

THE FINAL FOUR

Friday, March 31, 2000

The Daily Tar Heel



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NEW WAVE meets OLD SCHOOL

Donovan, Guthridge Reflect Teams' Different Styles of Play

By BRIAN MURPHY
Senior Writer

They come in waves, a sea of energy, swallowing those unable to keep up — nothing is fast enough for youthful Florida. Billy Donovan, the 34-year-old leader of these rambunctious Gators, looks as if he should be their shooting guard, not their coach. North Carolina is more mechanical, plodding and pragmatic, nibbling until its satisfied. Slow and steady wins the race. Bill Guthridge, the 62-year-old responsible for tweaking the current model of this machine, looks like a grandfather. As Florida and North Carolina prepare to battle in Saturday's

national semifinal, the differences in the teams' on-court styles are exceeded only by their coaches' differences.

The question makes Guthridge laugh. "You think we're different," he said. "A little."

"Well, there's definitely a difference in age, his hair is longer, and he takes his coat off," he said. "I leave mine on."

Cosmetic contrast aside, the programs they've developed stand in direct opposition.

Donovan took the fast track to the coaching ranks after his short NBA career ended. A disciple of his college coach at Providence, Rick Pitino, Donovan preaches the press, the 3-point shot and athleticism. He's already been a head coach at two Division I programs since leaving Kentucky, where he was an assistant under Pitino, in 1994.

"What he's done at Florida with their pressing style, their running and athletes they have on the floor, they love to shoot 3s like the old Kentucky teams did," UNC guard Terrence Newby said. "He played in the Final Four himself with Providence, so he knows what it takes to get there as a player, and he just carries that over to his team."

In fact, Donovan, a lethal 3-point shooter, carried the Friars to the 1987 Final Four. He earned Most Outstanding Player in the South Regional on the way.

Now he has returned to college basketball's final weekend with the Gators, a team that, like its coach, was considered too young by many. Florida, with one senior and loads of youthful talent, was next year's pick to win it all.

But predictably, these Gators couldn't wait. Patience is a virtue learned with age.

Donovan replaced the lone senior on the team, Kenyan Weaks, in the starting lineup with a freshman, shooting guard Justin Hamilton. Another freshman, Brett Nelson, plays the most important minutes at the point. Two others, Donnell Harvey and Matt Bonner, play significant minutes. A sophomore, Teddy Dupay, starts at the point. Mike Miller, another sophomore, is Florida's go-to guy.

The Gators — like Donovan — saw no need to wait until others thought they were ready.

So they busted the party a year early. After rallying to top Butler on a buzzer-beater by Miller in

Final Four Tip Times

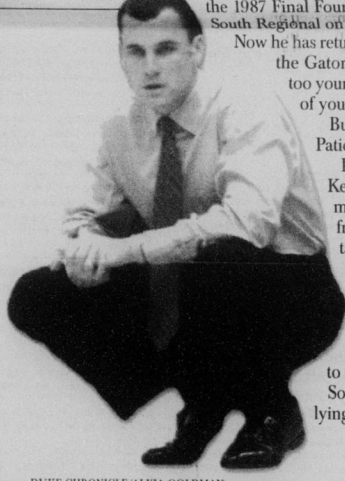
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5:42 p.m.

UNC vs. Florida
approx. 8:12 p.m.

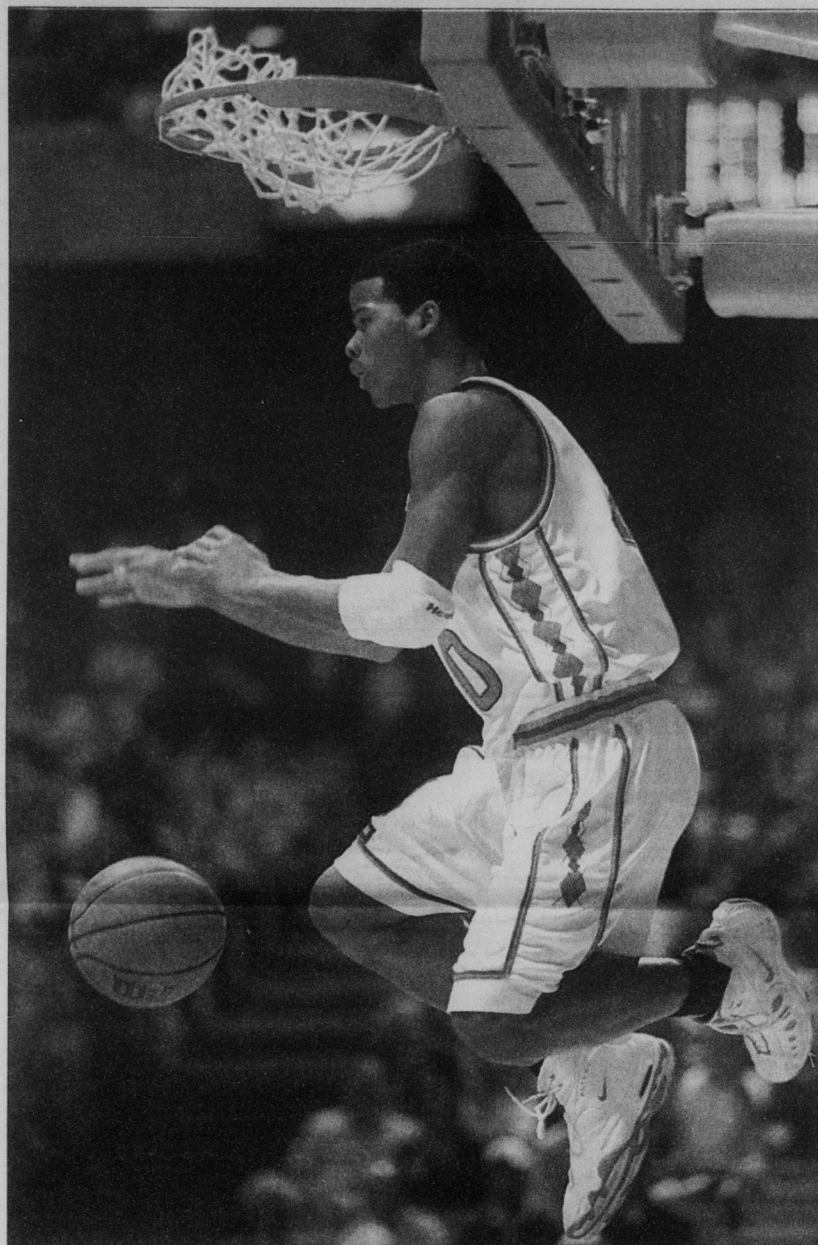


DTH/CARA BRICKMAN

NAME	Billy Donovan
AGE	34
STYLE	laid back, patient
HAIR	receding and gray
MENTOR	Dean Smith
HABIT	crunches ice
ON-COURT EXPERIENCE	benchwarmer in 1958 Final Four with Kansas State



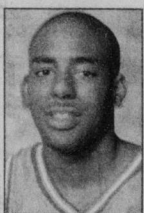
DUKE CHRONICLE/ALIZA GOLDMAN



DTH/MILLER PEARSON

Freshman guard Joseph Forte has provided a refreshing offensive flare for the Tar Heels. His off-balance leaners, daring drives and long-range bombs have helped him score a team-best 16.7 points per game.

Position-by-Position Breakdown

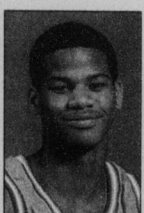


Ed Cota
10.1 ppg, 7.8 apg

Breakdown: Cota's ballhandling skills will be tested by the Gators' press. He has logged all but one minute in the Tar Heels' march to the Final Four. Dupay, at 5-10, has had his playing time limited by the emergence of freshman Brett Nelson. How Cota holds up will be the key to the game.
Edge: UNC



Teddy Dupay
9.0 ppg, 2.7 apg



Joseph Forte
16.7 ppg, 5.5 rpg

Breakdown: Forte has carried the Tar Heels this far with his deft shooting touch and penchant for knocking down the big shots. Hamilton, who recently replaced senior Kenyan Weaks in the starting lineup, is another freshman who can shoot. Forte must shoot well and score in bunches.
Edge: UNC



Justin Hamilton
4.8 ppg, 1.2 apg

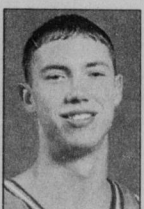


Jason Capel
12.4 ppg, 6.7 rpg

Breakdown: Capel has been the Tar Heels' heart and soul throughout this season. He plays wherever need be and gets on the floor for every loose ball. Miller, the Gators' best player, can do it all on the offensive end. Miller, the team's leading scorer and rebounder, provides a tough test for Capel.
Edge: Florida

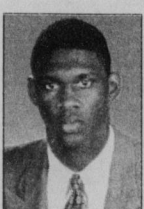


Mike Miller
14.3 ppg, 6.7 rpg

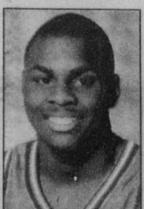


Kris Lang
8.6 ppg, 4.3 rpg

Breakdown: Lang, who has fought various ailments all season, is hobbled by an ankle injury. He said he'll play, but how effective he'll be remains to be seen. At 6-8, Wright is a productive offensive player and the Gators' best low-post defender. If Lang can't go all out, Julius Peppers will be called upon.
Edge: Florida



Brent Wright
8.2 ppg, 4.3 rpg



Brendan Haywood
13.4 ppg, 7.4 rpg

Breakdown: Haywood has played well for most of the season, and UNC will try to get him the ball against the shorter Haslem, who is just 6-7 but weighs 260 pounds. Haslem averages 11.4 points and maneuvers in the post well. But Haywood must avoid fouls and win this matchup convincingly.
Edge: UNC



Udonis Haslem
11.4 ppg, 5.2 rpg



UNC Bench
15.2 ppg, 7.4 rpg

Breakdown: The Gators use five reserves and use them a lot, as all five average more than 14 minutes a game. That depth will wear on a Tar Heel squad that features just Peppers and Max Owens off the bench. Florida's second five allows them to keep the pressure on all day, a huge advantage.
Edge: Florida



Florida Bench
37.3 ppg, 16.3 rpg

Gator Defense Creates Pressing Issue for UNC

The Tar Heels had limited success facing the pressure defenses of Duke and Virginia earlier this season.

By EVAN MARKFIELD
Senior Writer

North Carolina has seen pressure defense before. The Tar Heels have seen it against Duke, against Virginia and, most recently, against Tulsa in the Elite Eight.

But they've never seen it like this.

When UNC faces Florida in the semifinals of the NCAA tournament, it will have its hands full with a team that likes to press for all 40 minutes. With their depth and quickness, the Gators will run at Ed Cota and any other Tar Heel ballhandler constantly to create turnovers and turn up the tempo.

"We'll be prepared for them to do that," UNC coach Bill Guthridge said. "They make everyone a basketball player. Joseph Forte and Jason Capel will handle the ball, and our big men will, in certain situations, have to pass and catch the ball."

But the Tar Heels have struggled mightily when opposing teams force the ball out of Cota's hands. A primary example was Virginia's pressing defense, which helped the Cavaliers force 37 turnovers against the Tar Heels and earn two victories at their expense during the regular season.

But it wasn't just Virginia that

brought out the worst in North Carolina's offense. The Tar Heels trudged through most of their 18-12 regular season with a higher turnover rate than a temp agency.

"Their style of play we've struggled with some this year," Guthridge said. "We hope we have profited from playing against teams like that, that press us all the time, so we can respond better against Florida."

With the ball-handling and press-breaking problems that UNC suffered during the regular season, the team was expected to have the same struggles in its first-round NCAA matchup with Missouri.

A smaller, quicker opponent. Cota as the lone ballhandler. And, as a result, another first-round NCAA tournament exit.

Of course, it didn't quite happen that way. Apparently, the Tar Heels did take something good out of facing the press earlier in the year. UNC has used its size to overwhelm smaller teams while holding off the pressure just enough to escape game after game in the tournament.

Still, can the Tar Heels handle that style of play for two full halves against the Gators?

"I'm worried about how it can really turn a game around," UNC center Brendan Haywood said. "They can get two or three steals in a row, and next thing you know you're down 10 points."

"I'm also worried about how it's

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Final Analysis: In order for the Tar Heels to reach their first national championship game since 1993, they will have to find a way to break the Gators' press without killing Cota. Florida's tremendous depth ensures it will be fresh throughout the game, while UNC coach Bill Guthridge must conserve legs. The Gators' youth catches up with them, and unlike its last three trips, UNC packs its shooter. Forte scores 30, and the Tar Heels advance.

The Bottom Line — UNC 79, Florida 76

COMPILED BY BRIAN MURPHY