

DREAMS WITHIN REACH

BY MIKE EHRLICH
SPORTS SATURDAY EDITOR

Butch Davis was brought to North Carolina to turn around a floundering football program. And in only two seasons in the driver's seat, he has done just that.

After tallying a 4-8 record in 2007, Davis and the Tar Heels flip-flopped the results for an 8-4 record in year two.

It was the first time North Carolina had won eight games in the regular season since 1997 and left UNC bowl-game-bound for the first time in four years.

"I think for a program to grow and to make improvement, it takes an awful lot. It takes a ton of heart, and it takes a ton of work by the players and the coaches," Davis said after the season finale win against Duke.

"If we're going to be the football program that we all want to be, it's going to take everybody. And this was a great step forward."

It was truly a pivotal season for the developing football program. The only thing that will leave Davis and UNC fans scratching their heads this offseason is that it could have been even better.

What if quarterback T.J. Yates hadn't broken his ankle in the third game of the season, leading to a second-half collapse by the Tar Heels?

What if explosive receiver and returner Brandon Tate hadn't suffered a season-ending injury against Notre Dame?

What if the Tar Heels hadn't let a second-half lead to Virginia slip away, and what if they hadn't coughed up the football six times in a 41-10 drubbing at the hands of N.C. State?

And what if UNC, in control of its own destiny in the race for the ACC Coastal Division crown, hadn't stumbled in two of its last three games?

Whatever the possibilities, the Tar Heels still have plenty to look back fondly on from the 2008 season.

There was the emergence of the thunder and lightning combination at tailback — the power of Ryan Houston and the speed of Shaun Draughn.

And Hakeem Nicks put up a record-setting campaign. He became UNC's first-ever 1,000-yard receiver and moved into first place in school history in receiving yards — as a junior.

"He is one of the unique, special guys I have seen that the bigger the moment and the bigger the stage, the better he plays," Davis said.

Don't forget Trimane Goddard's seven interceptions, tied for the best in the nation and including a last-second game-saver in a big win against Miami. Or Bruce Carter's three blocked punts in one quarter against Connecticut. Or the landmark victory against Notre Dame.

The 2008 season was marked by transition, and UNC's record wasn't the only thing to evolve.

After four-year starting kicker Connor Barth moved on to the NFL, younger brother Casey stepped into the starting role.

Middle linebacker Mark Paschal, a senior, guided two young standouts, Carter and Quan Sturdivant, into prominence on his flanks.

Even Cameron Sexton, the oft-criticized veteran quarterback, filled in admirably before handing the reins back to the younger Yates to close out the year.

The regular season began with a win, and it ended with another. The Tar Heels closed the season with a 28-20 win against rival Duke, but even in the aftermath of the victory, Goddard still found some perspective.

After all, the Tar Heels will go bowling before the calendar turns.

"It's just a great win for our program," the safety said. "Still got one more game and unfinished business — and we look forward to that."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.



DTH FILE/ANTHONY HARRIS

Junior wideout Hakeem Nicks has provided many of the brightest spots in an up-and-down UNC season. Nicks became the Tar Heels' first-ever 1,000-yard receiver, and he's used his stiff arm as a nice way to get a few extra. "The stiff-arm has always kind of stuck with me since high school," he said.

UNC hoops on top in 2008

Final Four sparks success in '08-'09

BY DAVID ELY
SENIOR WRITER

It's been quite a rocky road to No. 1 for the North Carolina men's basketball team.

In May, forward Alex Stepheson transferred in order to be closer to his ailing father. And for nearly two months, Wayne Ellington, Danny Green and Ty Lawson toyed with entering their names into the 2008 NBA Draft before ultimately deciding to return to Chapel Hill.

But once the trio announced that they'd be back, there was little doubt that the Tar Heels would begin the season as the clear-cut favorite.

"I enjoy it a lot more than no targets being on your back," said coach Roy Williams of the high

expectations surrounding his team during UNC's October media day.

"I like having the target on our back. It think it makes us play to a higher standard each and every day, concentrate to a higher standard, can't take any days off."

"I've said many times, if everybody's saying you're gonna be pretty good, you've probably got a chance to be pretty good."

But in the months leading up to UNC's unanimous No. 1 ranking in the preseason polls, the injury bug hit North Carolina in a big way.

In early October, forward Marcus Ginyard had surgery to repair a stress fracture in his left foot. The senior is not expected to play until next semester.

"You know, you're losing your best defender," Williams said. "A guy who gets more little cheap baskets, offensive rebounds, steals than anybody on your club."

UNC's '08 run ends in Final Four

APRIL 7, SAN ANTONIO — North Carolina came to the Alamodome with dreams of a national title.

But after 14 minutes of play that Saturday, those dreams were dashed. Instead, UNC saw Kansas Jayhawks who stole the ball, raced downcourt and dropped in layup after layup.

Try as they might to mount a comeback, the Tar Heels tired out before they could complete the task, falling to Kansas 84-66 in the Final Four.

Then Tyler Hansbrough sat out the first few games because of a stress reaction in his right shin. The reigning national player of the year now has played in three games and sat out two others since his return.

"This bunch did some great, great things," coach Roy Williams said. "But we're extremely disappointed right now, because we had a bigger dream."

- 40-12: Kansas' largest lead, with 6:48 left in the first half
- 29 percent: UNC's shooting percentage in the first half
- 54.5 percent: Kansas' shooting percentage in the first half
- 42-33: Kansas' rebounding advantage against UNC

To make matters worse, UNC lost one of its top freshmen — forward Tyler Zeller — to a broken left wrist Nov. 18 against Kentucky.

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Heels make it to CWS for 3rd year

BY POWELL LATIMER
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

It's almost a routine by now.

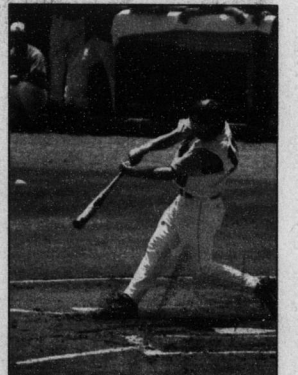
For the past three years, the North Carolina baseball team has been on a flight to Omaha, Neb., for the College World Series.

And each of the past three years, UNC came ever so close to winning.

The year 2008 was no exception, as the Tar Heels steamrolled through the regular season without losing a single series and compiled a record 54 wins.

That dominance extended into ACC play, where the Diamond Heels downed conference powerhouses Florida State and Miami.

The Hurricanes were even



DTH FILE/DAVID ENARSON

Second baseman Kyle Seager hit nine home runs and a team-high 75 RBI in UNC's 2008 campaign.

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HOW THE TARHEELS FARED IN 2008

MEN'S SPORTS

CROSS COUNTRY

15th: Best finish at the NCAA Southeast Regional — sophomore Evan Watchempano ran a time of 31:05.6 in the 10K.

11th: Place the UNC men finished in the NCAA Southeast Regional.

FENCING

17th: Team's finish in the NCAA championships in Columbus, Ohio.

Bobby Zeichmann: Finished 18th at the NAAs in his third year at the NAAs. The junior finished highest of the three Tar Heel men at the event.

GOLF:

15th: UNC's finish at the NCAA West Regional. The Tar Heels shot a three-day total of 895 in Bremerton, Wash.

14: Number of rounds under par for UNC's Kevin O'Connell, who was ACC Freshman of the Year.

LACROSSE

Coaching change: Joe Breschi, a 1990 UNC alumnus and first-team All-American defenseman, was named head coach.

8-6: Final record of the 2008 squad, which was upset 8-7 in the first round of the NCAA Tournament by unseeded Navy on Fetzter Field.

SWIMMING AND DIVING

2nd: Tar Heels' ACC finish, the highest since 2001.

Joe Kinderwater: Earned a spot on

the U.S. National Team after finishing third in a 10K meet at U.S. Open Water Championships in Minneapolis, Minn.

Seconds short: Sophomore Chip Peterson missed a spot on the 2008 U.S. Olympic team by 2.2 seconds in a 10K swim. He finished 13th; only the top 10 qualified.

SOCCER

2005: The last time North Carolina advanced to the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament.

Brian Shriver: Named to the All-ACC first team. Shriver has 31 points (13 goals, five assists) to this point in 2008. Visit dailytarheel.com for the full story on the squad's run in NAAs.

TENNIS:

Sustained success: The Tar Heels finished 21-6, the fourth time in five years UNC eclipsed 20 wins.

No. 12: UNC's final national ranking.

TRACK & FIELD

42nd: UNC's finish in the NCAA Championships in Des Moines, Iowa.

53'3": Length cleared by Austin Davis in the championships in the triple jump.

Charles Cox: Won the 400-meter dash title en route to winning ACC Track Rookie of the Year.

WRESTLING

Justin Dobbies: The junior ACC Champion at heavyweight won three straight matches at the NCAA Championships after losing his first match. Dobbies finished one loss shy of All-America.

3rd: Finish at the ACC Championships. UNC had five wrestlers place first or second in College Park, Md.

WOMEN'S SPORTS

BASKETBALL

1: Preseason ACC ranking for UNC, the first in the past four years.

Erlana Larkins: senior forward in 2008, who graduated as an All-American and led the Tar Heels to the NCAA sweet sixteen. Visit dailytarheel.com for the full

story on the squad's season.

CROSS COUNTRY

2: Number of All-Americans for UNC. Senior Brie Felnagle and junior Lauren Holesh became just the third pair of Tar Heels to earn the honor in the same year.

6th: Finish for the UNC women at the ACC Championships. Felnagle and Holesh each placed in the top 5.

3rd: Team finish at the NCAA Southeast Regional. Felnagle (2nd) and Holesh (4th) led UNC yet again.

FIELD HOCKEY

16: Danielle Forward: Scored 16 goals in an injury-shortened season, five more than any other Tar Heel.

2: Departing seniors on the 2008 Tar Heels' roster. Britt van Beek and Kate Scholl combined to register 15 goals and 12 assists. Visit dailytarheel.com to read the full story on the field hockey season.

GOLF

Sally Austin: The long-time coach announced her retirement Nov. 12,

effective after the 2008-09 season.

19th: Finish for the team at NCAA West Regional in May. The squad shot a three-day total of 914, led by Sydney Crane's 221.

GYMNASTICS

194.185: The Tar Heels' final regional qualifying score. UNC advanced to the Southeast Regional and placed sixth.

Injuries: UNC used five gymnasts for much of the season but were led by Christine Nguyen, named EAGL Gymnast of the Year.

LACROSSE

Carrier Dome: The host Syracuse Orange ended North Carolina's 13-7 season in the NCAA quarterfinals with a narrow 13-11 win.

World Cup: Midfielder Erica LaGrow and defender Amber Falcone earned spots on the U.S. training team for the 2009 Federation of International Lacrosse Women's World Cup.

ROWING

4th: North Carolina's finish at the ACC Championship Regatta. The team's best finish ever.

All-ACC: Two Tar Heels, senior Lisy McIntee and Ruby Woodsdie, earned all-conference honors.

SOFTBALL

13: North Carolina's highest ranking, which came at the end of the season.

Struggles at home: The Tar Heels failed

to make it out of the NCAA regional in Chapel Hill, losing to unranked BYU and Campbell.

SWIMMING & DIVING

Whitney Sprague: Placed second at the NCAA Championships in the 1650-meter freestyle with a time of 15:57.77.

32nd: The team's finish (a tie) at the championships.

TENNIS

3-4: The team score of the Tar Heels' final match of their season. With the loss to No. 17 Arkansas, UNC missed out on a trip to the Sweet 16. UNC trailed 2-0 early, but rallied to almost defeat the Razorbacks.

All-Conference duo: North Carolina's Sanaz Marand and Katrina Tsang each earned a spot on the all-conference team.

TRACK & FIELD

7th: North Carolina junior Brie Felnagle earned the seventh All-America honor of her career at the 2008 NCAA Championships by finishing ninth in the 1500-meter run.

VOLLEYBALL

Champs: The Tar Heels won the ACC Championship, clinching the title with a win against rival N.C. State.

300: North Carolina senior Lauren Prussing is just four kills shy of 300 for the season heading into the NCAA Tournament.