

University of National Champions

North Carolina's championship brings title back to Chapel Hill

National Championship
by Steve Politi, DTH sports editor

First the NCAA takes 64 teams and throws them into a quest for the collegiate title — The Final Four, otherwise known as March Madness. Just making it is a celebration. For some, others, with proud basketball pasts, play to get crowned best in the nation.

And that's out of thousands of schools in the nation. Tigers, Bears, Cougars, Blue Hens marched to the Big Dance in New Orleans. Throw in some Jayhawks, Wolverines, Wildcats, all title hungry creatures, yearning for celebrations made famous by victories of the past.

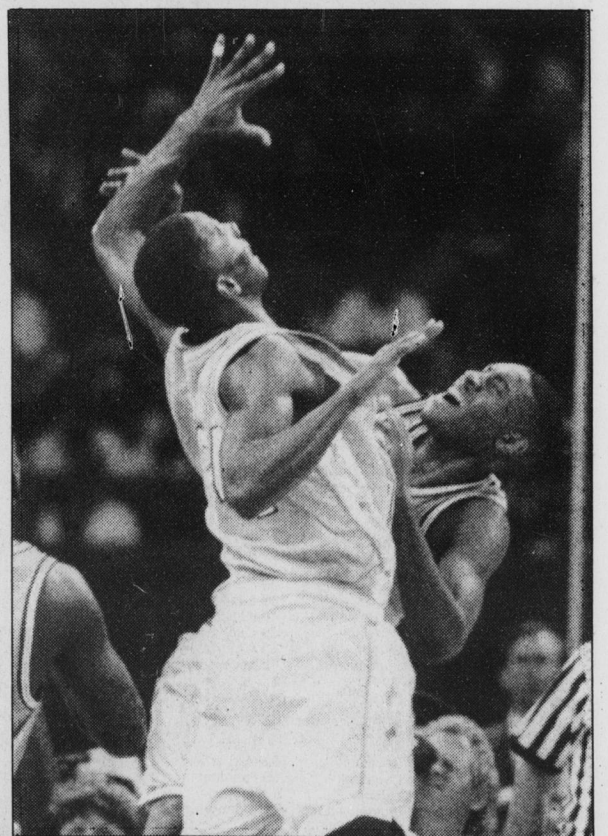
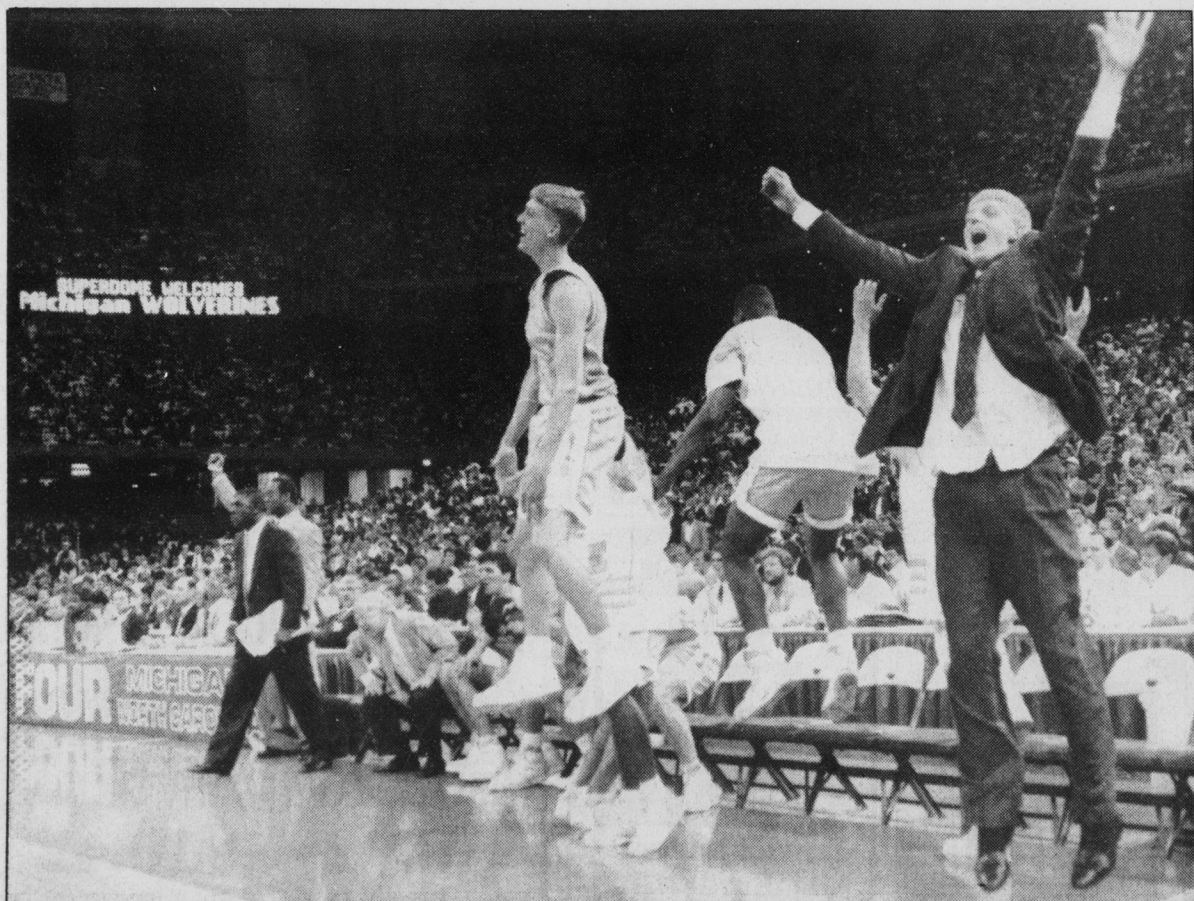
Our Tar Heels had to have looked at their past. 1982 — Dean Smith's first super celebration. When North Carolina claimed the NCAA title. Chapel Hill, New Orleans and the rest of the nation watched Michael, accurate as a point-blank dart throw, hit the bullseye for the most famous shot of March.

In 1993, North Carolina had a similar march to New Orleans. Ranked No. 1 in the nation, The Heels stayed at the top, rallying past 34 teams, but few accolades were thrown at UNC — no one win worthy of a celebration, no one win earned the school a title.

But then they played for the national title. Double-zero played like a monster, throwing the ball in the hoop from anywhere. Phelps' passes, sharper than the trophy's top, got the nation's attention as April replaced March. It was almost time for celebration.

Then Michigan tried to cancel the celebration. Dean called for Four Corners and job passes until Chris Webber became the joke of the nation. Then No. 21, the sharp-shooter, marched to the line to seal the national title. Unfazed, he hit his free throws.

The long march ended with a celebration. It's as simple as a free throw or a bounce pass — Carolina's got the title, we're best in the nation.



PHOTOS BY ANDREW CLINE