

Stingy Tar Heel Defense Stops ODU's DiGiacomo

Old Dominion's leading scorer Marina DiGiacomo was limited to three shots on goal in Saturday's game.

By RACHEL CARTER
Assistant Sports Editor

North Carolina's fans figured out pretty quickly who the enemy was.

Boos and the occasional hiss filled the air at Henry Stadium every time Old Dominion's No. 10 touched the ball with her field hockey stick or angrily asked an official why a foul wasn't called.

The Tar Heels made sure that No. 10, otherwise known as Marina DiGiacomo, stayed angry and frustrated during Saturday's match.

DiGiacomo was the center of North Carolina's worries when it prepared for the weekend games, and with good reason. Before Saturday's contest, DiGiacomo had scored 12 goals in five games with six assists.

After Saturday's match, those numbers remained the same.

"We didn't dive in," Tar Heel back Jana Toepel said. "She has amazing skill, and she's a very talented player, so we just played smart first-role, second-role defense. The first player would contain her, the second player came up to pick up the tackle."

DiGiacomo hails from Argentina, a country that is traditionally strong in field hockey. Toepel said there are not many Americans with DiGiacomo's skill level.

But the Tar Heels still limited her to only three shots on goal.

In one play late in the second half, DiGiacomo received a pass while facing the ODU goal. She turned around and saw she was covered by a Tar Heel.

With a sharp move to the left, DiGiacomo left her UNC defender in the dust and continued up the field, dodging three Tar Heels that came to challenge her.

DiGiacomo's path led her right to a waiting Toepel, who charged, reached in with her stick and wrestled with DiGiacomo until she spun and pushed the ball from DiGiacomo's reach.

"Defensively, we worked our butts off just to cover the areas and the zones and make sure she didn't walk into the circle unattended," Toepel said.

While the Tar Heels could pat themselves on the back for stopping DiGiacomo, they could only bang their head against a wall in frustration about the game's ending.

UNC and ODU went scoreless for 69 minutes until the Monarchs penetrated deep into North Carolina territory. A brief defensive letdown translated into an ODU goal with 25 seconds left to play.

UNC goalkeeper Amy Tran got caught outside of her box as ODU forward Laura Steadman stopped a pass in the circle, turned and fired into the net.

UNC sweeper Abby Martin said the way the Tar Heels lost the contest was so disturbing that it took her hours after the game to get over the shock.

The Tar Heels did not receive any additional surprises in Sunday's 3-1 victory against Virginia. Although UNC won, the defense was not on the same level as against ODU.

"Inside our 25, (Saturday) was the better game," Martin said. "Today wasn't so great. We gave up corners, and one of our goals was not to give up corners against Virginia because that's how they score."

UVa. drew four penalty corners but converted one into a goal.

"We knew if we gave up penalty corners against Virginia that they could score goals," UNC coach Karen Shelton said. "They had a great first shot, and they scored off the rebound, but they executed. The problem is that we gave up the penalty corner to begin with."

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

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JANA TOEPEL
UNC Back

FIELD HOCKEY

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nenced progress.

"We are not really in sync with our movement off the ball offensively," Shelton said. "We are not quite there yet. I think the ideas are there. Our receptions are a little off. However, I think we have the potential to be a great offensive team."

The victory against the Cavaliers does not count toward ACC standings. Because of a quirk in conference rules, the two teams' Oct. 15 match-up in Charlottesville, Va., will count for the ACC records.

While the Tar Heels might have had some offensive areas to iron out Sunday, the team's wall-like defensive intensity clicked almost perfectly for 69 minutes against Old Dominion (5-1) Saturday.

The Tar Heels broke down in the final minute after clawing their way to

scoreless standoff.

Monarch forward Laura Steadman knocked a 10-yard shot through the net with a mere 25 seconds remaining, stunning the crowd of 942 in attendance.

And although the Tar Heels let one slip through their sticks, they couldn't be too disappointed with their defensive effort.

The Tar Heels held ODU's leading scoring Marina DiGiacomo scoreless. The potent Monarch offensive attack was silenced as ODU's menace on the turf only got off three shots on goal.

"I think we can take away many positives," Shelton said. "We held them very contained to only one goal in the last 25 seconds. And the other positive is that I know we are one of the teams that can legitimately win the national championship."

For UNC, the weekend was a learning tool. Although a split is not always indicative of a strong performance, the players know that this weekend has built an important element.

Confidence.

"We are coming together," Cox said. "The things we are working on, it's not just fundamentals anymore."

"And I think we are coming out saying, 'Watch out for us; we are back now.' It's good to be feared."

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FIELD HOCKEY			
UNC 3, Virginia 1			
Virginia	1	0	1
UNC	3	0	3

Goals: VA - Victoria 0:52, 1st. UNC - Cox 31:23, 1st. Half (Martin) 29:34, 1st. Woolley 3:08, 1st. Shots: VA - 7. UNC - 12. Saves: VA - Worthington 6. UNC - Tran 2. Defensive Saves: UNC - 1. Penalty Corners: VA - 4. UNC - 8. Attendance: 942.

FIELD HOCKEY			
Old Dominion 1, UNC 0			
ODU	0	1	1
UNC	0	0	0

Goals: ODU - Steadman 0:25, 2nd. Shots: ODU - 4. UNC - 3. Saves: ODU - Freeman 1. UNC - Tran 2. Penalty Corners: ODU - 8. UNC - 7. Attendance: 942.

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