

Sports

A UNC fan's reaction the '09-'10 college basketball season

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As a die-hard Carolina Tar Heel fan, I have had a rough past couple of months. After an amazing basketball season in 2008-2009 capped off by a national championship, I expected to see more of the same during the 2009-2010 season. After all, we were the top-ranked team in the preseason.

But then the season started and shortly thereafter, I was reminded that that we had lost our top scorers to the NBA. Then, after a couple of early injuries I was reminded of how young the Tar Heels were this year. But Roy Williams was still our coach and that gave me confidence that we could bounce back and still be competitive this year.

So, after a disappointing season culminated by a loss in the NIT, the only thing that could hurt more was having our rivals succeed us as National Champions. After watching the National Championship game Monday night, I found myself beginning the process of grieving Carolina basketball's poor season.

Denial:

Waking up Tuesday morning, I avoided newspapers heralding the new National Champions. Maybe if I just don't read about it, that skinny kid, what's-his-name-with-the-'stache who plays for Butler, will hit that half court shot to keep the National Championship out of Duke's trophy case. Hey, maybe the game wasn't even played. Perhaps, by avoiding newspapers for a year or so, I will be able to pick up a sports page to see my beloved Tar Heels cutting down the nets after another National Championship. Maybe, if I'm lucky, I can even go so far as to block out everything from Selection Sunday on through until next November.

More than that though, I find myself trying to believe that UNC didn't even play any games this year. We didn't lose to Duke twice, we didn't go 5-11 in the

ACC, and we didn't lose in the NIT. None of that happened.

In fact, next year Tyler Hansbrough and Ty Lawson will be back starting for Carolina. The word on the street is that Michael Jordan circa 1984 might even suit up for a few games.



Anger:

Hansbrough and Lawson are but memories of a more successful past. MJ in Carolina blue is even more of a distant memory.

Denial wears off. It really happened. We had a losing record in the ACC and we are no longer the reigning National Champions. Worse yet, Duke is.

I get it, but I'm not happy. The second stage of my grief sets in as my anger over the entire season blinds me to everything else relating to college basketball this year.

"Duke played an easy schedule," I think. "They were given an easy bracket in the tournament," I say. "For God's sake, they played a 5-seed for the National Championship," I cry.

Carolina didn't get a fair chance, and when they did, bad luck cost us wins. This season just wasn't fair.

This buildup of anger leads me to question whether maybe the NCAA had it out for the Tar Heels.

Bargaining:

Anger subsides. No use being angry, what's done is done. The Tar Heels had a down year and it was no one's fault, but come on- did Duke really have to win the championship?

Maybe we can get the NCAA to help us out a bit, just give the title to Butler. That would be really cool. It would sure take the sting away from our disappointing season. After all, Butler worked really hard to go as far as they did, and they deserve some recognition too.

I had an idea. I e-mailed the NCAA to see if maybe they could tweak the records from this year and go back and make one of Butler's two late shots, which would have put them ahead, go in.

Depression:

Unfortunately, the NCAA told me that they had some sort of ethical dilemma about just giving the National Championship to someone and that Duke really did deserve to win. They also told me that there was no conspiracy against the Tar Heels this year, and that although Butler worked hard, they did lose to Duke, so Duke is the National Champion.

Finally, I came to terms with the reality that UNC is no longer the reigning National Champions and that this season really happened.

This is depressing. I can already hear the taunts at Cameron Indoor next March and it makes getting out of bed difficult. I don't want to face a cruel world where Duke can win a National Championship and Carolina won't even be invited to the NCAA tournament.

Once on campus classes were irrelevant, focus was impossible, and the only thing visible was that smug smile on Krzyzewski's face.

Acceptance:

However, a new day dawned. I realized that every now and then, teams have to go through a transitional phase. After a disappointing year like this one, the will to win will only be stronger for the Tar Heels next year.

As I walked around campus, I remembered that we'll be returning a number of strong young players who can build another dynasty just like Lawson, Green, Hansbrough, and Ellington did after the 2005 National Championship.

I look forward to seeing several more years of success from Zeller, Davis (if he comes back), Drew II, and Henson, and to watching Will Graves have a successful senior year.

Finally, I understood that this wasn't a failed season. All the experience that the young Tar Heels got this year can only help them next year.

Because there will be a next year. And when the 2010-2011 season finally comes around, the Blue Devils, the ACC, and the entire NCAA will have to watch out for the next group of players wearing Carolina Blue to fight for a national title.