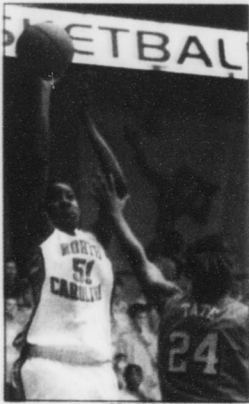


SPORTS BRIEFS

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



DTH FILE/SABRINA SHORT

FROM WIRE REPORTS

ATLANTA — It was a less than perfect game by a North Carolina team that has made a habit of blowing out opponents this season. But for the No. 3 Tar Heels, less than perfect is still often good enough.

Rashanda McCants had 19 points and Erlana Larkins had 18 as UNC coasted to a 75-61 victory against Georgia Tech on Sunday.

The Tar Heels were sloppy with the ball at times, committing 27 turnovers. But with just five regular-season games remaining, they played well enough to keep building momentum as they set their sights on March.

"We knew it was going to be a tough game down here," North Carolina coach Sylvia Hatchell said. "We knew they were going to press, and it was going to be very physical, and it was exactly how we thought it would be."

The Tar Heels (22-2, 9-0 ACC) extended their winning streak against the Yellow Jackets to 12, dating back to 2002. And after losing at No. 1 Connecticut on Jan. 21, they've won five in a row.

FOOTBALL



DTH FILE/LARRY BAUM

Seven home games and a nationally televised Thursday night game on ESPN highlight North Carolina's 2008 football schedule, which the Atlantic Coast Conference released Friday.

UNC begins the season on Aug. 30 vs. McNeese State and also hosts Connecticut (Oct. 4) and Notre Dame (Oct. 11) in nonconference play.

The Tar Heels' ACC home slate includes games against defending ACC champion Virginia Tech (Sept. 20), Boston College (Oct. 25), Georgia Tech (Nov. 8) and N.C. State (Nov. 22).

INSIDE SPORTS

The gymnastics team beat N.C. State in its first home meet of the season. See pg. 11 for story.

Freshmen helped fuel UNC's wrestling victory in Raleigh on Friday. Go to dailytarheel.com for story.

THIS WEEK

TUESDAY

MEN'S BASKETBALL
at Virginia
TIME: 8 p.m.
LOCATION: Charlottesville, Va.

WEDNESDAY

SOFTBALL
at UNC-Wilmington
TIME: 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.
LOCATION: Wilmington

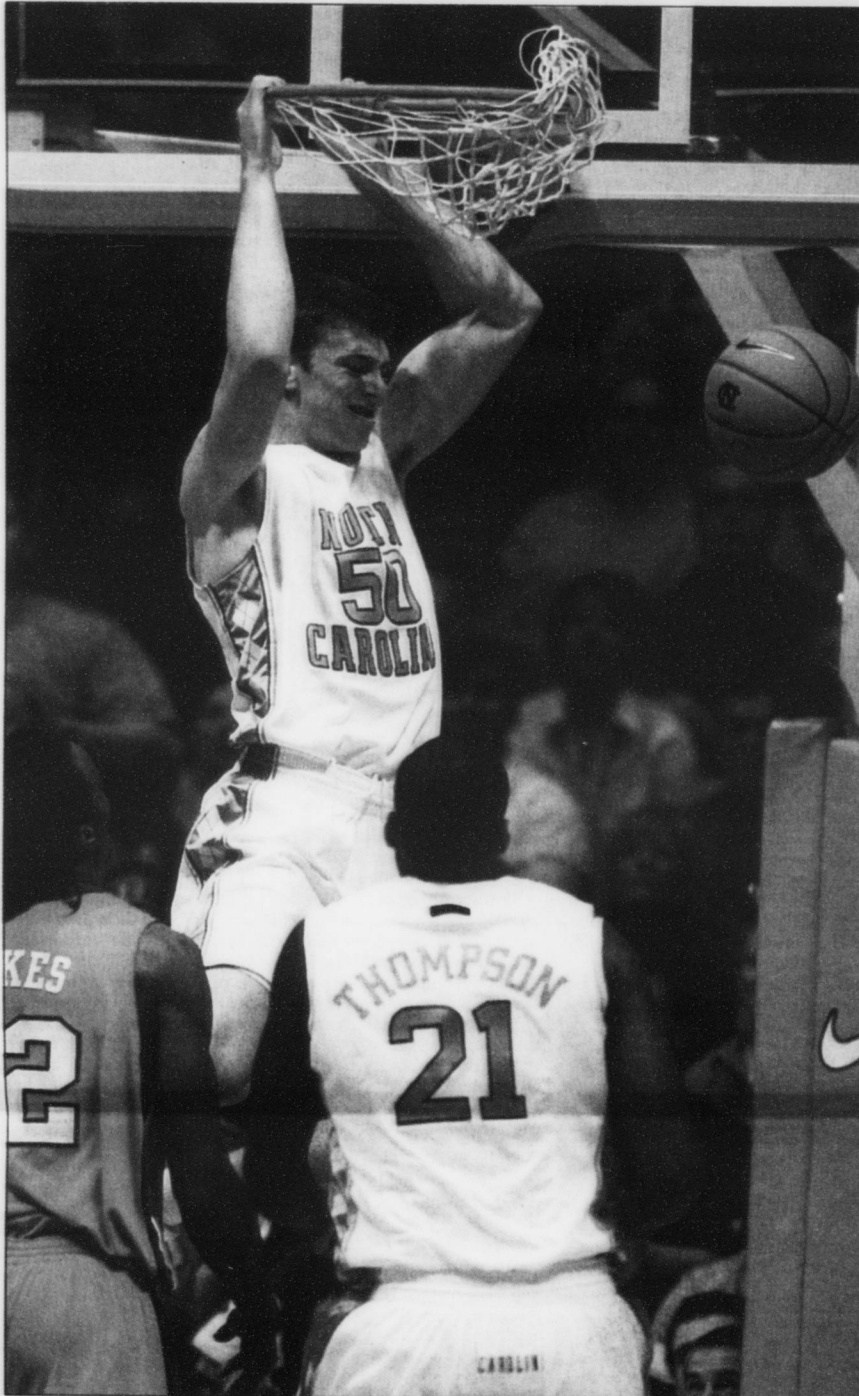
FRIDAY

SOFTBALL
vs. East Tennessee
TIME: 9 a.m.
LOCATION: Gainesville, Fla.

WRESTLING
at Ohio
TIME: 6 p.m.
LOCATION: Athens, Ohio

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL
at Virginia
TIME: 7 p.m.
LOCATION: Charlottesville, Va.

THE STREAK SURVIVES



DTH/DAVID ENARSON

North Carolina's Tyler Hansbrough throws down a dunk during UNC's 103-93 double-overtime win against Clemson in the Smith Center on Sunday. Hansbrough's 39 points, including 17-19 free throw shooting, led UNC.

HEELS RALLY FOR VICTORY

BY GREGG FOUND
SENIOR WRITER

Clemson's James Mays, all alone in the open, court, hauled in a pass, took a monster step and threw down a dunk to open the game.

When Tyler Hansbrough turned to inbound the ball, there was orange everywhere. Taking advantage of Ty Lawson's second straight missed game, Clemson (17-6, 5-4 ACC) threw on a full-court press, roared out of the locker room and stormed to the biggest lead the No. 3 Tar Heels have faced all season.

Which only made for a bigger comeback. Without leading at any point during regulation, the

Tar Heels used every second possible — plus two overtime periods — to claw back from a barrage of punches and a 14-point deficit, then ran away late for a 103-93 win.

"They hit us right between the eyes, and we backed off," UNC coach Roy Williams said. "We got so timid and tentative with everything."

In a game every bit as heart-pounding, nerve-wracking and adrenaline-fueled as the first meeting between the two teams this season, the Tar Heels struggled to recover from their woozy opening minutes for the rest of the game.

Then senior Quentin Thomas dove to the hoop.

His soft layup sank through the net with 26 seconds left in the second half, and the Tar Heels had finally rallied to tie the game at 82-82, closing a gap of nine points in the final three minutes.

But the theatrics were just getting started when Clemson's

SEE STREAK, PAGE 11

Tar Heel offense finds its groove

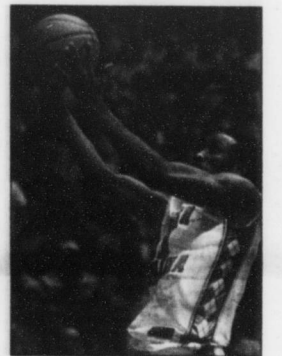
BY JESSE BAUMGARTNER
SENIOR WRITER

With no Ty Lawson for a second consecutive game, No. 3 North Carolina had to turn to a different offensive formula in Sunday's stunning 103-93 comeback victory against Clemson.

To go along with lots of Tyler Hansbrough — the norm in any UNC game these days — a shot-making Wayne Ellington reemerged and none other than senior point guard Quentin Thomas debuted as the squad's Mr. Clutch. An unexpected combination to be sure, but after scoring just 34 points in the first half, UNC couldn't afford to be picky.

With limited point production from Thomas for much of the evening that couldn't make up for Lawson's usual 13.6 a game, Ellington chose the right time to break out of a six-game shooting slump that saw him shoot 35.6 percent from the field and 21.4 percent from beyond the arc.

On Sunday, Ellington was



DTH/DAVID ENARSON

North Carolina senior Quentin Thomas led UNC to his first victory as a starter Sunday night and came up big late.

back to the gunslinger mentality that netted him 36 points Jan. 6 at Clemson. Curling around screens and pulling up off the dribble in rhythm, the

SEE OFFENSE, PAGE 11

Wrestlers grapple to key conference win

BY DANIEL PRICE
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

RALEIGH — Heading into its match against N.C. State on Friday, the North Carolina wrestling team had alternated wins and losses in its last four conference contests, the most recent a win against Virginia Tech.

But the Tar Heels (8-5, 3-2 ACC) put a stop to the pattern in Reynolds Coliseum, dominating the Wolfpack (8-8-1, 1-2) in the early matches and coming out with a 24-18 victory.

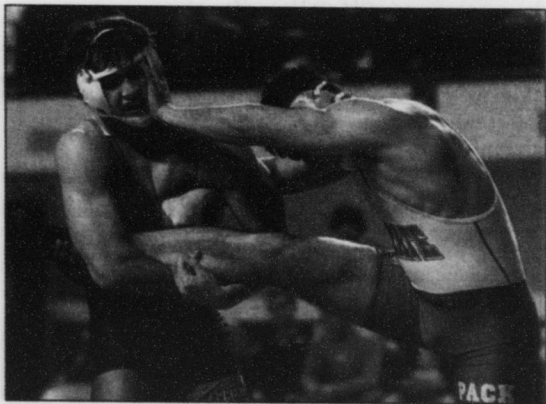
"It's always great to beat State," UNC coach C.D. Mock said. "They embarrassed us here last year. They embarrassed us, I think, at the ACC Tournament. Our guys were fired up tonight."

The match got off to a late start, with the first contest commencing 25 minutes after the scheduled time. But when it finally began, the Tar Heels didn't delay in taking it to their rival.

After an 8-2 win from redshirt freshman Thomas Scotton put the Tar Heels up 3-0 early, UNC's star 165-pounder Keegan Mueller continued his stellar streak of wins.

Mueller earned his second pin of the season, smothering N.C. State's Jalil Dozier one minute and 13 seconds into the second round.

Mueller, a transfer from Ohio State, reveled in the atmosphere in Raleigh, comparing it to that of the crowd at Buckeye matches



DTH/NICOLAS GUILLETT

The North Carolina wrestling team jumped out to a 24-0 lead Friday night at N.C. State and then hung on to land a 24-18 conference win.

against Michigan.

"It's so much fun to come here because they have a real good crowd," Mueller said. "Nobody likes name calling or whatever, but it's kind of fun because (the fans) are so intense."

Seizing the momentum from the Mueller pin, Tar Heel wrestlers won the next four matches in building a 24-0 lead. Included in the four were three straight major decisions.

"The difference between wrestling and team sports is there's momentum, but you can't take a timeout and try to change it," Mock said. "The kids have to change the momentum."

N.C. State's last four wrestlers were able to do just that — just

not well enough. After a forfeit in the 125-pound weight class got the Wolfpack on the board, N.C. State hit the strength of its lineup.

But despite having two top-10 ranked wrestlers left to go, the Wolfpack was not able to get the three pins it needed to tie UNC, leaving the Tar Heels with the six-point victory.

Even after a rivalry match though, the Tar Heels have bigger things on their minds.

"We don't care about N.C. State, Virginia, Virginia Tech — all those individual wins and losses," Mueller said. "We want to win the ACC Tournament."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

Tar Heels take five to kickoff new season

BY PENN ELY
STAFF WRITER

The North Carolina softball team jumped off to a blistering start this season, winning the Carolina Classic and twice shattering the all-time scoring record.

The Tar Heels (5-0) claimed the Classic title Sunday with a 5-2 victory against East Carolina.

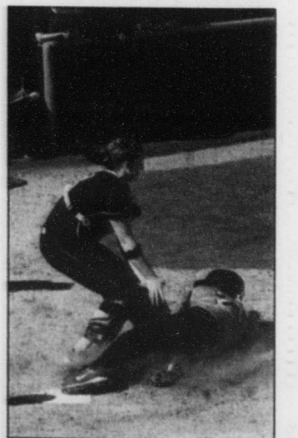
But Friday and Saturday's games were 21 when UNC did the most damage.

"We felt like for us to be a contender, our offense really had to improve," North Carolina coach Donna Papa said. "We spent 80

percent of our fall really working to improve that, so I was pleased with the runs that we put on the board."

The offense came with a vengeance. Friday, the squad dismantled George Washington 21-1, setting a Tar Heel record for most runs scored.

But the Tar Heels were not content. The team returned to action Saturday afternoon, topping N.C. Central 24-0 and breaking the record for the second time in 24 hours.



DTH/SARAH RIAZATI

Junior Emily Troup slides safely into home during one of UNC's five games this weekend. The Tar Heels won all five contests.

"We did such a good job in staying focused in our at-bats and not worrying about who we were playing or what the score was," Papa said.

"It's very easy when you get a big lead just to go up there and not be very focused on what we're doing."

UNC junior Emily Troup earned tournament MVP honors. Troup hit 8-16, putting up two doubles,

SEE SOFTBALL, PAGE 11