

# Tar Heels open tournament play in Denver

BY AARON FITT  
SENIOR WRITER

Roy Williams was ready for a party.

The NCAA Tournament Selection Show was always a bit of a ho-hum affair for Williams when he coached at Kansas. Every year, the Jayhawks knew they were going to the Big Dance. The only suspense was whether they'd be a top seed, a two seed or a three seed.

But no player on the North Carolina squad Williams inherited this season has ever played in a tournament game.

He figured they'd be going wild as they watched the announcement of their bid in Williams' home Sunday night.

"As soon as they showed North Carolina, I raised my arms and yelled, and I looked around, and three or four guys were yawning, two guys were taking naps," Williams said Tuesday. "I'm thinking, 'Hello, Pete!' If I hadn't been in a couple of years, I'd be hanging on the rafters."

## Low seed gets local venue

Maybe North Carolina should have intentionally tanked down the stretch.

With a couple more losses, the sixth-seeded Tar Heels (18-10) might have been one of the last teams invited to the NCAA Tournament and been sent to play their first-round game in Raleigh.

Well, probably not, but being a late at-large invitee has worked out pretty well for the 11th-seeded Falcons (22-6), who will play their opener an hour and a half from their home court in Colorado Springs. Air Force won the Mountain West Conference regular season by two games but were bounced in the first round of the conference tournament.

The Falcons earned an NCAA bid despite a 179th-ranked strength of schedule, and they are all but playing host to a UNC team five seeds higher and thousands of miles from home.

"I don't think it should happen,"

Williams said Sunday. "I think the higher seed should not have to play the lower seed closer to their home. But we're doing it, and there's nothing we can do to change it."

Adding to the Tar Heels' disadvantage is Denver's mile-high altitude and accompanying thin air. The Falcons are used to those conditions, but it will likely take some adjusting for UNC.

Williams said his Kansas teams rarely had difficulty with the thin air when they played at Colorado during the Big 12 season, but he didn't dismiss the altitude altogether.

"There is a factor, but I'm not going to go out and have oxygen tanks on the bench," he said. "If I do, it might be for the referees I might try to strangle or something."

## A familiar-looking offense

The fast-paced North Carolina attack has already been slowed by the Princeton-style offense twice

this season, when the Tar Heels played N.C. State. Both games were relatively low-scoring, but both games were also UNC victories.

That's why the Tar Heels are not overly concerned about Air Force's shot-clock-eating, floor-spreading, Princeton-style offense.

"Watching Air Force, they just cut so hard and move so well," said UNC center Sean May. "They are a very unselfish team. They have five guys who can basically do anything."

That's only if the Tar Heels stick to the game plan. Williams was not happy with his team's shot selection in the first half of its ACC Tournament loss to Georgia Tech.

"We took some shots in the first half against Georgia Tech that I wouldn't take in a game of H-O-R-S-E," Williams said. "I mean, it was ridiculous. If we do that against Air Force, we'll be on one of those jets coming home."

Contact the Sports Editor  
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## THE LOWDOWN ON THURSDAY'S GAME

**Air Force**  
(22-6)  
vs.  
**North Carolina**  
(18-10)

### PROBABLE STARTERS

#### UNC

C: Sean May, 6-9  
F: Jawad Williams, 6-9  
F: Rashad McCants, 6-4  
G: Melvin Scott, 6-2  
G: Raymond Felton, 6-1

#### Air Force

C: Nick Welch, 6-8  
F: Joel Gerlach, 6-6  
F: A.J. Kuhle, 6-3  
G: Tim Keller, 6-3  
G: Antoine Hood, 6-5

Game: Air Force vs. North Carolina  
Time: Thursday, approximately 9:50 p.m.  
Location: Pepsi Center, Denver  
Radio: 100.7 FM, WCHL-1360 AM  
Television: CBS

Keys for Air Force: The 11th-seeded Falcons won the Mountain West Conference's regular season with their frustrating, plodding Princeton-style offense and their outstanding team game, but conference co-player of the year Nick Welch must be stellar for them to have a chance against the athletically superior Tar Heels. The multi-talented Welch gives up 45 pounds to Sean May, but his terrific outside shooting ability will force May to leave the defensive interior and guard Welch on the perimeter. This should at least slightly neutralize UNC's overwhelming rebounding advantage.

Keys for UNC: The sixth-seeded Tar Heels must be patient on both ends of the court. Air Force will compensate for its lack of size with a lot of zone, so UNC's perimeter players must hit their open shots. But the Tar Heels also need to keep May involved. "Our eyes have to light up when you see a 6-foot-8 guy who's fairly thin inside," May said Tuesday. Air Force Bench: Freshmen Jacob Burtschi and Matt McCraw are solid but don't post big numbers. UNC Bench: Jackie Manuel has to avoid the foul trouble that has plagued him of late. David Noel will be counted upon for rebounds, as usual. Prediction: UNC 71, Air Force 59

COMPILED BY AARON FITT

# UNC reloads with talented trio

BY HUNTER POWELL  
STAFF WRITER

This is not how things usually happen.

For the North Carolina women's tennis team, this year could have been disastrous.

Any team that lost two All-Americans and a coach during the summer wouldn't come back even better the next year.

However, a trio of freshmen have bought into first-year head coach Brian Kalbas' system and are helping North Carolina stay in the national spotlight.

"They are an incredible breath of fresh air," Kalbas said. "They all come in extra to work on their games, and they are positive and appreciative about everything."

This year's freshman class of Sara Anundsen, Caitlin Collins, and Jenna Long has keyed an early-season surge that has North Carolina sitting pretty at No. 5 in the country with a 13-3 record.

"All three of them are very different, but they are all very easygo-

ing," Kalbas said. "They don't have any egos, and they are very unselfish. It's been a great balance between experience and youth, and we have had one of the best chemistry teams I have ever coached."

The freshmen, known as "The Three Amigos" to teammates, each bring something different to the table.

Anundsen is emotional and intense, Long is focused and composed and Collins is upbeat and playful.

The bond between these girls originated from playing against each other on a junior level.

"I knew Sara back in 12-and-unders. She used to beat me all the time," Collins said.

They began playing together before coming to school, as Collins and Long entered the annual Easter Bowl, one of the largest junior tournaments of the year, together.

"Once Caitlin and I found out we were going to be teammates, we played doubles together, and we all kept in contact more," Long said.

"This is like a family."

However, things could have been different upon arrival at UNC. With only two seniors leaving and three incoming freshman, that meant one would not get as much playing time as the others.

However, the three have supported each other through everything, and they have handled the situation with the humble poise of veterans.

"We are really close," Anundsen said. "We have a really special bond and trust between each other, and we always support each other. It really helps having that friendship on and off the court."

There are no egos and no complaints, but there are a lot of wins. In singles, these three have handled one of the toughest schedules in the country by compiling 28 wins and only 12 losses.

"It's exciting that we have started out so strong and that we have set a standard for ourselves," Long said. "It's going to make us be intense our whole time here. It's

motivation more than anything."

The freshmen have recently meshed into potent doubles players, helping the Tar Heels win eight of their last 10 doubles points.

"I am very excited, selfishly, to have these three girls come in and to be able to coach them from the beginning," Kalbas said. "They are three of the most genuinely nice people you could have on a team, and they are all about what is best for the team."

As the freshmen prepare for their first taste of the Duke-UNC rivalry on Sunday, there is no doubt they are ready to add yet another win against a top-25 team to their already impressive resume.

"We are excited and ready to play them," Anundsen said. "Us freshmen know a couple of the freshman on their team, and we will be a little nervous but definitely excited and very up for the match."

Contact the Sports Editor  
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# No-hitter topples Thundering Herd

BY BRANDON COWARD

With her teammates only managing three hits the whole game, sophomore Crystal Cox couldn't afford to give up any — and she didn't.

**SOFTBALL**  
Marshall 0  
UNC 1  
8 INNINGS  
Marshall 1  
UNC 3

Cox was nearly perfect in the first game of Wednesday's doubleheader against Marshall. The Tar Heels won the first game, 1-0, and the second game, 3-1.

"I was hitting my spots and had good defense behind me," Cox said. "I was in a groove."

Cox's was the first extra-inning no-hitter in UNC history. The two wins brought the Tar Heels to 21-13 on the season and served as a late birthday present for Coach Donna Papa.

"It was a day late, but I'll take it," Papa said. "I'm really excited because I feel like we put together two good back to back wins."

"We lost an extra-inning game to Florida Atlantic over the weekend, and it was nice to be able to come out on the other end this time."

Wednesday's first game was a defensive standoff in which no team had a runner in scoring position until the bottom of the seventh inning.

"I felt like our hitting was struggling," said catcher Theresa Nicholas. "We didn't make adjustments early at the plate. We also struggled finding consistency in the umpire."

When the Tar Heels came in the

dugout after stifling the Thundering Herd's attack in the top of the inning, they knew they had to put the game away.

Starting out with a runner on second — in accordance with international extra-innings rules — the UNC's top priority was to advance freshman Marissa May to third.

"In this case, you want to get a bunt down and move the runner," Papa said. "Then you've got two opportunities to score them from third."

Papa's plan played out perfectly. Sophomore Julia Bove dropped a bunt in front of the plate, which set the stage for another freshman, Joslin Higgins, to knock May in for the winning run.

Both teams struggled offensively in each game. But the Tar Heels got some help from the Thundering Herd (14-13) in the third inning of the second game when first baseman Sara Spenia let a throw sail into foul territory, allowing a run to score and the batter, Higgins, standing on third.

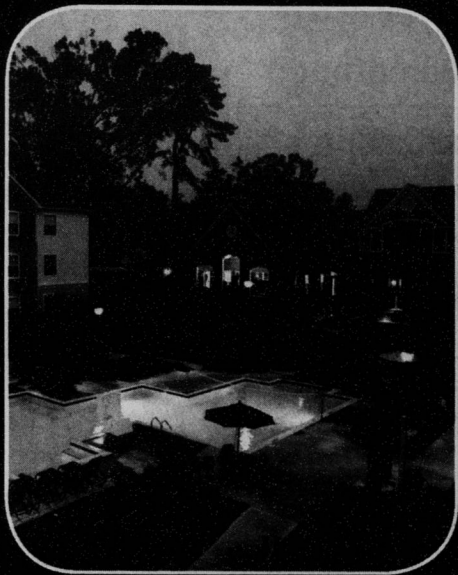
Higgins later scored on a sacrifice fly to put UNC ahead for good.

Though the Tar Heels didn't win in dominating fashion, Papa felt the victories continued a positive trend for this season's team.

"As of these last five games, the team has really come together," Papa said. "We've had solid pitching and very solid defense. Even though we didn't have many opportunities in these games, we made the most of the ones we had."

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