

Tar Heels fall to Fresno St.

Loss was first of the postseason

BY POWELL LATIMER
SPORTS EDITOR

OMAHA, NEB. — No one can adequately explain exactly how Fresno State continues to win ball games. Its best two pitchers are injured, and on paper its lineup is nothing more than average.

But somehow, the ultimate underdogs willed their way to another unexpected victory — this time at the expense of North Carolina in the College World Series.

Fresno State opened the game in similar fashion to that against LSU, with two massive homers sandwiching a three-run UNC inning. First, Ryan Overland put

a shot over the left wall in the second inning. Following UNC's three-run inning off an RBI triple from Tim Fedoroff, an RBI double from Kyle Seager and an RBI single from Chad Flack, Steven Susdorf blasted another solo shot over the right wall.

And through it all, the gritty Adam Warren was battling his way through four innings of work. Warren gave up nine hits but only allowed four runs, and when he left the mound, UNC was only one run behind.

But Fresno State out-gritted Warren's performance with a gutsy bullpen that employed five separate pitchers in the win.

"For a depleted pitching staff, they pitched pretty well tonight," UNC coach Mike Fox said. "Everybody that came out of the bullpen, they matched up when they needed to in the middle of the game, and their relievers got it done. We just couldn't get a big hit."

For most of the night, UNC's offense was an exercise in futility. The Tar Heels racked up 11 total hits but couldn't score after their three-run fourth inning and left 10 runners on base.

In the fifth inning, UNC left the bases loaded after Fresno State pulled some strategic pitching substitutions, bringing in Kris Tomlinson to intentionally walk Tim Federowicz to load the bases and face down Seager, then trading him for Holden Sprague one batter later to face Chad Flack. The result saw Seager strike out swinging and Flack fly out to right field.

In the bottom of the sixth, UNC was on the verge of collapse.

Following a Ryan Graepel error



North Carolina's Mark Fleury survives a pickoff attempt at second base by Fresno State shortstop Danny Muno in UNC's second College World Series game June 17 in Omaha, Neb. UNC fell to the Bulldogs 5-3.

"We swung at a lot of balls ... Even in the last inning we swung at a couple pitches ... we just didn't walk enough."

MIKE FOX, UNC HEAD BASEBALL COACH

— his first of the NCAA Tournament — reliever Rob Wooten loaded the bases by hitting one batter and walking another. But the Tar Heels managed to piece together a strike-out, a fly ball to Dustin Ackley and a ground out, again to Ackley, to escape from the jam.

"We had them in a corner more than once, and we took some at-bats like we were the ones with the problem," FSU coach Mike Batesole said. "We didn't finish some innings today like I'd like us to."

Despite numerous failed opportu-

nities to score, Fresno State managed — somehow, some way — to cobble together five runs on 13 hits, despite leaving 12 runners on base. That all started with first baseman Danny Muno, who reached base five times with three hits and two walks.

"We couldn't get their leadoff hitter off the base," Fox said. "He's red-hot, and every ball he hits finds a hole. He kind of gets them started, and they do what they need to."

For the final innings, North Carolina found themselves in an

unfamiliar position this postseason: playing from behind. The Tar Heels struggled and pressed and swung on pitches out of the zone until they had no outs left.

"We don't play well when we're behind," Fox said. "I don't know why."

"Tonight I thought we swung at a lot of balls ... Even in the last inning we swung at a couple pitches ... we just didn't walk enough. The strike zone was small for both teams and we didn't take advantage of that."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu

Graepel's glove shines at just the right time

Shortstop sees new plate success

BY POWELL LATIMER
SPORTS EDITOR

There's only one starter on this year's North Carolina team with no experience in Omaha, Neb. Only one player green behind the ears in Rosenblatt Stadium.

It's the rangy No. 24 shortstop in the middle of the field.

The one making all the plays.

Ryan Graepel, UNC's postseason shortstop, is fast becoming one of the biggest success stories of this year's NCAA Tournament.

Getting his first start in the Cary Regional, Graepel instantly solidified UNC's infield defense — which has given up an average of only four runs per game in the postseason.

Part of that statistic is due to Graepel's glove, which gets on just about everything that comes his way, and another part to his throws — dead-on without fail.

"He's a great defensive player, he's one of our best guys out in the field, and now he's starting to pick it up at the bat and he's just becoming a great player," catcher Tim Federowicz said.

"He's doing everything he needs to do, he's not making any errors, and he's getting all the routine plays done."

Graepel has zero errors in the postseason and only one in the last four months, and he takes a sort of pride in making that simple, but vital, 6-3 play to first base.

He also has developed a chemistry with second baseman Kyle Seager, with whom he shares a penchant for making the simple plays.

"It's one of those things where a lot of the times we don't even have to talk to each other, we know what each of us is gonna do in certain situations," Graepel said.

"We feel really comfortable with each other in the middle. I think that's really helped the team out a lot, being strong up the middle, in big situations down the stretch."



Ryan Graepel has been inserted into the starting lineup to shore up the middle infield.

The two now constitute an iron-clad middle infield, but while Seager's hitting prowess has been well-documented all season, Graepel has just recently been finding his groove.

He has three multi-hit games in the postseason, and, as he continues to start, his swing puts more and more balls into play.

"I'm starting to feel like I'm getting into a little bit of a rhythm at the plate, getting more at-bats has definitely helped," Graepel said.

"Coming in for spot defense and to pinch hit every now and then, it was tough for me to get into a rhythm."

But his defense still takes priority, epitomizing the same things that coach Mike Fox preaches seemingly every press conference.

"Mainly in the field is where my job is, any base hits or anything like that is a bonus — I think coach Fox would tell you that as well," Graepel said.

"I was put out there to play defense, and that's the main thing I'm posted on right now. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind getting hits at the plate either."

So for the time being, the least experienced starter on North Carolina's team is the one playing with the most moxie. Despite his play in the regional earning him interviews surrounded by TV cameras (an experience he called a "whirlwind"), he remains focused on those same simple throws to first base for easy outs.

"It's still kind of a whirlwind, but I just try to take it one day at a time and so far things have worked out."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu

Beijing deserves attention, too

Picture being brandished with a gold medal while dressed in your country's colors standing atop a podium embossed with the number one in the midst of thousands of fans with five interlocking multi-color rings and a burning torch in the background. It is the pinnacle of athletic achievement — to be an Olympic gold medalist.

But does anyone in the United States even care if an American or an athlete from another country is winning?

As I see it, the blunt answer would be no. The Olympics are a big deal, no matter if we choose to recognize it or not. The event is designed to bring together nations in the name of competition and unity. Either we have forgotten this, or we neglect to appreciate it.

The summer games are barely six weeks away, but I hear no talk of "Beijing '08."

Instead there are conversations about an NFL season looming in late September or a college basketball season tipping-off around Veteran's Day. We speculate almost a half year away, while the indubitably largest worldwide sporting event is just around the corner. Frankly, the lack of interest is demeaning to the athletes.

Have U.S. athletes not delivered in the past?

The reality is, in fact, quite the opposite. Since the inaugural modern Olympics in Athens in 1896, the United States has medaled a total of 2,197 times including 897 golds. Russia (the former Soviet Union) stands as the country with the second most medals earned of all time, having earned 1,122 total medals and only 440 golds.

Call me crazy, but that's domination.

A plausible reason for disaffection would also be if the United States as a whole was in a down year athletically, not expected to have the medal haul that we, as a nation built on the instant gratification that is bred with winning, have come to expect from our modern day gladiators.



CODY WILLIAMS
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But, that is hardly the case this year.

U.S. athletes are favored to win gold in eight events including basketball, softball, women's beach volleyball and a predicted sweep of men's swimming events — all competitions that receive the most glamorous coverage by the media and draw the most interest from the sports-watching public.

This doesn't take into consideration the many silver and bronze contenders for the U.S. We are gunning for that number one spot just like always.

When push comes to shove, I believe there is a single cause to this jaded America.

The people don't see the purity in the sports. With doping rampant in almost every instance of athletic competition, I can't even say I blame the pop-

ulation. Marion Jones, a former UNC-Chapel Hill student and star two-sport athlete, was once the most prolific female track competitor, possibly in U.S. history. Now, after the revelation of multiple doping offenses to prepare for the 2000 Sydney Olympics, she has become an outcast in the women's track world.

American Justin Gatlin once won an Olympic gold medal in the 100-meter dash. Now he faces what appears will be a lifetime ban from world track and field after testing positive for performance enhancing drugs not once, but twice.

And so, as the torch continues to make its way to Beijing and the pomp and circumstance of the opening ceremonies draw closer, I fear that the dreary tale will carry on.

As we see the number of "enhanced" Olympic athletes rise, the trust of Americans, along with their interest, will continue declining until the "Friends" re-run receives more American viewers than the Olympic games.

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THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

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