

Crucial Stretch Carries Postseason Implications for UNC

The North Carolina baseball team will play conference road series at Virginia and Duke in the next two weeks.

By T. NOLAN HAYES
Sports Editor

What's done is done. The North Carolina baseball team knows it. But coach Mike Fox and his players had to find a way to fix it.

It was the team's 4-8 start in ACC play. The Tar Heels began the journey out of the hole they dug for themselves by sweeping Maryland at home during the weekend to get to within one game of .500 in the league.

"We've had a little pressure on us knowing what we've got to do in the league," Fox said after his team finished off the Terrapins 23-8 on Sunday. "The guys know where we are, and we're kind of disappointed that we were 4-8."

"We've still got to continue to get better. We can play better."

The Tar Heels (33-9) moved up to fifth place from seventh on the strength of their weekend victories. More good news for North Carolina lies in the fact that the path leading to the top half of the ACC standings won't get exceptionally rough for a couple of weeks.

The Tar Heels play Virginia and Duke in the next two weeks before closing out their ACC season against Florida State. UNC swept Virginia and Duke last season, and the two teams now stand seventh and eighth in the league, respectively.

But North Carolina's plans of getting out the brooms twice more aren't foolproof. For one thing, the Blue Devils and Cavaliers are more talented than they've been in recent years. And second, both series are on the road, where the Tar Heels are 0-6 in ACC games.



DTH/EMILY SCHURE

North Carolina right fielder Matt McCay went 7-for-11 with eight RBI in the Tar Heels' three-game sweep of Maryland this past weekend.

"Realistically you don't look to go against any of these teams on the road and sweep them," Fox said. "You can say that's what you want to do - but it just doesn't happen in this league. It's a hard thing to do."

The Cavaliers dropped to 5-10 in the conference after getting swept on the road by Georgia Tech during the weekend. But Virginia did manage to defeat Florida State, which has spent time at No. 1 this season, at home April 2.

Duke sits in eighth place in the ACC at 4-11 but handed first-place Georgia Tech its only two losses in the league back in late March. That, coupled with Virginia's win against the Seminoles, will keep the Tar Heels from becoming too confident.

"Any team can beat anybody in this league on any given day," UNC pitcher Ryan Snare said. "They say Maryland, Duke and Virginia are the weaker teams, but once you get in between the lines, the records are thrown out, and they want to win just as bad as you."

"If you don't play well, they're going

to beat you."

That's something North Carolina can't afford. The Tar Heels have aspirations of reaching the College World Series, so they need to qualify for the NCAA tournament to give themselves a chance.

UNC has also applied to be host of a super regional in the tournament should it qualify. The host sites are determined by a committee that considers a number of factors. One of those factors is performance, so the Tar Heels know they need to come away with wins against teams they should beat.

The stakes are high, but North Carolina isn't worried. Not yet, at least.

"We don't have any pressure because we're not a top team in the league right now either," right fielder Matt McCay said. "They might be looking at us in

that same way.

"But we really need to play well this weekend to start us up for the end of the season so that we can make a run to get

to the tournament and do well."

The Sports Editor can be reached at sports@unc.edu.

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