

# Baseball season ends in Gainesville

By Pat James  
Summer Sports Editor

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JUNE 5 — Heads hanging in disappointment and feet shuffling, the North Carolina baseball team solemnly

headed into the dugout at McKethan Stadium after its season-ending 12-5 loss to Long Beach State on June 2.

Senior Parks Jordan, who hit 1-for-10 in the Gainesville Regional, was steps away from departing the field for the final time in his blue and white uniform when a familiar face intercepted his path.

Coach Mike Fox stood with his arms spread wide and embraced Jordan, one of three seniors whose career concluded, before he ducked into the shadows of the dugout.

"Saying goodbye to seniors is the worst part of coaching — it just stinks," Fox said. "Their career is over, and you spent a lot of time with them. I feel bad for them. If the world worked like it was supposed to, your seniors would go out on a high note and play great baseball. It's like life — it doesn't work that way."

The loss to the Dirtbags came on the tail end of a 5-2 win against No. 2 national seed Florida on May 31 to fend off elimination after falling to LBSU the day before.

And for a youthful team that battled through adversity all season and will return most of its starters, Fox says UNC (35-27) will build off its appearance in the regionals heading into next year.

"I think we got a lot out of our kids this year," Fox said. "So some good experience for our young players to get into a regional, play in a regional, win a game in a regional and lose a game in a regional. It's an experience, and they've just got to go through it."

Early in the season, the Tar Heels' chances of making a 13th consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance took a severe hit.

Ranked No. 13 in the preseason, UNC opened the year by dropping its opening



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Alex Raburn is called safe as he slides into home plate during the Tar Heels' final NCAA Tournament game in Gainesville, FL, on June 2. The Tar Heels ended their season with a record of 35-27.

series against the College of Charleston and home opener to Xavier, the first loss in a home opener since Fox became head coach in 1999.

But following a walk-off win in their series finale against Xavier on Feb. 23, the Tar Heels reeled off 11 victories over their next 13 games — justifying the preseason hype surrounding the team.

And as quickly as UNC seemed to be gaining momentum, the wheels fell off. The team dropped seven of its next eight games, including a sweep by Duke for the first

time since 1994.

"We've just got to start playing inning by inning, winning every inning," said catcher Korey Dunbar after a 3-1 loss to Winthrop in March. "Right now we're just not doing that. And I don't know what we've got to do, but we've just got to step it up — no excuses at all."

The stretch dug the Tar Heels into must-win territory for the final stretch of the season. And with victories over Virginia, Florida State and Miami, the team clinched a spot in the ACC Tournament.

After a 1-2 start in the conference tournament, UNC used a six-run eighth inning to capture a 13-7 win against Maryland that propelled the team into the NCAA Tournament. And although his team ultimately fell short of returning to the College World Series, Fox said his team never gave in.

"I'm proud of our guys for continuing to play hard and compete until the very end. That's all you can ask."

Contact the desk editor at [sports@dailytarheel.com](mailto:sports@dailytarheel.com).

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