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Lynch wills Tar Heels back into Final Four

By Warren Hynes
Senior Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — It wouldn't have been enough for George Lynch.

Thirty-one wins, an ACC regular-season title, an appearance in the NCAA's "elite eight" — all were not enough.

Only a Final Four. Nothing less. "It definitely would have been a disappointing season," he said. "With our team, I think we deserved nothing less than another trip to the Final Four."

North Carolina's senior leader had watched his team mature in the 1992-93 season. He knew how good this squad was, and he wasn't going to let tough Arkansas and Cincinnati teams keep his men from getting to New Orleans.

In the East Regional semifinal and final games at the Brendan Byrne Arena this weekend, George Lynch scored 44 points, pulled in 24 rebounds and made seven steals. He came up big — real big — in the clutch. And he led his team to two tough wins and a berth in that Final Four he had been thirsting for.

"He's not as flashy as the other guys; he just does the dirty work," said Cincinnati head coach Bob Huggins. "He gets position inside and does a good job getting the ball. He doesn't get the credit he deserves."

Sunday, the 6-foot-8, 218-pound forward got some credit. He was named most valuable player of the East Regional. "I've been playing the last few days the same way I have all season," Lynch said. "Things probably just look better considering this is the East Re-

gional." All year long, Lynch has been there, scoring inside, pulling down rebounds, hitting short jumpers, making key steals. He has been there off the court, steadying his team, guiding it along with his unflappable team attitude.

Sunday, North Carolina found itself up against a Cincinnati Bearcat squad that simply would not let up on its tenacious defense. The scratching and clawing led to a 29-14 Cincinnati lead when Nick Van Exel hit a 3-pointer at the 7:08 mark of the first half.

Lynch had four points at the time. He knew that in order to stop these Bearcats, he had to scratch and claw, just like them. His teammates would follow, just as soon as he took the lead.

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UNC's George Lynch (34) calls a time out with :00.8 left in regulation as Brian Reese (31) screams for a foul

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JOINING THE JAMBOREE



MICHIGAN 77, TEMPLE 72

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — Michigan, perhaps the best team in the country at playing half a game, is going back to the Final Four after a show of brute power and raw talent overcame a big defeat against Temple.

The Wolverines danced on the court and donned Final Four shirts at the end of their 77-72 victory Sunday, awaiting a meeting with Kentucky in New Orleans.

Fortunately for the Wolverines, they put together their best play in the second half against the Owls, coming back after trailing by eight points at the half.

Jalen Rose led Michigan with 17 points, 13 in the second half, as he took control of the offense along with off-guard Jimmy King, who had 14 points.

Michigan (30-4) was aided in the final minutes by a technical call against Temple coach John Chaney. The Owls trailed only 67-62 with 1:49 left when Chaney complained about a call.

That allowed Michigan to pull away with five free throws — one on the technical, two on the call and two more on another play on Michigan's regaining of possession.

KANSAS 83, INDIANA 76

The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Poise. Patience. Toughness. Confidence. They are the ingredients Kansas coach Roy Williams believes are needed to beat a team the quality of top-ranked Indiana.

His Jayhawks displayed all four Saturday night, and more — like hustle, unselfishness, aggressiveness, desire. Consequently, they are in the Final Four for the second time in three years, and will play North Carolina.

The Jayhawks (29-6) extended their halfcourt man-to-man defense against Indiana and it worked. The Hoosiers (31-4) only shot 45 percent and All-American Calbert Cheaney had to work exhaustively for his 22 points.

"They just take you out of your game," said Indiana guard Damon Bailey, who scored just seven points and was in second-half foul trouble. "They put a lot of pressure on you. We weren't pressured all year like we were tonight."

Kansas used its depth to wear down the Hoosiers, who had five players play 27 minutes or more but didn't have anyone else play more than 11 minutes. Williams shuttled 10 players in and out, eight of them for 14 minutes or more.

KENTUCKY 106, FSU 81

The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kentucky made sure a last-second shot wouldn't stop its run to the Final Four this time.

The Wildcats, getting 22 points and 11 rebounds from unlikely star Jared Prickett, defeated Florida State 106-81 Saturday in the Southeast Regional final.

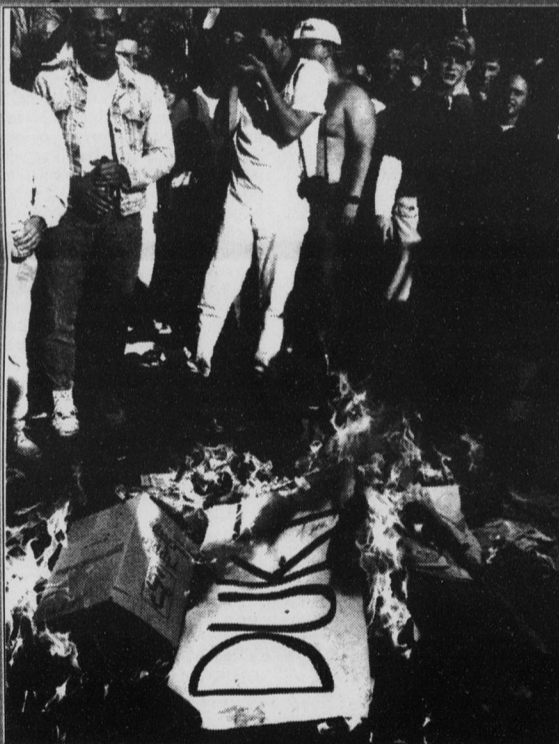
Kentucky's fourth consecutive blowout, by an average margin of 31 points, moved the Wildcats into next Saturday's NCAA semifinal in New Orleans against Michigan.

The Wildcats (30-3) are going to the Final Four for the 10th time and the first time since losing to Georgetown in the 1984 semifinals. It will be the second Final Four for Kentucky coach Rick Pitino, who took Providence to the national semifinals in 1987, the last time the Final Four was in New Orleans.

Like Kentucky's three previous tournament games, this one was over long before the final buzzer. The Wildcats, who averaged 97 points in roaring through the Southeast Regional as the No. 1 seed, took an eight-point halftime lead, then broke it open with an 11-0 run in the second half.

Franklin Street bedlam

Fans flock to Franklin Street to celebrate UNC's Final Four trip to Bourbon Street



Tar Heel fans returned to Franklin Street for the second time in three years as North Carolina returned to the Final Four, courtesy of a 75-68 overtime victory against the Cincinnati Bearcats. The win advances UNC to the New Orleans Superdome, site of its last NCAA championship in 1982, to meet Kansas and Jayhawks in the Big Easy.

(Clockwise from top) UNC faithful gathered 'round a makeshift hearth, fed by a burning Duke sign. The fire wouldn't last long. Beer seemed to be the constant for the revelers, whether it was for consumption or headgear. Smoke from the bonfire and toilet paper made for an eerie victory scene on East Franklin Street. Even the young got into the celebration, learning the fine art of tree rolling (the beer part will have to wait).

Reese miss at buzzer nearly fatal

By Bryan Strickland
Senior Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — In the final second of Sunday's East Regional final, time seemed to stand still.

Actually, it did stand still. With :00.8 seconds showing on the Meadowlands' scoreboard, UNC and Cincinnati stood tied at 66, a trip to New Orleans for the Final Four hanging in the balance. The Tar Heels had the ball underneath their own basket, possessing one last-gasp opportunity to avoid an extra five-minute session.

"Originally, our play was to run for (Eric) Montross," UNC head coach Dean Smith said. "Then we changed it and used Eric as a decoy. We moved Brian (Reese) out there, and he was just to touch it and score."

But Reese did more than just touch it. He grabbed Derrick Phelps' lob pass five feet from the basket, turned, jumped and dunked. He missed it.

"Coach told me just to tap it," Reese said. "But I was so open that I had to try and shoot it. Coach said it wouldn't have counted anyway."

Apparently it would have counted. The official under the basket appeared prime to score the goal. The tardy shot would have given the Tar Heels the win; it would have also sent Cincinnati head coach Bob Huggins and the entire state of Ohio into a frenzy.

"I can't talk about that," Huggins said following the game, "unless you want to pay the fine."

So assuming the dunk try would have indeed counted, Reese was faced with the unenviable task of forgetting about the dunk he missed that would have propelled his team into the Final Four. But he had an overtime period to play. "We felt like it was a new ball game," Reese said. "We picked up a lot of momentum in the second half."

Reese put the incident behind him quickly, feeding a nice pass underneath to George Lynch for a layup at the 4:14 mark. The Lynch basket tied it at 68, and the Tar Heels went on to score the final seven points of the game.

Still, it was another close call for the Tar Heels. UNC got a 40-minute battle from Arkansas Friday night in the Meadowlands, escaping 80-74.

Van Exel cools in 2nd half as UNC forges comeback

By Bryan Strickland
Senior Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — In a hotly contested game between teams of similar talent, the performance of a single player often spells the difference between victory and defeat.

In the first half of Sunday's East Regional final between No. 1 seed UNC and No. 2 seed Cincinnati, Bearcat guard Nick Van Exel was that one player. Van Exel burned the Tar Heels — and the Brendan Byrne Arena nets — in the first 20 minutes, striking for 21 points on 7-of-14 shooting.

He was the difference. In the second half and subsequent overtime period, Van Exel was again that pivotal player — for all the wrong reasons. Van Exel struggled with his shooting throughout the second stanza, hitting just 1-of-10 shots to finish with 23 points. The result: a 75-68 overtime victory and a trip to the Final Four for North Carolina.

After Sunday's up-and-down performance — the final hurrah of Van Exel's brilliant collegiate career — many wondered if the real Nick Van Exel would step up. But the fact is, Van Exel was probably too worn down to step up.

"I just got tired in that second-half stretch where I took myself out," Van Exel said.

"They've got so many players that they run at you. They were coming after us."

Actually, the "stretch" that he sat out couldn't have rested him much — it ran from the 11:17 mark to the 10:21 mark of the second half. That's one minute on the bench, 44 on the floor.

"In the second half, I thought he wore down," said UNC guard Derrick Phelps, the person mainly responsible for the second-half shut-down of Van Exel. "He was real tired, and he couldn't get his shots off."

This is nothing new for Phelps, long-regarded as one of the nation's best defensive stoppers. After leaving Van Exel much of the first half to give aid to other players in Dean Smith's help-defense scheme, Phelps received instructions not to leave Van Exel in the final 20 minutes.

"Early in the game, he was getting off some good shots while I was trapping and trying to help other people," Phelps said. "Then Coach wanted me to concentrate on him."

Good thinking. In a seven-minute stretch midway through the first half, Van Exel had taken over the game, scoring 15 of Cincinnati's 17 points in a 17-8 Bearcat run.

"If someone's hitting shots like that every time, you can't always worry about playing good team defense," Phelps said.

So Smith turned to Phelps. "We started out

(the second half) in a key matchup, and Derrick was not supposed to leave him," Smith said. "I told the team to go back to regular pressure, but I whispered to Derrick not to leave Van Exel."

And Phelps didn't leave him — at all.

"It was just more of me playing man-to-man and not helping anyone else on the team," Phelps said. "He wasn't looking for the ball as much, and if he did look for the ball, I made him work to get it."

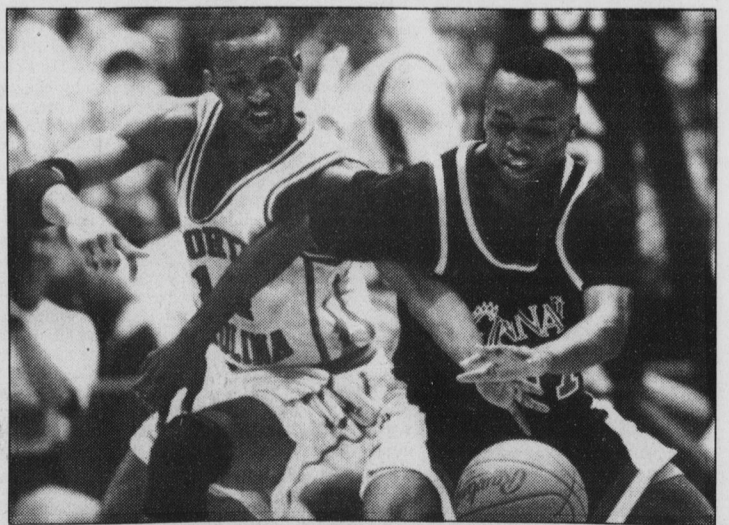
Indeed, Van Exel took just six shots in the second half, and four more in the overtime.

"I probably wasn't looking for my shot as much as I should have," said Van Exel, who scored nearly 60 percent of the Bearcats' first-half points. "I was trying to get everyone else involved so that they would have a little more confidence down the stretch."

Cincinnati head coach Bob Huggins defended his star's second-half approach. "Our other people have to do something," Huggins said. "Nick's not going to get 50 against them."

But did Huggins go so far as to encourage his hot hand to not pull the trigger as much in the second half?

"I would never tell Nick not to shoot," Huggins said. "All I said was that we weren't running our offense and that we'd have to run our offense to be successful."



Cincinnati's Nick Van Exel battles Tar Heel counterpart Derrick Phelps in Sunday's 75-68 UNC win

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