

SPORTS

In the back row at the SAC seeing ants turn to people

By **TIM CROTHERS**
Assistant Sports Editor

Aisle 202A, Row W, Seat 3. It is the one of the worst seats in the Dean E. Smith Student Activities Center. Trust me, I sampled it. Behind me was a wall. In front of me, there were 21,443 Carolina Blue fans in Carolina blue seats and ten dots, five of each color, milling around on the court like ants on a saltine. "There isn't a bad seat in the house." I heard it a hundred times from every public relation involved in the inauguration of the Dean Dome. The surprising thing is, it's true. My seat, although it made my ears pop and was not padded, afforded a very reasonable view of the ant action. (Writer draws a deep breath) "I almost (gulp) like the SAC."

Walking up the hill to Manning

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Drive, a flying saucer appears on the horizon. It is the Starship Smith which seems to have touched down like a meteor, sunk into a barren section of earth. But no, it is the Dean Dome. Where else on the globe could you find 20,000 or so people, all dressed in a distinctive shade of blue, shouting obscenities like "Go to hell Duke" or "How much did you give, Fred?"

On the steps of the SAC, people held up \$100 bills. I don't know about you, but I started gazing down at the ticket clenched in my sweaty palm and saw a compact disc player or Spring Break in Miami Beach and heck you can see it better on T.V. anyway and . . . and . . . Never!

The next thing I knew I was inside the House That Dean Built (with the help of a few rich friends). My first thought was; HUGE! For someone who had spent four blissful years germinating in the friendly confines of Carmichael Auditorium, this was quite an uprooting experience.

Kenny Smith put it best last week before the SAC opener. "It seems too big to practice in," Smith said. "It's a little intimidating, but it closes in on you." The same feeling Smith discovered in the quiet, cavernous arena during practice, I found true on Saturday with the place jammed. It was a bit

overwhelming at first, but eventually the ants turned into people, albeit very small people.

The Game decided the best college basketball team in the nation on Jan. 18, 1986. But what the 20,000 fans packed inside the SAC that day will boast and playfully exaggerate about in the company of friends and relatives decades from now was the spectacle.

They'll talk about the Duke players wandering out on the court for the first time with looks of astonishment on their collective faces. They'll talk about the ten-minute drum roll that preceded the Tar Heel's opening appearance. They'll talk about Warren Martin's dunk that officially baptized the SAC and about his fist-in-the-air acknowledgment to the appreciative throng chanting "Warren! Warren! Warren!" after he'd fouled out. Oh, and they'll mention the game. "Yeah, the Heels won by five or seven or something. It was great, but I'll never forget seeing that arena for the first time."

Back on earth, I saw the beginning of what will become a tradition. Hoard your Charmin on game days if you live in Hinton-James. But the most pleasant part of the SAC is that it's so far away from home. I had twice as much time walking home to savor a sweet victory.

So the SAC may take several games to get accustomed to, but before long the novelty will wear off. Better get started planning an even bigger Dean Dome, huh?

WRAL cheating hoops viewers out of Big East with shoddy ACC

By **JAMES SUROWIECKI**
Staff Writer

Boy, that was a great St. John's-Georgetown game a week ago Saturday, wasn't it? What's that? You say you didn't see the big St. John's victory? Oh. Well, in any case, it was really nice after UNC's big win over Duke to watch Louisville upset Syracuse in a matchup of two of the nation's best teams. But you say you didn't see that game either? And you didn't get to see Notre Dame's defeat of DePaul in the Rosemont Horizon? What's going on here?

What's going on here in North Carolina, as the result of WRAL-TV 5 becoming a CBS affiliate in August of 1985, is a systematic exclusion of national collegiate basketball games from this viewing area in favor of ACC broadcasts. Now most of you who are reading are probably saying now, "Good. We'd rather watch the ACC than a national game anyway." But what that attitude implies is a preference for games that fit your regional bias over games that feature two top-flight opponents.

This is true because to a large, indeed almost complete extent, the games which WRAL has been showing in place of the CBS national contests have been of vastly inferior quality. Instead of seeing St. John's and Georgetown, WRAL showed Clemson and Virginia. Instead of Syracuse and Louisville Saturday, the station showed the classic matchup of N.C. State and Wake Forest. The situation is not that of replacing good Big East games with good ACC games, but of replacing good Big East games with mediocre ACC games.

Now the question arises: Why are the ACC games, supposedly featuring the best conference in America this year, of lesser quality than the national broadcasts? The answer lies in the respective television contracts of the Big East and ACC conferences.

The Big East Conference is right now in the final year of a contract with CBS, with NBC having "secondary rights." Starting next year, the Big East has a new contract with CBS, which will essentially create a Big East

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"game of the week" on Saturday afternoons, and also provides for the broadcast of Big East intersectional games. Assistant to the Commissioner Tom McElroy said, "We gave CBS the Big East tournament, but said the price is a game of the week. In return we cannot dilute the national advertising market." That promise eliminates any more Pitt-Syracuse games on ESPN on Saturday night.

What this all means is that the Big East has become more of a national conference than a mere regional alliance. Instead of making a local syndication deal, the Big East went right to the networks and has received terrific national exposure. "CBS must do a minimum of 14 states (from Virginia to Maine), which puts us in approximately 25-30 percent of all the television homes," McElroy said. "But the way it's worked out, it looks like CBS will take it beyond those states. Right now, we're averaging 50 percent of the country's television homes."

Thus, the Big East is not trying to blot out the other conferences, as some have alleged. Instead it is relying on the networks to broadcast its games to the viewing area it wants to reach (the 14 states).

The ACC, on the other hand, relies on Jefferson Pilot-Raycom Sports to accomplish the same task. "We own the rights to all ACC games, and all intersectional games played at ACC sites," Mike Klatt, coordinating producer for Raycom, said. "We make up our schedule and then are approached by the networks, who are obviously looking for games like Georgia Tech-UNC or UNC-Duke. We sell off about the top 10 percent of our schedule to the networks."

Raycom then goes to its affiliates, including WRAL-TV, and offers them a maximum schedule which this year includes 33 games plus the tournament. But that schedule does not include, save for rare exceptions like the UNC-Duke game this past Saturday, games pitting the best ACC teams against each other. After all, just about all of those games have been skimmed off and sold to the networks. WRAL is left with the rest. This Saturday, for example, the Georgia Tech-UNC game will be shown on NBC, while WRAL

will be stuck with the fine matchups of Clemson-Wake Forest and Virginia-N.C. State.

Ah, but here's the rub. You see, WRAL does not have to be stuck with those games. It could show Indiana-Illinois and St. John's-Pitt, the CBS games. For according to Klatt, the stations have the option of taking the full schedule or just part of it. "There are very few stations that do not take a full schedule," Klatt said. "If a station doesn't take all the games, and our arrangement with them isn't exclusive, we'll go to other affiliates in the area and offer them the games that are left." In this area, the other affiliate Raycom goes to is WLFL-TV 22.

"Raycom offered the package first to WRAL-TV, and they decided what they did and did not want to carry," Joel Kaczmarek of WLFL said. "Those games they did not want to carry we picked up. We will show a total of seven ACC games this year, based on WRAL's refusal." Kaczmarek also said that those seven games were the only ones WRAL decided not to show.

The point now becomes clear enough. WRAL is not committed to broadcasting every ACC game that Raycom offers. It has made a decision not to show seven of those games for a variety of reasons, including a decision to show the CBS-produced Oklahoma-Duke game on February 22. In each case, WLFL will broadcast the dropped game. And so, there is nothing preventing WRAL from showing the CBS national game on Saturdays and allowing another station to pick up the Raycom contest. Nothing but the desire for higher ratings, ratings which the ACC games provide.

But in its quest for ratings, WRAL has left behind the viewer. If WRAL showed the CBS game, that is, acted like an affiliate, WLFL would show the ACC game and viewers would have a choice. This is not a question of obliterating the Raycom package from the region. It is a question, though, of bringing national games into the region, of having a choice between St. John's-Georgetown and N.C. State-Wake Forest instead of a choice between N.C. State-Wake Forest and nothing at all, of essentially being able to choose at times between a great Big East matchup and a mediocre ACC matchup. And like the Wendy's commercial says, don't you really want a choice?

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