

Composure crucial for Tar Heels late in game

Veterans, freshmen stay focused in OT

BY MICHAEL MARTINEZ
STAFF WRITER

With 10 minutes remaining in the first half of North Carolina's 3-2 overtime victory against Duke on Wednesday, goalkeeper Ford Williams gave freshman teammate Ted Odgers an earful for making a mental blunder on the defensive end of the field.

In some ways, Odgers' mistake was understandable — it can be hard to stay focused in a game against an arch-rival, but the pressure can be even more relentless for a freshman.

But for a team loaded with untested rookies, the Tar Heels could not have responded to the pressure any better.

"I've been confident with this team all year long," said senior captain Grant Porter. "We showed a lot of courage in overtime. I don't know how many overtime games we've been in, but we always give it our all toward the end of games."

"We showed a lot of mental toughness, which is crucial if you want to have a good season."

Porter is part of a veteran defensive unit that has been a rock for the Tar Heels throughout the season. With junior defender Tim Merritt and senior defender Sean McGinty on the back line, the Tar Heels were able to keep their composure in a game that boasted eight yellow cards.

UNC coach Elmar Bolowich also moved junior Ray Fumo from midfield to defense late in the game, providing the team with another savvy player on the back end.

"It helped us stabilize at least the defense," Bolowich said. "But then we had to take Fumo out of the midfield, so it was give and take."

North Carolina also leaned heavily on its veteran players for offensive leadership Wednesday, as Merritt and Fumo scored the team's only goals in regulation.

However, the Tar Heels were lifted by the poise of their younger players down the stretch.

Freshman forward Corey Ashe created several scoring opportuni-

ties in both overtime periods before classmate Wes Shull netted the game-winner with a 30-yard blast on a free kick.

"It's really tough to keep your focus when you've been on the field that long," Shull said. "The fans really gave us a lot of energy, and we kept up a good pace. We did a good job of keeping our heads in it."

The Tar Heels are no strangers to overtime this season. Wednesday's game was their third overtime victory in four tries.

Regardless of their previous overtime experience, Porter said, he was impressed with the team's composure in a heated rivalry game.

"If they were 0-10 coming into this game and we were 10-0, it still would have been a good game," he said. "We were ready for it."

Porter also said he's confident that his young teammates will be able to keep their cool in the team's upcoming ACC stretch.

"We're good, but what I like about our team is that we don't ever really talk about it," Porter said. "We're always focused on the next game. ... We should be ready."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

Shull free kick beats Duke in OT

Men's soccer wins hard-fought thriller

BY BRANDON PARKER
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

When the powder blue of North Carolina and the royal blue of Duke face off on the soccer field, there's always a chance for a classic.

Wednesday was no different. It took more than 100 gut-wrenching minutes, two overtimes, 44 fouls, eight yellow cards and 29 shots to decide a nail-biter in front of 3,184 at Fetzer Field.

Freshman midfielder Wes Shull looped a free kick into the left corner of the net in the 108th minute to score the game-winning goal in the Tar Heels' 3-2 defeat of the Blue Devils.

"I had a little practice with (that shot)," Shull said. "I knew right when I hit it that it was going in."

The rest of the game was full of uncertainty for Tar Heels (6-1-1, 1-1 in the ACC). UNC lost a 2-1 lead in the second half, and it seemed as if the stingy Duke defenders were not going to succumb in the extra periods.

"(Duke) played a very, very disciplined, fast and hard game and almost got a result out of it," said UNC coach Elmar Bolowich.

North Carolina began the game with lots of fire and tallied the first goal with a Tim Merritt header in the 14th minute of the contest.

After his goal, the junior defender played off the crowd and the intensity of the matchup by running to the stands with his teammates and joining the fans in their celebration.

Less than eight minutes later, Duke (2-5-1, 0-3) tied the score with a goal from midfielder Chris Loftus. Much to the dismay of the North Carolina fans, Loftus repeated Merritt's gesture tauntingly.

At this point, the game became very physical, and the teams took a more aggressive approach toward one another, leading to a high

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GRANT PORTER, SENIOR CO-CAPTAIN

amount of contact.

"All ACC games are pretty physical, which we have found out thus far," Shull said. "So we were expecting a lot of contact and physical play."

The Tar Heels went up 2-1 in the 36th minute on an unassisted goal by Ray Fumo and seemed poised to hold off the Blue Devils for the win.

But Duke tied the game in the 62nd minute and forced UNC's fourth overtime game of the season.

A number of scoring opportunities in front of the goal were squandered by the Tar Heels, including a shot headed away on the goal line by Duke defender Matt Ahumada.

But when Shull's kick ripped the back of the net for the win, the hometown crowd showed their

appreciation for the teams that provided yet another exciting chapter in the UNC-Duke saga.

"The crowd was outstanding, and that was our 12th man tonight," Bolowich said. "They were just unbelievable."

With all the young players that constitute the North Carolina men's soccer team, this was a game full of experience and potential for things to come. It was especially a treat for the seasoned veterans of the squad.

"I've only been here four years," said senior co-captain Grant Porter, "and this has got to be one of the best Duke-North Carolina games in a while."

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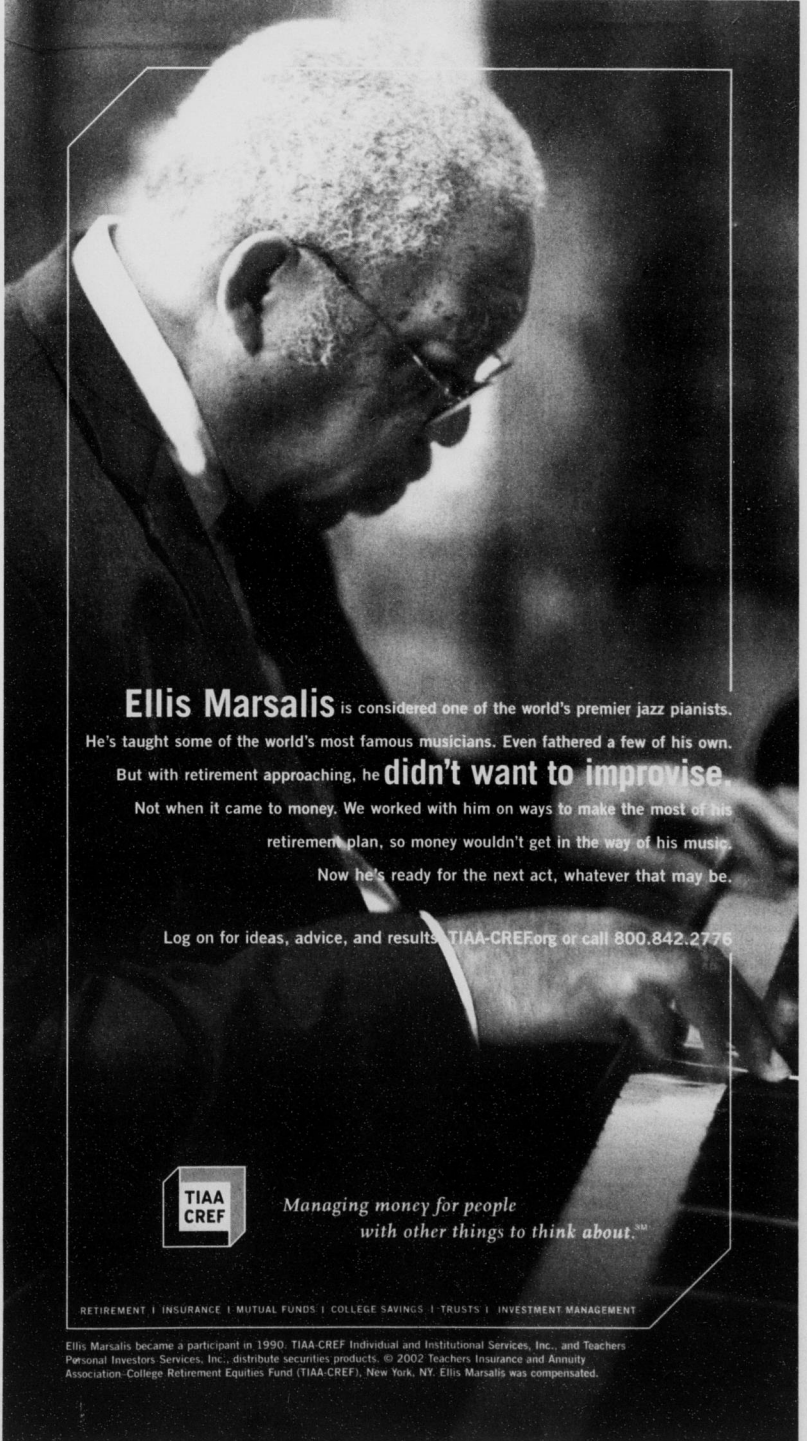
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