

Deacons find answers, but too late to pass the Cardinal's test

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SPORTS ANALYSIS

Wake Forest went into the NCAA tournament searching for some way... any way to regain its form as a basketball team, as opposed to their recent productions of the Tim Duncan Show.

Dave Odom, Wake's head coach, berated his players about standing and watching Duncan play, called his team "spectators" in the media, rearranged his line-up countless times, and still the Deacs did not respond.

Sean Allen, Ricky Peral, Tony Rutland, Jerry Braswell, all key ingredients in the Deacons run to last years elite eight, rarely showed up in the Deacons last 7 games.

As a result Wake dropped 5 of those contests, including a drubbing in the second round of the ACC tournament at the hands of the University of North Carolina.

Then suddenly, with 8:35 left in the second half of Sunday's game (March 16) against Stanford, a Wake Forest team showed up for the first time since January. Peral, Rutland and even Braswell, inexplicably started playing like the Demon Deacons circa March 1996.

The trio combined to hit on thirteen of their last eighteen shots and exploded for 25 points over the last 8 1/2 minutes. It was a performance that would have certainly carried them to victory, if the Deacons had not played the first 31 1/2 minutes like avid Duncan fans with really good seats.

The Deacons sleepwalked through the first half, especially the Wake guards who were held scoreless throughout the first twenty minutes and were largely responsible for Wake's ten turnovers in the first half. While the Deacon backcourt floundered, Brevin Knight the nation's premiere point man ran the Cardinal attack with precision. Knight's ability to penetrate at will and create opportunities for himself and his teammates was a crippling blow to Wake's chances to advance to the West Regional. He finished with 19 points, five assists, four steals and only one turnover in the 39 minutes that he ran the Stanford offense.

"This was the third year we had to face a dominating big man," said Knight. "The last two years we lost to Marcus Camby and this year to get by Tim Duncan and Wake Forest... it's like a dream."

That dream became reality, in part, because of Stanford's defense on Duncan in the first half. The Cardinal threw four

different large bodies at Duncan and used 9 fouls in the first stanza to limit, disrupt and frustrate him. The strategy showed true dividends in the second frame, when Duncan seemed to tire. The Cardinal was unabashed in their physical play and after a first round slug fest with 345 pound Brad Millard of St. Mary's the Wake Forest center and savior looked as if he had emptied his tank of miracles. He scored his last field goals with just over 14 minutes left in the game, and only added a pair of free-throw to round out his last game with 18 points, 20 rebounds, and three block shots.

"I think everybody saw what happened," said Odom. "It was just one body after another coming at him, and it's very hard to hold that off."

Duncan said he wasn't caught totally off-guard by the game plan.

"It wasn't a big surprise, I thought they were out there to play physical like everybody else," he said "That was the theme at the end of the year, everybody had to play physical and knock me around. And they just picked up on it."

The rest of the Demon Deacons looked despondent while Duncan's play made it clear that he was running on fumes, and the Cardinal lead ballooned to 13 points. Then when it was apparent that the crutch of the

Nation's best player had been snatched from under them the rest of the Wake team decided to stand and deliver.

"We wanted to go further in the tournament not just for the team, but for Tim," said Braswell of the Wake charge back into contention. "He has done a lot for this program and a lot for this team. We just wanted him to go out with something good on his back - and that was a national championship."

The Peral, Braswell, Rutland resurgence whittled the Stanford lead down to 4 points, but the Cardinal second half free throw shooting (17 of 22) and two late jumpers by Pete Sauer, a 6-7 sophomore sealed Stanford's travel plans to San Jose, Ca. (site of the West Regional finals).

And like that Tim Duncan's collegiate career ended, without fan fare of a Final Four berth. He said he would never look back and second guess the team and that he had no remorse about his decision to return to college.

"I have no regrets about my decision to come back," he said. "I would give anything in the world to come back and be with these guys."

College basketball fans have no qualms with Duncan's decision either, only the regret that they will not see No. 21 in Indianapolis.

Hosiery 17- and-under All-Stars place second at tourney

The Hanes Hosiery 17 and under All-Star team recently finished 2nd in the North Carolina State 17 and under tournament held in Charlotte, N.C. They were defeated by the Charlotte All-Stars from Mecklenburg County in the Championship game 64-51.

The Hosiery All-Stars' road to the finals included a 54-53 win over Alamance County in a heart-stopper. The Hosiery team relied on the sparkling offensive performances of B.J. Briston, Jordan Lash, Nick Hairston, Donnie Allen, and Josh Talbert in this game and throughout the tour-

namment. The defensive leaders were Justin Thomas, John Forte, Anthony Scott, and Larry Wharton.

The tournament, held in the Grady Cole Center, was attended by teams from Lee County, Orange County, Alamance County, Charlotte, N.C., and Winston-Salem.



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