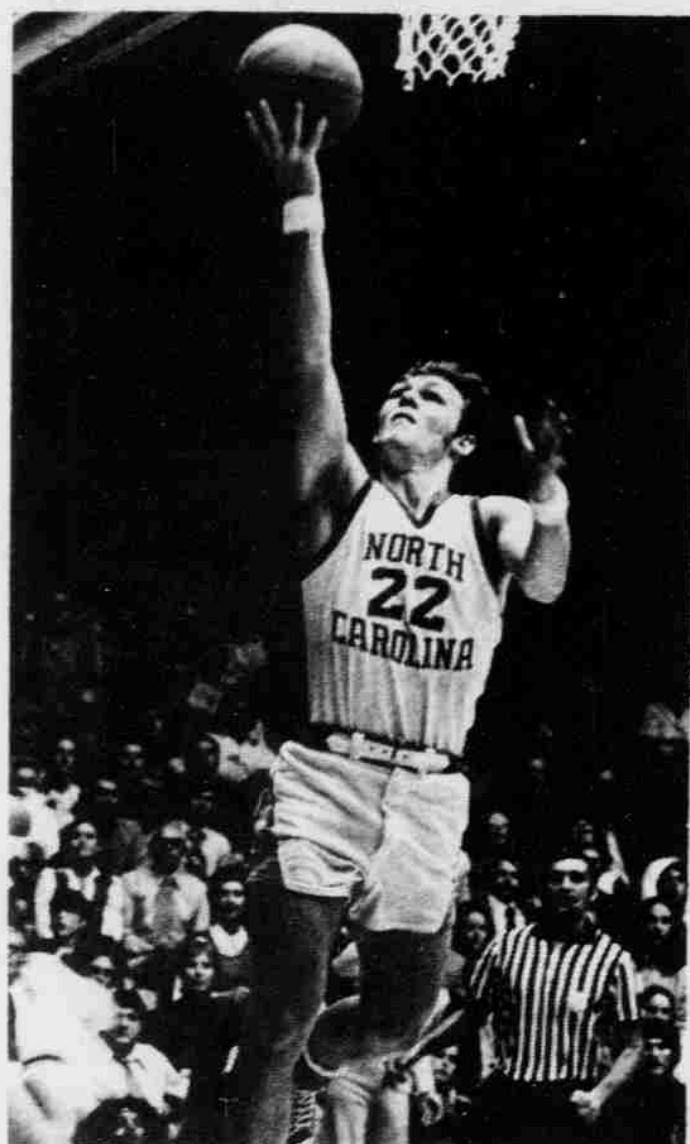


# Tar Heels, Deacons brace for tournament



George Karl

by Winston Cavin  
Sports Editor

Some call it ridiculous. Sports Illustrated's Curry Kirkpatrick calls it Looney Tunes. Frank McGuire used to call it Russian Roulette.

Whatever you call it, it's known as the Atlantic Coast Conference basketball tournament, and it determines the official league champion. Often criticized by sports writers and detested by coaches, the tournament survives. It is the pride—and scourge—of Southern basketball.

The tournament is as rare as a Mexican restaurant in Peking. Only two major conferences determine their champs by tournament play and the other one is the insignificant Southern Conference.

Good or bad, the tournament is a reality. The whole regular season becomes suddenly meaningless as the whole conference slugs it out for the crown. And to the winner goes the spoils.

Of course, there is the chance that there could be two winners. Should regular-season champion North Carolina State or fourth-seeded Duke win the title, the runnerup will go to the NCAA Eastern Regionals at Charlotte.

The three-day lunatic binge gets under way this afternoon when second-place North Carolina takes on number seven Wake Forest. That game begins at 1:30. Then at 3:30, third-place Maryland (20-5, 7-5) meets sixth-place Clemson (12-13, 4-8). In the final first-round game at 8 p.m., number four

Duke (12-13, 4-8) collides with number five Virginia (12-11, 4-8).

In Friday's semifinals, front-runner N.C. State (25-0, 12-0) meets the Duke-Virginia winner at 7 p.m. The UNC-Wake Forest winner meets the winner of the Maryland-Clemson game at 9 p.m. for the title game.

Carolina carries a fine 22-6 overall record into the Wake Forest contest, while the Deacons are 11-14 overall and 3-9 in the ACC. In regular-season meetings, Carolina defeated Wake, 99-80 in Greensboro and 69-51 in Chapel Hill.

Nevertheless, the Tar Heels are not taking the Deacs lightly. Carolina coach Dean Smith is concerned about the first-round game, as there are no second chances in the ACC tournament.

"We haven't really beaten Wake Forest as badly during the regular season as the scores would indicate," Smith says. "Wake proved recently in its win over Maryland how capable it is. We expect a very different game Thursday."

Smith's concern is not unjustified. Wake Forest gave the Heels hectic first halves in both games before folding in the final 20 minutes. If they play above their heads they could give the Heels nightmares.

The Deacs had their ups and downs during the regular season. Coach Carl Tacy's team knocked off powerful Alabama in the second game of the year, then put together a five-game winning streak on the way to an 8-4 record. Then the ACC wars got under way and the Wake Forest season took a turn for the worse.

The Deacs pulled perhaps their greatest surprise last week when the top ten-ranked Maryland Terrapins fell in Winston-Salem, 62-60. In their final regular-season game, the Deacons fell to the strong Wolfpack in Raleigh, 100-77.

Tacy's men are led by second-team All-ACC selection Tony Byers. A junior transfer, Byers led the team in scoring and finished second in the ACC in that department with a 22-point average. He shot 46 per cent from the floor.

Byers teams with another fine guard, Eddie Payne, in the backcourt. Payne averaged 15.4 points per game, giving the Deacons the strongest backcourt scoring punch in the conference. Payne made 46 per cent of his shots as well and dished out 9.5 assists.

Inside, the Deacon story is different. Tacy needs more tall and talented players to compete in the ACC. Rebounding strength is lacking somewhat. Tacy does have Mike Parrish, a sophomore who is good for 10 points and eight rebounds per game. The other forward is freshman Lee Foye, who shows promise (seven points, seven rebounds). The center is Pat Kelly (five points, five rebounds) and he could stand some improvement. Still they are not to be counted out.

The Tar Heels will be vying for their sixth ACC title in 20 years of conference competition. Last season, the Tar Heels won the ACC tournament and finished third in the national tournament. Should the Heels win the championship, it would be Carolina's fifth ACC title in seven years.



Tony Byers

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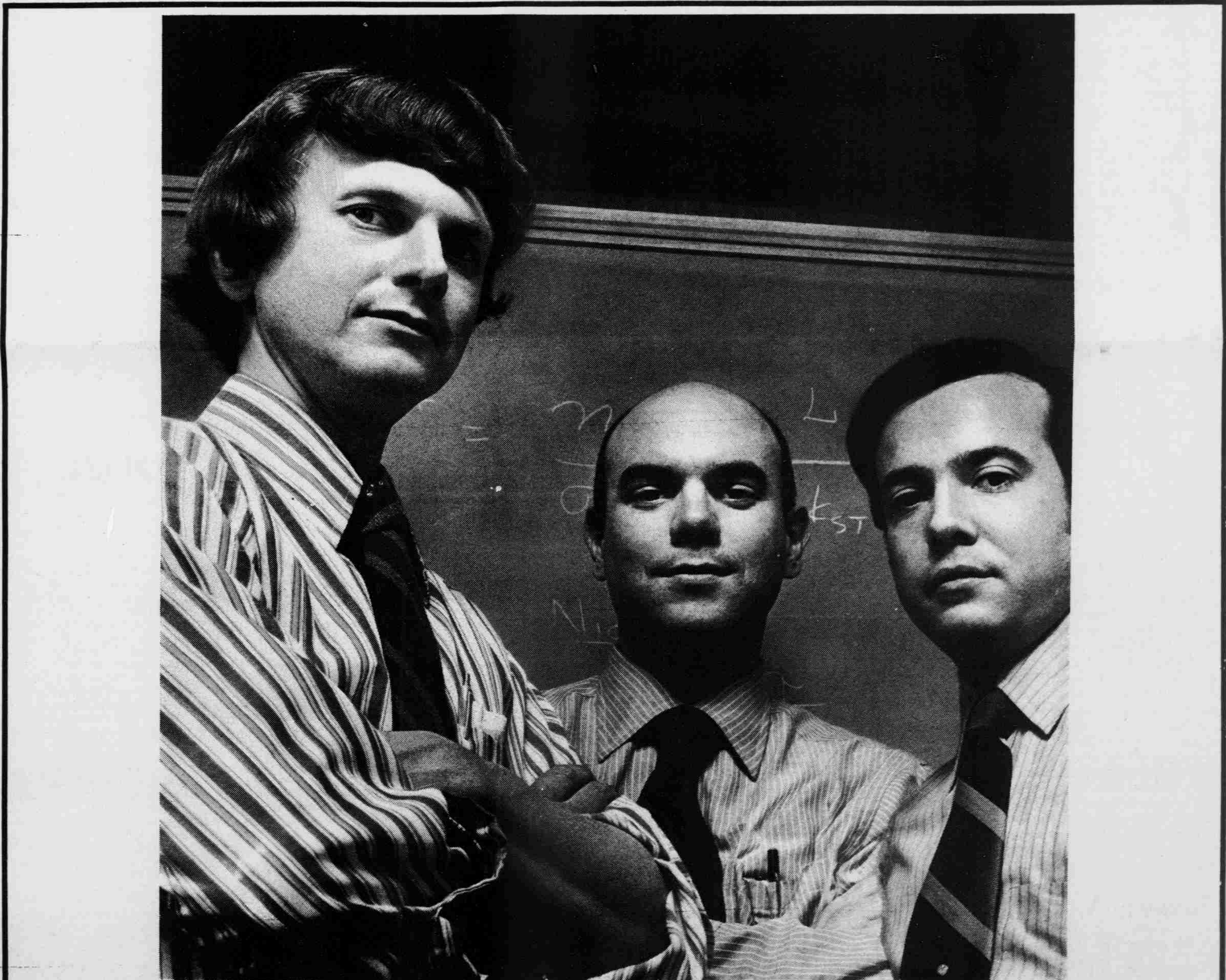
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