

# Heels show different faces

Not just the comeback kids

BY DAVID ELY  
SPORTS EDITOR

OMAHA, Neb. — Through three games in the 2007 College World Series, three very different North Carolina squads have made an appearance at Rosenblatt Stadium.

Friday's game against Mississippi State featured the cardiac Tar Heels. This is a team the Carolina faithful know all too well. A team that continually spots opponents early and waits until its nearly too late to mount a comeback.

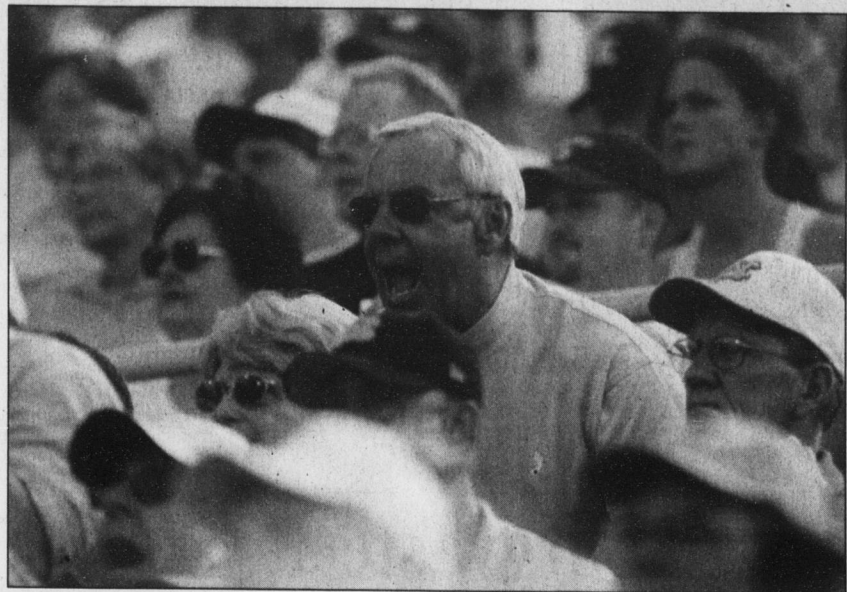
This time North Carolina used a six-run sixth inning to cage the Bulldogs behind timely hitting by junior Benji Johnson, whose RBI double tied the game, and first baseman Dustin Ackley, who hit a two-run single down the left-field line.

"Once again, we were able to come back from behind," UNC head coach Mike Fox said Friday night after the win. "I'm not sure how long we're going to be able to keep doing that."

Fox's words were indicative of what was to come for the Tar Heels — and proved to be the type of predication that would make Nostradamus blush — as Rice jumped all over North Carolina from the get-go en route to a 14-4 route Sunday night.

No longer was UNC the kind of team that rallied from early inning troubles. Instead, the Tar Heels of Sunday night resembled a squad that was in over its head as the Owls lead grew and grew.

This was a team that had rarely reared its head at any point earlier in the year. Sure, North Carolina had lost 13 other games up to that



Basketball coach Roy Williams cheers with fellow Tar Heels in the game against Mississippi State of the College World Series at Rosenblatt Stadium. Coach Williams also attended games of the CWS last year.

point but not many in this startling of a fashion. The only other time the Tar Heels lost by 10 runs was against N.C. State on April 27.

That's what was so surprising. In what Fox called "a good old fashioned fanny whopping," North Carolina was beat in just about every facet of the game.

For the second straight game in the College World Series, a UNC starting pitcher was lit up by opposing batters. In similar fashion to teammate Robert Woodard on Friday, right-hander Alex White (6-6) lasted just 1.1 innings allowing six runs on five hits.

"It was pretty bad tonight," White

said Sunday. "The frustrating thing was, I felt like I had good stuff, especially the first and second inning."

If the difference between Friday's and Sunday's Tar Heels was startling enough, the Tuesday edition looked like they came from completely different planet.

The dominance that had disappeared from the UNC rotation reappeared as right-hand Luke Putkonen put on a performance for the ages, striking out seven Cardinals while giving up just three hits through seven innings.

"From the stuff standpoint, Luke's got just as good as anybody in the country," North Carolina pitching coach Scott Forbes said on Monday as UNC was preparing for its game against Louisville.

Tuesday, Putkonen backed up his coach's comments by firing a barrage of deadly pitches that dominated the opposition. To put Putkonen's start in perspective, you just have to look at the stat sheets from the Tar Heels' previous two games.

Then you'll see that when

Putkonen recorded his sixth out of the game, he had registered the longest outing of any North Carolina starter in the 2007 College World Series.

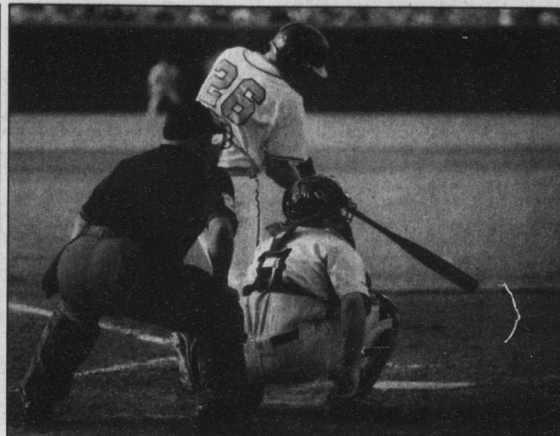
Just as the pitching staff was putting together its best effort of the postseason, the Tar Heel hitters were looking weaker than they have at any point this season.

UNC batters could only muster three hits against Louisville and even sent 21 guys up to the plate in between two of its hits. A second inning single by center fielder Seth Williams and a eighth inning double by Josh Horton.

North Carolina has proven throughout the year that it has the ability to put forth a complete performance, on the mound and on the plate. It has also shown — albeit in separate games — in Omaha that ability is still there.

The only thing the Tar Heels have to do now is put the both pieces together.

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.



Designated hitter and catcher Benji Johnson hits against Rice in the second game of the College World Series in Rosenblatt Stadium.

# Catcher pops the question

Met fiancée at last year's CWS

BY DAVID ELY  
SPORTS EDITOR

OMAHA, Neb. — When North Carolina catcher Benji Johnson arrived at Rosenblatt Stadium for practice last Thursday, he carried with him something a little more valuable than his trusty bat and glove.

Safely tucked away with the rest of his stuff was a ring that Johnson bought just a couple of weeks ago. And while the rest of his teammates were about to stretch before practice, Johnson casually strolled over to his girlfriend of one year, dropped to a knee and proposed.

Sorry ladies, Michaela Ammerman said yes.

But when you think about it, how could the answer be anything different?

Especially when you consider that the proposal took place at the same spot where the two met one year earlier.

"She volunteered to work at the game last year and it just happened to be the Clemson game when we were playing," a smiling Johnson recalled.

"Her and her friend went out there and they wanted a baseball. ... So I went out there and gave her a ball and started talking to her, and that's how it started."

The two proceeded to hang out during the course of North Carolina's run through the College World Series, and three days after UNC's season ended, she flew down to Wilmington, where Johnson was playing summer ball.

From then on, Ammerman, who is a linguist specialist in the Air Force, would visit about once a month, as the relationship became more and more serious. And although Johnson didn't propose

until the Tar Heels made it back to the CWS, he knew Ammerman was the girl for him two months after that fateful day in Omaha.

The same can't be said for his fiancée.

"The day she met me, she called her mom and said she was gonna marry me — the day she met me," Johnson said, a 17th round selection by the Atlanta Braves.

So after Johnson settled on a ring, with the aid of teammate Adam Warren and his sister, all that was left was the proposal. And while his teammates pressed Johnson to let ESPN in on his secret in hopes of garnering some national attention, Johnson never wanted to pull an Ian Johnson — the Boise State running back who proposed to his girlfriend following his game-winning two-point conversion in the Fiesta Bowl on national television this year.

"I just thought for me and her, it would be really special just to do it kinda how I met her last year," he said.

With Ammerman standing in the spot where they met, Johnson walked toward her with a ball in his hands — just like how they met — and proposed.

"I gave her the ball," Johnson said. "I think I wrote 'It all started here June 18, 2006,' and then I proposed to her."

Although it's been said that no one on the team shed any tears, Johnson did admit his fellow catcher, Tim Federowicz, got goose bumps when he watched.

Once head coach Mike Fox had gotten word of the news, he mainly wanted to make sure that he didn't take any bad advice, especially from his teammates. But don't think that meant Fox had many words of wisdom to pass along either.

"I've been married too long to give him good advice," Fox said.

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

# It don't matter if you're black, white

I, like many other sports aficionados who were watching SportsCenter Saturday night, laughed when the highlights of the Chicago Cubs-San Diego Padres game appeared on screen.

I'm talking about the game where Padres pitcher Chris Young and Cubs first baseman Derrek Lee got into a little fistcuff.

See, Young beamed Lee in the back of the arm. Lee said something about it. Yadda yadda yadda, the benches were cleared as the two athletes traded missed punches.

Happens all the time in baseball. The fans love it. No problem right? Right?

Well actually, there is a problem. A big problem. And the problem isn't that Young and Lee couldn't land their hooks.

The problem is the lack of public outcry. The fact that if this happened in the NBA, people would care.

Take last December's brawl between the New York Knicks and the Denver Nuggets. Denver's Carmelo Anthony and J.R. Smith get into a fight with Nate Robinson, Marqise Collins and Jared Jeffries, and suddenly it's the talk on every sports show.

There's a reason for this. And the reason is race.

The NBA is perceived as a "black league," so when its players get into on-court fights, people use terms like thug without thinking twice. On the other hand, the MLB or NHL, which are generally labeled as "white leagues," fight all the time without barely a raise of an eyebrow.



DAVID ELY  
I CALL IT PERK BODY ZONE

It's hypocritical, and it's despicable.

Guys like Young or Kyle Farnsworth are treated to the saying "boys will be boys" along with a pat on the back. But when Jermaine O'Neal justifiably defends himself from a fan who invaded the court during the unfortunate Pacers-Pistons melee, he is crucified and suspended for 25 games.

White America can't relate to most NBA players. They don't understand them, and they don't try to. So when they see those O'Neal and Carmelo fights, their only reaction is to label them thugs.

It's not right, but it's the way things have been every since the Fab Five came to Michigan wearing baggy shorts and when Allen Iverson came to Philly with his tattoos and street swagger.

I'm not saying that we need to start calling baseball players thugs or hooligans the next time someone rushes the pitcher. I'm just saying that we need to be a little more sensible the next time two NBA players decide to throw down.

After all, at least they've proven they know how to land a punch.

Contact David Ely at dely@email.unc.edu.

# UNC earns honors in rowing, Carlyle Cup

FROM WIRE REPORTS

North Carolina junior Lisy McIntee, a member of the Tar Heel rowing team, has earned All-America honors as selected by the Collegiate Rowing Coaches Association (CRCA). McIntee, from Bala Cynwyd, Pa., is the first UNC rower to be named All-America. She was selected for the second time.

The award caps an outstanding year for McIntee, whose 2007 accolades include All-Atlantic Coast Conference, CRCA National Scholar Athlete and team MVP.

"Lisy has been a tremendous asset to the program this year," UNC coach Sarah Haney said. "She was a leader on and off the water. Lisy is a very diligent, hard-working athlete, and I am pleased that she is being honored for efforts. All of us at Carolina Rowing are very proud of her."

McIntee also earned CRCA All-South Region first-team honors for 2007. She is the first UNC rower since 2001 to earn all-region recognition and only the fifth Tar Heel named to the all-region first team.

## Carlyle Cup

Brandon Tate's kick returns for touchdowns, Tyler Hansbrough's 26-point, 17-rebound performance and Jenna Long's dramatic, cup-saving rally on the tennis court highlight the achievements of North Carolina's Carlyle Cup Most Valuable Performances for 2006-07.

The MVP trophies are given to the student-athletes at UNC and Duke who most excelled in the past year in the annual Carlyle Cup, the symbol of the prominent rivalry in college athletics.

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