

INC Drops Nail-Biter In 9th Against ECU

North Carolina's baseball team scored just one run and lost at East Carolina on a bases-loaded walk.

Staff Report

GREENVILLE — East Carolina's Warren Gaspar drew a bases-loaded walk from Michael Gross in the bottom of the ninth to give No. 20 ECU a 2-1 win against No. 21 North Carolina on Wednesday in front of 3,890, the largest crowd in Harrington Field history.

Four East Carolina pitchers allowed UNC (25-14) just four hits and a season-long one run in taking just its second win in the last 10 tries against the Tar Heels.

Neal Sears (5-0) pitched a perfect ninth inning for the win, while Gross falls to 3-3 with the loss.

"We knew this would be a tough game and that East Carolina had some good pitchers," said UNC coach Mike Fox.

"We just didn't do enough offensively to win the game. That's no discredit to East Carolina; I was just surprised that we played sluggishly tonight. We didn't have many good swings of the bat, and when we did they made plays on them."

With the game tied 1-1 going into the bottom of the ninth, Ben Sanderson and Darryl Lawhorn had back-to-back one-out singles. Bryant Ward grounded out, but Gross issued consecutive walks to end the game. Gaspar worked the count full and fouled a ball to the left side that

was nearly caught by Tar Heel third baseman Chris Maples. But the next pitch was low and drove in Sanderson from third for the winning run.

UNC left fielder Sean Farrell had one of his team's four hits Wednesday and scored the Tar Heels' only run.

Gaspar made several outstanding plays in center. He robbed Adam Greenberg of a hit with an over-the-shoulder grab at the fence to end the third inning and collected all three putouts in the fourth, including a diving catch of a Russ Adams drive to left center and a grab at the fence of a potential Chris Maples homer.

UNC stayed within a run with some good defense of its own in the bottom of the sixth. Chad Prosser threw out Gaspar at the plate for the second out of the inning and Kevin Brower saved two runs when he snared a shot hit back to the mound to send the 1-0 game into the seventh.

UNC brought its top of the order to the plate in the ninth, but Sears struck out Greenberg and got Adams to fly out to center for the second out. Sean Farrell laced a shot to left field, but Paige made a leaping catch to end the inning to send the game into the bottom of the ninth.

"I was disappointed in the way we lost there at the end," Fox said. "We had a couple of chances to get out of the inning, but we just couldn't make the plays."



UNC left fielder Sean Farrell had one of his team's four hits Wednesday and scored the Tar Heels' only run.

Men's Tennis Aims for Redemption

BY OWEN A. HASSELL
Senior Writer

It would be nice if the North Carolina men's tennis team got a second shot at rival Duke this weekend.

But Coach Sam Paul is preparing his team for another challenge: the winner of today's match between seventh-seeded Virginia and No. 8 Maryland.

The victor will next play the Tar Heels at noon on Friday in the quarter-finals.

"Just one match at a time," Paul said. The 25th-ranked and second-seeded Tar Heels (16-5, 7-1 in the ACC) will look to adopt their coach's mindset this weekend in the ACC Tournament, which will be held at the Millbrook Exchange Tennis Center in Raleigh.

Although UNC had little trouble in beating both the Cavaliers (6-1) and Terrapins (7-0) during the regular season, Paul has seen the ACC's lower-seeded teams come ready to play in past tournaments.

Most recently, he has seen this trend against his own team.

Just last year, the then-No. 36 Tar Heels were upset victims, courtesy of No. 49 Clemson. The Tigers beat UNC 4-3 in the first round in Orlando, Fla., the site of last year's tournament.

And so Paul has put his game face on, pacing the grounds of Millbrook Exchange while his team gets last-minute instructions before Friday's match.

"Come on Nick, come on Geoff!" Paul barked at players Nicholas Monroe and Geoff Boyd as the two rushed to get their shoes on for Wednesday's afternoon practice.

If anyone benefits most from Paul's practice sessions, it is UNC's

No. 1 player, senior Marcio Petrone.

"Coach Paul and (assistant) Coach (Marc) Schwartz have believed in me ever since I got here," Petrone said. "They have helped me improve."

But the improvement of the entire team is necessary if the Tar Heels are to dethrone Duke, the defending champion.

It is one upset every ACC team has attempted to complete this year, but failed. The top-seeded Blue Devils have not lost a regular-season conference match since 1996, a 4-3 loss against the Tar Heels.

The score was the same in 2002, but it



UNC senior Marcio Petrone will get his last shot at beating Duke in the ACC tourney this weekend.

was Duke that beat UNC 4-3 on April 10. The Tar Heels' No. 6 player, Andrew Metzler, was on serve and ahead in the third set of his singles match at 5-3 before falling to the Blue Devils' Peter Shults 7-5.

Duke gained sole possession of first place with the come-from-behind win and cruised to another regular-season title while ending North Carolina's winning streak at six matches.

The Tar Heels have not won the regular season title since 1996, when they went undefeated in the ACC en route to a No. 16 national ranking.

But the focus is now set on the tournament, and Paul believes it is a chance for redemption.

"It is definitely one of our goals," Paul said. "So it is important we stay on top of things because we've got a good season going."

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

Hurricanes Top Devils in Playoff Opener

The Associated Press

RALEIGH — The depleted New Jersey Devils are in an early first-round playoff hole for the first time in four years.

Rod Brind'Amour and rookie Erik Cole scored 1:22 apart and Arturs Irbe stopped 34 shots as the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Devils 2-1 in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference quarter-finals Wednesday night.

The Devils, two-time defending East champions, were without Joe Nieuwendyk (flu), Petr Sykora (foot), Scott Gomez (broken hand) and Stephane Richer (bruised foot) — and it showed.

New Jersey won last year's playoff opener 5-1 against Carolina en route to a 3-0 lead in the best-of-seven series it eventually won 4-2.

But things started much differently this time for the Devils, who finished the

regular season riding a six-game winning streak.

Martin Brodeur, with a career goals against average of 1.91 in 109 playoff games, was beaten twice on Carolina's first five shots as the Devils fell into a two-goal hole halfway through the first period against the Southeast Division champions.

New Jersey outshot the Hurricanes 35-17 and a power-play goal by Patrik

Elias with 12:29 left put some pressure on Carolina. But the Hurricanes were able to hang on and head to Friday's Game 2 with some confidence against the 2000 Stanley Cup champions.

Irbe, with a 13-19 lifetime playoff record and a poor 3.53 goals against average, was super from the start, stopping 14 first-period shots, including a breakout 3:27 in by rookie Christian Berglund.

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