially — Papa said she was pleased with the way Spingola pitched.

"She pitched every inning of every game for us," Papa said. "I think she matured as a pitcher on the mound. She was very tough and throwing some of her best stuff. We just didn't get the hits that we needed."

Papa said UNC's younger players will be able to use this experience as a stepping stone toward tournament success in years to come.

"I told the kids that will be returning, 'Know how this feels and know what it takes to play at this level for every game to get out of the regional.' The freshmen and sophomores now know better what it takes."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@dailytarheel.com.



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Lori Spingola pitched every game for the Tar Heels in regional action this past weekend, but the Georgia Bulldogs ended UNC's season.

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