

SportsMonday

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'When we play like that, I feel like we can't be beat'



DTH/ZHENWEI ZHANG

Senior guard Marcus Paige (5) scored 15 points in the game against the Pittsburgh Panthers Sunday afternoon. The Tar Heels won 85-64.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

NORTH CAROLINA 85
PITTSBURGH 64

By C Jackson Cowart
Assistant Sports Editor

As Marcus Paige sprinted up the court on a routine fast break, doubt crept into his mind. Moments earlier, the North Carolina guard had missed his second 3-pointer in as many attempts. With under nine minutes left in the first half of Sunday's 85-64 win over Pittsburgh, No. 9 UNC led by just six. And as he and sophomore Justin Jackson — both mired in recent shooting woes — launched their offensive assault on the lone Panther defender, Paige knew what to expect.

"We always work on that in practice," he said. "Getting in 2-on-1 situations, making the defense commit and then dishing the ball off." But as of late, the routine had betrayed the Tar Heels.

Once the top team in the land, North Carolina (21-4, 10-2 ACC) had dropped two of its past three games, its lone win coming in dramatic fashion against ACC-worst Boston College. Despite earning ACC

Preseason Co-Player of the Year honors, Paige has struggled in his senior campaign.

So as Paige approached the basket against Pittsburgh (17-7, 6-6 ACC), the doubts resurfaced. He was too far away — he had to be. One hand or two?

But when Jackson dished the ball to Paige, the senior redefined the routine. He took flight.

The two-handed slam granted Paige the first two of his 15 points and earned Jackson the second of his six assists on the day.

"We reverted away from the norm when we were in the slump," Paige said. "Now we're kind of back to being ourselves."

After battling midseason struggles, Paige and Jackson have combined for 61 points in the previous two games. Against the Panthers, they were two of five Tar Heels to score in double-figures.

But amid their scoring breakouts, each recorded multiple assists — two of seven players to do so.

"That's just the way we need to play," said senior Brice Johnson, who added three dimes to his game-high 19 points. "That's the way Coach (Roy Williams) wants us to play all the time."

On Sunday, Williams had plenty to praise. Of UNC's 32 made field goals, 26 came off an assist — its highest total in ACC play

this season.

"If you take care of the name on the front of the jersey, the name on the back of the jersey will be taken care of," Williams said.

For North Carolina, it seemed everything had finally taken care of itself.

Returning to their typical starting lineup, the Tar Heels shot a season-high 59.3 percent from the field, 53.3 percent from behind the arc and 86.7 percent at the line.

UNC's stifling defense held Pittsburgh to 37.3 percent shooting and forced 19 turnovers — sparking 16 fast-break points.

Following the abysmal three-game road stretch, the Tar Heels seemed right at home.

"If we had swept through that (road trip), we'd be sitting pretty right now ..." Paige said. "(But) it's the ACC — you can't just run over everybody."

Yet if UNC plays like it did on Sunday, conference foes will be hard-pressed to halt the preseason ACC favorites.

And with Duke coming to Chapel Hill on Wednesday, the Tar Heels are hoping their old identity is here to stay.

"When we play like that, I feel like we can't be beat," said wing Theo Pinson.

Maybe everything is back to normal, after all.

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McCool heats up in win over San Diego State

WOMEN'S LACROSSE

NORTH CAROLINA 20
SAN DIEGO STATE 7

By Ben Coley
Senior Writer

Before Sunday's game against San Diego State, North Carolina sophomore Marie McCool was focused on improving her shooting ability.

In No. 2 UNC's 20-7 victory over San Diego State at Fetzer Field, McCool found her stroke and set a personal record in the process. The sophomore tallied five goals — a new career high.

"(Shooting) is something I've been struggling with the past couple of weeks," McCool said. "And I'm kind of hard on myself with it. I was really focusing on getting it around the goalie and faking and shooting."

Coach Jenny Levy asked the sophomore to shoot at least 10 times in this weekend's games against High Point and the Aztecs.

McCool has been inching closer to that total — she shot three times versus James Madison on Feb. 6, five times versus High Point on Friday and eight times against San Diego State.

"We really wanted to increase the number of shots (McCool) was getting," Levy said. "But we want them to happen organically, in the flow of the game."

Before Sunday's match, McCool hadn't scored more than three goals in a game during her career. She scored four goals in the first half and added her fifth goal about 11 minutes into the second half. In the 2016 season, McCool has seven goals.

Four of her five scores against the Aztecs were unassisted. Junior attacker Molly Hendrick believes one of McCool's biggest strengths is the ability to move in isolation.

"She's always one of our good, top dodgers," Hendrick said. "So when we just give her space and let her dodge, she can always do that."

McCool hustled in transition by scooping four ground balls, tied for the second-most on UNC (3-0). The sophomore said she wants to be one of the hardest-working players on the field.

"I think my speed really helps me out with that and gives me the ability to work hard on the field," McCool said. "And my teammates are what helped me. If they didn't get through for me, I wouldn't be able to beat my girls."

Levy said McCool is hard on herself because she wants to achieve and play at the highest level.

She recently spoke with McCool and told the young player to clear her mind, "rip it up" and just have fun.

"I think (McCool) said in practice she's been getting stuffed by the goalies, but our goalies are really good," Levy said.

"And I thought today, the shots she got and the goals she scored were not necessarily because she was trying to be a ball hog, but that was the opportunity that was in front of her, and she took it and did a great job."

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Balanced offense leads UNC men's lacrosse to win

MEN'S LACROSSE

NORTH CAROLINA 14
FURMAN 6

By Ethan Belshe
Staff Writer

After losing three players who accounted for almost half of the 2015 team's points, the North Carolina men's lacrosse team knew there would be some changes to the attack coming into this season.

At times last year, the Tar Heels' attack depended on the individual skills of Jimmy Bitter, Joey Sankey and Chad Tutton to manufacture offense. The trio combined to tally 191 points in the form of 104 goals and 87 assists while playing their way to All-American selections.

But this year the attack's strategy has changed.

"A lot has been talked about our team losing some superstars, which we did, but we're at our best when the guys are all playing together," Coach Joe Breschi said. "Instead of standing around watching the superstars play, everyone has to play."

This season, the North Carolina attack's game plan revolves around patience and balance instead of the sparks of individual brilliance that powered the 2015 team.

"We put in an offense and our job is to execute it," said senior attackman Steve Pontrello. "It's different from last year with those two studs Jimmy and Joey, so just sharing the ball on attack and listening to our coach is important."

"The focus really isn't on who is scoring the goals, it's more just on our offense scoring."

Patrick Kelly
North Carolina senior midfielder

This fact was abundantly clear during Saturday's 14-6 win against Furman at Fetzer Field. The Tar Heels (2-0) executed an unselfish style that led to seven players tallying goals and no single player scoring more than three times.

"The focus really isn't on who is scoring the goals, it's more just on our offense scoring," said senior midfielder and team captain Patrick Kelly.

Balance isn't the only thing Breschi has emphasized to his players this season. He also wants his team to be more systematic in

the way it attacks, especially when it comes to shooting.

Instead of taking the first available shot, Breschi prefers his players to work the ball around in order to find the best opportunity to score.

"We're focusing on being efficient and tuning our game as best we can," Kelly said.

UNC showed the kind of efficiency their coach wants to see on Saturday, as 29 out of their 50 shots were on goal.

According to Breschi, North Carolina needs to keep up this balanced and meticulous attack if it wants to continue to have success



DTH/KENDALL BAGLEY

The North Carolina men's lacrosse team celebrates its 14-6 win against Furman on Saturday afternoon at Fetzer Field.

this season.

"When we share the ball, we're very good. When we don't, we're not very good," he said. "We can't stray from what

we know best which is sharing the ball and taking quality shots, not just the first shot."

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Kendra Lynch throws 2 complete-game shutouts in Texas Classic

SOFTBALL

NORTH CAROLINA 5
ARKANSAS 0

By Nicole Caporaso
Staff Writer

The North Carolina softball team might not have come away from the Texas Classic this weekend with a winning record, but it found a bright spot in junior pitcher Kendra Lynch.

In UNC's season-opening weekend in Austin, Texas, the

Tar Heels went 2-3.

"The first weekend, we really try to find out a little more about our team and kind of figure out lineups and things like that," Coach Donna Papa said.

Lynch, who started 43-of-51 appearances in the outfield in 2015, was the starting pitcher for Friday's season-opening 9-0 win against North Dakota State and Sunday's 5-0 win over Arkansas.

With the departure of ace Kaylee Carlson — who transferred to Auburn this offseason — Lynch hoped to fill the void.

"I knew this was going to have to be a really big role for me to fill and step into," Lynch said. "I like playing other positions, but I loved it this weekend ... I really enjoy this role and where I'm at right now."

In Friday's first game, the Tar Heels dominated the Thundar behind Lynch, who allowed just one hit while striking out a career-high seven batters in her second career complete-game shutout.

Offensively, it was a team affair, as every Tar Heel in the starting lineup collected a hit or a run.

The Tar Heels weren't as offensively loaded in Friday's second game — an eight-inning battle against Texas.

UNC took an early 4-1 lead in the top of the second inning after senior Kristen Brown hit a three-run shot, but the Longhorns ultimately tied the game at 5 in the bottom of the fifth.

Coming in relief of starting pitcher Sydney Matzko, Lynch inherited two runners, who both scored to tie the game. The Tar Heels went on to lose 6-5 in the bottom of the eighth, as Lynch gave up a

bases-loaded walk.

North Carolina lost both of its games on Saturday, dropping a second game against Texas 7-6 and losing to the Thundar 5-2.

Lynch started the second game against Texas, pitching six innings while giving up four earned runs.

UNC ended the weekend on a high note, as Lynch threw her second complete-game shutout in three days against Arkansas.

Lynch said she felt comfortable this weekend and attributed her success to making

opposing teams feel off balance with a variety of pitches.

"I was changing their vision going up, but then I was getting them off balance with my off-speed," Lynch said.

Although the weekend didn't go as planned at times, Brown said she anticipates good things in the rest of the season.

"Obviously we didn't win as many games as we wanted to win, but the hitting was good and the pitching was good," she said. "We just didn't make key plays at the right time."

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