

A friend's final home game means a long wait

By **CHIP PEARSALL**
Staff Writer

"Phil's not here," the voice at the other end of the line says. "He ought to be back about one o'clock. Try him then."

1:45 p.m., Tuesday. No answer.

3 p.m. A couple of Sadlock's hot dogs rest uneasily on my stomach as I walk up to Carmichael Auditorium's front porch. Two guys play backgammon in the corner. "You're cheating. I don't know how, but you're cheating."

I drop my pack and sleeping bag next to some others lying on the bricks. It's colder than it was an hour ago, and grey clouds muscle their way across the sky.

Inside Carmichael, Carl Bauchle sits in front of a trophy case reading *Moby Dick*. Carl edited the Yackety Yack two years ago and we had a class together last semester. According to the backgammon players, he is first in line for tickets to the Duke game Saturday.

"I got here about 11:30 this morning. I stopped by the grocery store for some vanilla wafers and the ABC store for some Seagram's, so I'm all set."

Neither of us has waited overnight for tickets before. As seniors, this game will be our swan song. We both have had lousy tickets to the games this year.

None of that is important, though. It's Phil's last game.

"I knew this would work out great," Carl said. "We're gonna have a good time."

There are only four of us on the porch. The backgammon players have left, and two replacements—the next shift—talk quietly.

Passersby ogle. Some glance curiously, smile and keep walking. Others stare and stop to ask questions.

"What are you waiting for? What time do they give tickets out? Do you think if I came at twelve tomorrow ..."

Three joggers come out the front doors. They spot us.

"Daaaaaaaaaaamn — you guys are crazy."

Carl makes an apt observation as we sit. "People will come out here and ruin a weekend waiting for tickets, but they won't waste a weeknight. Something's wrong."

A car approaches along the side street in front of the auditorium. The horn blows. A pale blond leans out of the passenger side, waving a clenched fist at us.

"All riiiiiiiiiiiight!" The car passes.

"Wasn't that Rich Yonakor?"

Another person walking by hails us. "Waiting for State tickets?"

Carl leaves with his roommate Mark to eat supper. It is 5 p.m., and in the hallways inside, employees are leaving. One speaks to a janitor. "They're already camping out for tickets."

"Yeah," he replies. "There'll be a mess here tomorrow."

Already, a stray newspaper blows around the porch.

Coach Smith has a closed practice today, but one corner of the gym is not curtained off. I can see him lecturing to his offense.

Phil sits at the scorer's table, arms crossed, gazing at the team on the floor.

An aide runs me off.

Phil and I attended Rocky Mount Senior High together, and I knew him as a casual friend. I can still remember the 30- and 40-point performances, the ACC coaches in the stands and more than one last-second victory that came off a Ford jumper.

I haven't seen him very much since we came to college.

Jeff Wolf, Dudley Bradley, and Mike Pepper leave practice through the front doors. They see the unrolled sleeping bags, the ice buckets and the blankets.

"These guys are really serious about Duke," Pepper says as the players walk toward their car.

"Hope you guys are, too," comes the reply. 8:30 p.m. It is raining now, and the prospects for snow seem good. Liquor begins to flow among the four on the porch. Tom Carter and a friend set up another backgammon game.

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We don't even notice when the rain turns to snow until Homer Lee, who has joined Tom and his friends, notes that "it's snowing like hell."

The inevitable finally happens. Snowballs pelt us in a cold barrage, thudding against the glass doors behind us and splattering everywhere.

Retaliation comes immediately. The same scene is repeated three times before midnight as roving bands attack mercilessly.

A janitor tells us he will open the doors at 5:30 a.m., and we finally burn out. The snow continues to come down heavily, sometimes blowing up around the doors where we lie. Our ranks have swollen to fifteen.

Only someone who has spent the night there can know the incessant squealing of the drafts from inside Carmichael as they play around the bottoms of the doors. It's like an all-night train whistle.

"It's open." The janitor leans out a front door at 6:15 a.m. We discover that some other people have gone in ahead of us. I suppose the janitor didn't want to wake us up.

Wednesday passes neither quickly nor slowly. It just passes, with basketball games, more backgammon, PTA and Kentucky Fried lunches, newspapers and catnaps.

People wander around aimlessly between seat checks. Paper airplanes take off from the rafters, and some land on the polished floor. Muscles stiffen.

Sitting there, I remember the first time I saw Carmichael Auditorium. It was during the days when Dick Grubar, Rusty Clark, Larry Miller and the rest were the class of the ACC. I was 10.

My father was buying tickets at the Carmichael ticket window for a football

game. My sister and I wandered through one of the concourses and discovered the gleaming hardwood floor with its baby-blue frame and the Tar Heels painted in each corner.

We ran down to the floor, but would not step out on it.

Skip Foreman, a reporter for WCHL, sits down beside us. He turns on a tape recorder and holds the mike up to Carl.

"What would it mean to you to beat Duke?"

Carl thought a moment. "I'd rather just see Phil Ford have a good game."

The planned mid-afternoon excitement begins as student coordinators try to organize the crowd for a Guinness world record. "The Physical Paradox of Sitting in an Unsupported Circle without Chairs" record was set by 3,333 participants at the Air Force Academy.

After much struggling and cursing, the feat is done. The crowd returns, exulting, to their chairs. But the excitement is premature: only 3,071 participated, so the old record stands.

A little before 5 p.m., the first rows of waiting students go to the ticket windows. We are almost too tired to care where the seats are.

The teller punches athletic passes for our group of three. He pulls a packet of tickets. "Pearsall? Here."

Section B, row L, seat 1. Carl and Mark grin.

We leave. The icy sidewalk along South Road gleams in the late-afternoon sun, and the campus is bathed in a warm orange glow.

7:30 p.m. Wednesday. My story is due. No answer at Phil's room.

I just wanted to say good luck.

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