

Root for the Patriots; It's the American way

Few things resonate with Americans' sense of core values as much as rooting for the underdog. After all, this nation derives its principles from the American Revolution, "The Little Engine That Could" and "Fievel Goes West."

This year, especially, people love the underdog — aka all of the New England Patriots' opponents. Millions of Americans loathe the Pats, thanks to years of pent-up jealousy and a video-taping scandal that many claim "taints" their perfect regular season.

Want some cheese with that whine?

The Patriots may be as far from underdogs as Tyler Hansbrough against yours truly one-on-one, but rooting against New England in Super Bowl XLII is un-American.

More than underdog victories, America prides itself on great achievements, and the Patriots' season certainly qualifies.

Here's an underdog — the guy reasoning with people to root for New England. So listen up, Brick Wall.

First, if the Pats win Super Bowl XLII and finish the season with a flawless 19-0 record, you can tell your grandkids, "When I was your age, I watched a man with a chin as chiseled as 'David' put together the season to define all others."

But the Patriots need to win the Super Bowl to be "the best team ever." Had the 1972 Dolphins lost to the Washington Redskins in Super Bowl VII, they would not be "The 1972 Dolphins" as we know them.

If the 2007 Patriots beat the Giants, they are "The 2007 Patriots" for eternity. And you will have lived through every game.

Second, the Patriots were incontrovertibly the best team in football this season. If the Giants win the Super Bowl, it's a travesty.

See, the best team does not always win the championship in its respective sport.

Many times, yes, the best team wins the World Series, NBA Finals, Super Bowl or Stanley Cup, and all is right with the world. But sometimes the hottest team wins, or the one that suffered the least injuries or the one that survived because of a ground ball through



SAM ROSENTHAL
THE GARDEN STATE OF MIND

Bill Buckner's legs. If the Giants beat the Patriots, that hardly makes them the best team in football this season. The Patriots earned that distinction long ago, before the playoffs, arguably before they even completed their perfect regular season by beating the G-Men the first time.

Nobody but the Pats deserve this title. If the Giants win, they should tell their grandkids that they stole one from the best team ever.

Lastly, don't hate the players — hate the game.

If you root for a professional football team, chances are you have at least one excruciatingly painful memory of a loss to New England during the past few seasons.

Remember Super Bowl XXXIX? Philadelphia Eagles fans, like myself, wish they didn't. The Pats defeated the Birds 24-21 and won their third Super Bowl in four years. Now many Eagles supporters despise the Patriots, as do Colts fans, Dolphins fans, Panthers fans and virtually anyone living outside of the greater Boston area.

The Patriots, though, deserve respect, not rancor. As much as one can ask of a modern professional team, they play unselfishly and win with class. The franchise strives for the Super Bowl yearly — most teams are content to sell tickets.

The Pats lost last year's AFC title game but had no interest in trying again with the same personnel.

Instead they added Randy Moss, Wes Welker and Donte Stallworth to revamp their Achilles' heel of a receiving corps.

Those moves turned an excellent team into the best in NFL history. If New England wins one more game, They Are Legend.

So one week from Sunday, remember — Uncle Sam wants YOU to root for the Patriots.

Contact Sam Rosenthal at samrose@email.unc.edu.

THE LOWDOWN ON SATURDAY'S GAME



No. 4 Maryland vs.
No. 3 North Carolina
Carmichael Auditorium, 1 p.m.
Broadcast: FSN
Radio: 1360 WCHL



(17-2,4-0 ACC)

HEAD TO HEAD

Backcourt

With Kristi Toliver's and Marah Strickland's deadly marksmanship, MD leads the ACC in 3-point percentage. Adding in Toliver's ability to create for her teammates in the open court, Maryland gets the nod. **Edge: MD**



Frontcourt

Expect Saturday to be a war down on the blocks as both squads love to hit the glass. UNC's Rashanda McCants is always a mismatch for the opposition, and Erlana Larkins has been a force of late. **Edge: UNC**



Bench

When UNC's Jessica Breland comes off the bench, UNC boasts one of the top reserves in the ACC. Factoring in the tempo the Tar Heels play, look for both teams' depth to be a key storyline in the game. **Edge: UNC**



Intangibles

A pregnant Terrapin head coach Brenda Frese will not make the trip UNC — doctor's orders. This won't be the first time MD has been without Frese on the road, but Boston College isn't UNC. **Edge: UNC**



The Bottom Line — North Carolina 77, Maryland 71

— COMPILED BY DAVID ELY

North Carolina hits the road

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Three North Carolina Olympic sports teams will be in action on the road this weekend, with two heading to Pennsylvania.

The track and field teams will compete in the Penn State National today and Saturday in University Park, Pa., with freshman LaToya James looking to continue her strong season in the 60-meter hurdles.

Also heading to the Keystone State will be the North Carolina fencing team, which will participate in the Penn State Dual

Meets in State College, Pa.

They'll be looking to find consistency in their young season.

And the North Carolina wrestling team will visit two ACC foes this weekend, grappling with the Cavaliers of Virginia today and the Hokies of Virginia Tech on Saturday.

The Cavaliers boast three wrestlers in the top 17 in their respective weight classes and will look to be stiff competition for the Tar Heels.

Head to dailytarheel.com for the full story.

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CAROLINA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

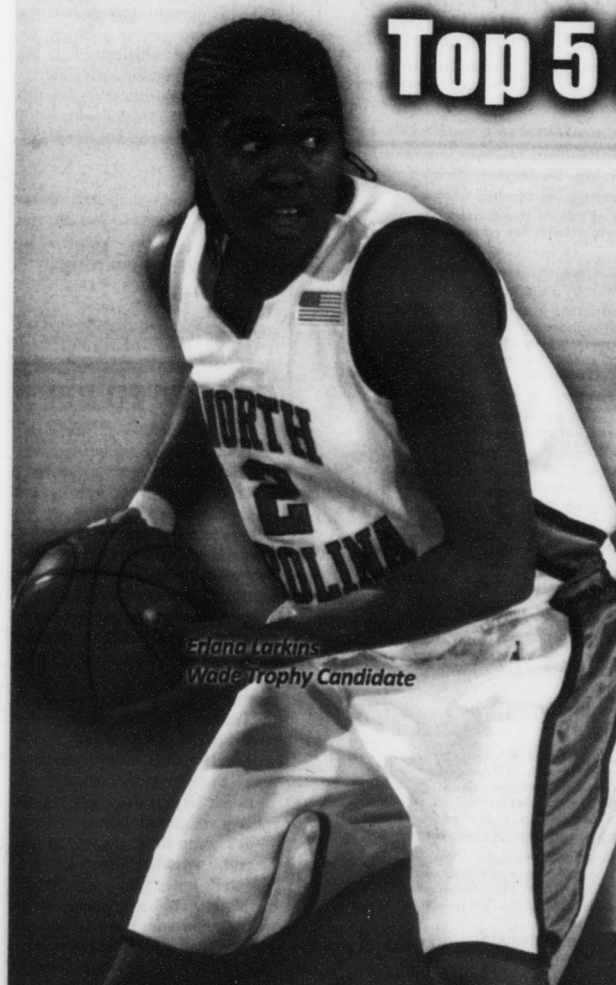
Top 5 Showdown in Carmichael!

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26th

#4 Maryland vs. #3 UNC

1:00 PM

Game tickets available at the Athletics Ticket Office, located in the Ernie Williamson Athletic Center, until Friday at 5:00 p.m.
Tickets will also be available at the white ticket trailer next to Carmichael starting one and a half hours before tipoff, **WHILE THEY LAST!**



Erlana Larkins
Wade Trophy Candidate



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