

Sizing up this year's squad Tar Heels shut down Miami

In success, UNC silences doubts

BY DAVID ELY
SPORTS EDITOR

After another white-washing of a conference opponent Thursday — Miami the latest victim — the North Carolina women's basketball team sits atop the ACC, unscathed at 12-0.

And now that the Tar Heels have approached the season's stretch run toward March Madness, it's only natural to wonder where this team should be placed in the pecking order of the previous UNC elite.

"Oh wow — I don't know," coach Sylvia Hatchell said Tuesday when asked how this year's edition stacks up against her previous two squads.

"That's hard to say. The other two went to the Final Four; this team hasn't done that yet. This team has a lot to live up to."

That's exactly what the Tar Heels have done thus far, despite many preseason claims that they didn't have the horses to replicate past postseason success.

Much of that speculation revolved around the matter of replacing Ivory Latta and fellow departed senior Camille Little. A player of Latta's caliber doesn't come around too often, and many pundits openly questioned how Hatchell could replace Latta's school-record 2,285 points and on-court leadership.

"I think people expected us not to be good without Ivory and Camille," senior Erlana Larkins said. "We really miss them a lot, but I feel like we just surprised a lot of people. I mean, who thought that we'd be

(25-2), losing Ivory and Camille?"

As painful as it was to lose those two seniors, their departure enabled UNC to become the juggernaut that it is today.

Without Latta's dependable outside shooting, which propelled UNC to attempt nearly 19 threes per game, Hatchell retooled her game plan to fit this year's team's strengths.

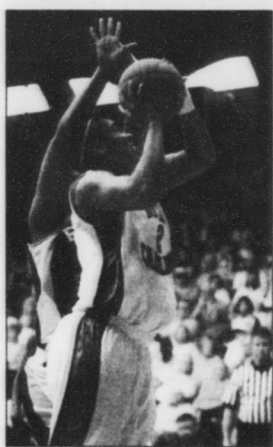
Instead, the Tar Heels primary option is a Cetera DeGraffenreid-led fast break. If that doesn't work, the freshman point guard whips the ball inside to either Larkins or LaToya Pringle, who either attacks the basket or kicks it back out, where the play starts again or an outside shot is taken.

In this manner, UNC plays a more efficient game, shooting 47.9 percent from the field and averaging 88.3 points an outing.

"I think our players complement each other well," Hatchell said. "Erlana, she draws attention, gets double teamed. If she kicks it out, those guards know, 'Hey, if I get it into Erlana, if she doesn't have something, she's gonna get it to me if I'm open.'"

While Pringle admitted the Tar Heels do need to hit more shots from the perimeter, she saw one area in particular where the '08 team trumps her previous squads — intensity.

Ever since a January meltdown at UConn, North Carolina has been a different team. Now every player talks about playing all 40 minutes of every game, and that mantra has



DTH FILE/KATE NAPIER

Senior Erlana Larkins leads the Tar Heels in rebounds per game. Larkins is looking to appear in her third straight Final Four with UNC.

fueled UNC through its current eight-game winning streak.

"Last year we didn't really have that kind of pivotal moment that really changed our outlook," Pringle said. "I think we just kind of coasted throughout the whole season with us only losing to Duke."

If there is one shortcoming, it's on the defensive end. Larkins said the Tar Heels continue to struggle with their transition and team defense.

"At this point in the year, several years ago we had our team defense down," she said. "We understood our concept sort of on each side, and we just haven't gotten that together this year."

Comparing recent women's teams

- 2007-08 team**
- ▶ Points scored per game: 88.3
 - ▶ Points allowed per game: 63.4
 - ▶ 3-pointers made per game: 4.1
 - ▶ Field goal percentage: .479
 - ▶ Rebounding differential: +10.8

- 2006-07 team***
- ▶ Points scored per game: 83.7
 - ▶ Points allowed per game: 55.0
 - ▶ 3-pointers made per game: 6.3
 - ▶ Field goal percentage: .467
 - ▶ Rebounding differential: +10.8

- 2005-06 team***
- ▶ Points scored per game: 82.2
 - ▶ Points allowed per game: 59.9
 - ▶ 3-pointers made per game: 7.1
 - ▶ Field goal percentage: .470
 - ▶ Rebounding differential: +4.5

*made Final Four

But as long as the Tar Heels continue to play at their accustomed breakneck pace, any defensive deficiency could be erased by UNC's potent offense come March.

And while this year's team has a long way to go before proving it deserves to be placed among the Latta-led squads, Pringle said the potential is there for greatness.

"I think this team could be the best out of the teams that went to the Final Four."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

Balanced effort key in road win

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) —Senior forward Erlana Larkins scored 18 points to lead No. 2 North Carolina to a 79-61 victory against Miami on Thursday night at the BankUnited Center.

Junior forward Rashanda McCants finished with 17 points, and Rebecca Gray scored 15 points as the Tar Heels wore down the Hurricanes with two first-half runs.

North Carolina (25-2, 12-0 ACC) has won eight straight and 16 of its past 17 games with its only loss at then-No. 1 Connecticut on Jan. 21.

Senior guard Maurita Reid scored 18 points to lead Miami (9-17, 2-9). She also grabbed seven rebounds, five of which came on the offensive end.

The 'Canes have lost eight of their past nine. Trailing 12-9, the Tar Heels scored 16 unanswered points in a span of 5:50 in the first half and took the lead for good. McCants scored eight points during the spurt.

Sophomore forward Jessica Breland's short jumper with 7:12 remaining in the half capped the run. Reid hit three 3-pointers in the next 1:50 as the Hurricanes cut North Carolina's lead to 27-21. Damisha Moore's field goal with 3:50 left again cut North Carolina's advantage to six at 29-23. But the Tar Heels outscored the Hurricanes 18-5 the rest of the half behind Gray's eight points, including two 3-pointers.

North Carolina played without senior forward LaToya Pringle, who injured her hand during the

second half of UNC's 97-77 victory against Florida State.

Miami played without senior center Carla Williams, who had started 22 of the team's 25 games.

UM coach Katie Meier suspended Williams and freshman center Kathryn Hester for a violation of team rules.

Williams was suspended for the North Carolina game while Hester's suspension is indefinite, according to a statement from the Miami sports information office.

The Tar Heels finish their ACC schedule at home with games against N.C. State on Feb. 25 and Duke on March 2.

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

North Carolina 79, Miami 61

| | | | |
|----------------|----|----|----|
| North Carolina | 46 | 33 | 79 |
| Miami | 28 | 33 | 61 |

North Carolina (79)

| | fg | ft | rb | a | pf | tp |
|---------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|----|----|
| Larkins | 28 | 7-8 | 4-4 | 2-6 | 4 | 3 |
| McCants | 24 | 6-14 | 3-4 | 2-10 | 2 | 2 |
| Breland | 31 | 6-11 | 1-2 | 3-11 | 2 | 0 |
| Clymer | 23 | 13 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 1 | 1 |
| DeGraffenreid | 35 | 17 | 1-2 | 0-4 | 4 | 3 |
| Bursey | 3 | 3-4 | 0-0 | 0-3 | 0 | 2 |
| Barry | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gray | 20 | 4-5 | 5-5 | 0-1 | 2 | 0 |
| Austin | 1 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 1 |
| Wood | 0 | 1-1 | 0-0 | 0-2 | 0 | 0 |
| Lucas | 24 | 16 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 5 | 0 |
| Total | 200 | 38-89 | 16-17 | 19-60 | 20 | 12 |

Percentages — FG: 50% FT: 83% 3-point goals — 5-15 (33) (McCants 2-3, Gray 2-3, Lucas 1-3, Clymer 0-2, DeGraffenreid 0-2, Breland 0-2, Bursey 0-1) Team rebounds — 6 (Blocked shots — 5 (Breland 5), Turnovers — 23 (DeGraffenreid 7, McCants 4, Lucas 3, Clymer 3, Larkins 2, Breland 2, Bursey, Wood, Wood) — 10 (Breland 3, DeGraffenreid 2, Gray 2, Larkins, McCants, Lucas)

Miami (61)

| | fg | ft | rb | a | pf | tp |
|------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|----|----|
| Clark | 21 | 2-6 | 0-0 | 5-9 | 2 | 3 |
| Barnes | 21 | 1-7 | 0-0 | 2-5 | 0 | 2 |
| Reid | 23 | 6-17 | 2-4 | 6-7 | 3 | 4 |
| Cunningham | 32 | 4-12 | 1-3 | 3 | 1 | 11 |
| Woodson | 12 | 2-11 | 1-1 | 1-3 | 6 | 0 |
| Moore | 15 | 2-4 | 0-0 | 1-3 | 0 | 0 |
| James | 15 | 1-6 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0 | 1 |
| Drake | 19 | 3-8 | 0-1 | 1-2 | 0 | 2 |
| Blair | 5 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-1 | 0 | 2 |
| Bentley | 7 | 2-7 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 200 | 34-82 | 4-8 | 25-41 | 15 | 14 |

Percentages — FG: 28% FT: 50% 3-point goals — 5-35 (27) (Reid 4-11, Cunningham 2-6, Clark 1-3, Woodson 1-4, Barnes 1-6, Moore 0-1, James 0-2) Team rebounds — 7 (Blocked shots — 3 (Clark 2, Drake) Turnovers — 18 (Clark 3, Reid 3, James 3, Barnes 2, Cunningham 2, Woodson 2, Moore) Steals — 12 (Reid 4, Clark 3, Cunningham 2, Drake 2, Barnes)

Technical fouls — None Attendance — 1,128

Schools board plans for coming year

Serving array of needs is a top priority

BY ROBERT C. GUNST JR.
STAFF WRITER

Challenging students academically and eliminating failure topped Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Superintendent Neil Pedersen's to-do list Thursday.

The district's Board of Education set goals and discussed challenges at its annual planning conference.

The board must decide how best to serve a growing number of auto-

tic and dyslexic students.

This year, the district teaches 149 autistic children and 332 children with learning disabilities, said Margaret Blackwell, the district's executive director of Exceptional Children and Student Services.

The district is a leader in dealing with exceptional children, Blackwell said. They take into account federal mandates, state policies, parent expectations and

the needs of the individual student, she said.

Blackwell told the board she favors increased instruction that monitors progress through tests and other assessments to help exceptional children succeed in the classroom, instead of simply allowing children to have extra test time.

"These children still need to be supported," Blackwell said.

Pedersen emphasized that the district faces challenges in improving the experience of the growing

and diverse population of students, while retaining good teachers.


Teacher turnover dropped to 8.5 percent in the 2006-07 school year from 16.43 percent in 2005-06.

The board will meet again today for day two of the conference to discuss possible technological innovations, the current needs of the faculty, and the superintendent's operating budget for the 2008-09 school year.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Alice McDERMOTT

2008 MORGAN WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

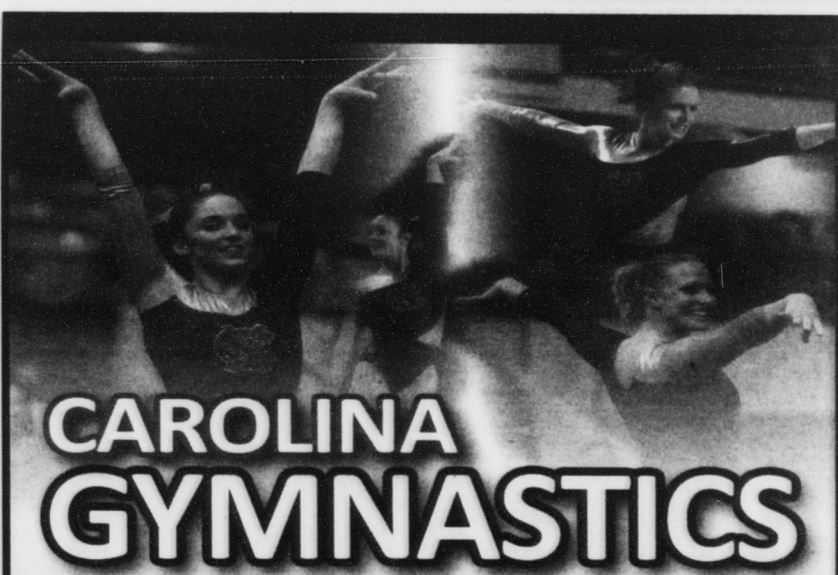


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