

Roy's sticky little situation

So you may have noticed that North Carolina coach Roy Williams donned a garish sticker during the NCAA title game that bore an uncanny resemblance to the Kansas Jayhawks' logo.

OK, it was a Kansas Jayhawks' logo, and you definitely noticed. And you strongly disapproved.

In the days following the game, the sticker covering Williams' breast became the subject of almost as much discussion as the one that didn't cover Janet Jackson's during that Super Bowl halftime show.

Take a chill pill, Tar Heel fans. Williams erred, for sure, but cut the man a break.

The issue here stems from a



SAM ROSENTHAL

THE GARDEN STATE OF MIND

disconnect between outsiders — fans and the media — and insiders — coaches and players.

Sometimes, we outsiders over-dramatize the sentimental side of sports, but sometimes coaches and players regard it too lightly.

In this case, Williams made a foolish decision to wear the KU

emblem and in no way anticipated the potential fallout (let's hope not, at least).

While Williams had his reasons — we'll get to those later — he had no sensitivity to the situation.

Had he simply shown up and cheered for Kansas sans the sticker, people would have cared much less.

But his transgression, in fans' eyes, went beyond the sticker: A broken clock had better timing than Williams on Monday.

If UNC had lost to Memphis or UCLA in the semifinals, and Williams supported KU in the finals, Tar Heel fans would have probably been all about their coach rooting against the team that knocked off UNC.

But he rooted for the team that did knock off UNC only two days earlier. For many fans, simply looking at a Jayhawk logo, or watching them win, made them see-sick.

Viewing it on their beloved coach's chest must have hit many as hard as Kansas' victory against North Carolina did itself.

So yes, Williams goofed. Now forgive and forget.

As he failed to understand the fans' perspective, so too did the fans misread the situation.

Students: Williams spent almost as much time at Kansas — 15 years — as you've been on this planet.

He won four National Coach of the Year Awards as a Jayhawk. He took KU to four Final Fours.

And then he left. He abdicated his throne in Lawrence, Kan., in favor of one here in Chapel Hill. Before you blame him for "Sticker-gate," remember that fact.

Williams is coaching your team, and for one night decided to wear a KU sticker. Would you rather he was coaching their team, and for one night wore a UNC sticker?

You'd likely be short a 2005 national championship trophy.

Moreover, Williams' action — misguided as it was — showed his unwavering class. Kansas played a huge role in making him the man who you all go wild for at the Smith Center, and he decided to pay homage to the years he spent there.

Don't question whether he focused enough on the game or whatever other ridiculous claims people have made over the past few days: Williams loves UNC, bleeds Carolina blue and you bet your bum wanted that game as badly as any of you did.

But, in defeat, he treated his old program with the same sportsmanship he always exemplifies. That doesn't mean he puts Kansas first, or that he wants to return to Lawrence now.

Besides, no way would Kansas replace the coach who brought them a title with the one who never did.

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Bats awaken for Tar Heels

BY DANIEL PRICE

ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

CARY — For nearly six innings Wednesday night, it looked like more of the same for the North Carolina baseball team.

The Tar Heels, who had only scored one run in their last 18 innings, were held scoreless by N.C. A&T through 5.1 innings, registering just three hits and striking out five times along the way.

"Our guys just weren't getting much done," UNC coach Mike Fox said. "The thing you've got to fight

in that atmosphere is not to start feeling too much pressure."

Thanks to a stellar performance from starting pitcher Mike Faccinei, the Tar Heel lineup didn't have much of that pressure to consider.

Faccinei threw 6.1 shutout innings, allowing just two hits while fanning a career-high eight batters.

"Michael's really been amazing for us," Fox said. "He gets like one start a month ... You're asking a lot of a kid to stay motivated and stay in there knowing you're probably going to get the ball again for a start at some point in the next two or three weeks."

Someone who hadn't been amazing for North Carolina (26-7) lately was Dustin Ackley. The sophomore had seen his batting average dip from better than .400 to .357.

Ackley broke out of his slump against the Aggies (12-22). With UNC leading 1-0 in the seventh inning, he plated the Tar Heels' first



Sophomore Dustin Ackley went 3-for-4 with two RBIs in UNC's 5-0 win against N.C. A&T.

two earned runs of the game on a double.

"Here lately I haven't been hitting that good," Ackley said. "I kinda needed to do something ... I feel I needed to get it going and just stop striking out."

Ackley's two-bagger was followed by a Garrett Gore walk and another two-run double, this one coming off the bat of Tim Fedroff. And with that inning, the Tar Heel offense appeared to be back.

"There's no secret that we need Dustin Ackley to hit for us to be the team we want to be," Fox said. "You have to have a guy in your lineup that everybody's a little afraid of."

And the offensive burst couldn't have come at a better time. UNC travels to Clemson this weekend for a three-game series with the Tigers. And despite Clemson being in a down year, Fox is glad to see production stepping up before the series.

"This game is so mental," he said. "You don't want to go into a big series ... not feeling really good about the way you're playing ... We haven't won a series in Clemson in I don't know when."

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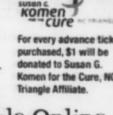
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