

## Looking Back:

# The 1971-72 Carolina "Dream" Team

By Elson Armstrong  
Staff Writer

Just the mention of the year 1972 brings the biggest "Jimmy Carter" grin from all loyal Tar Heel fans. As Frank Sinatra would say "it was a very good year" and what a year it was for Dean Smith and his North Carolina basketball squad. That year the Carolina cagers were led by such greats as Bob McAdoo, Steve Previs, George Karl, Bill Chamberlain, Dennis Wuycik, Kim Hubbard, Ed Stahl, Darrell Elston, and Bobby Jones. They are all part of the golden Carolina memories.

In 1971 North Carolina had been picked by most experts to finish in the lower division of the Atlantic Coast Conference race. This jolted for the Carolina faithful, who had come to expect their beloved Tar Heels to finish on or near the top annually. Most sports writers said that the South Carolina Gamecocks would walk off with the ACC and challenge perennial NCAA Champion UCLA for No. 1.

Much to the surprise of everyone (except Dean Smith and his troops), North Carolina had upset the Gamecocks in the regular season and won the ACC regular season title. In the ACC tournament shoot-out in Greensboro, North Carolina rolled by Clemson and Virginia to advance to the finals against the hated Gamecocks. It was a brutal title game, the Tar Heels holding a slim lead throughout most of the contest. With six seconds to go, UNC was ahead 51-50 when a controversial jump ball was called under the South Carolina basket after UNC had blocked a desperation shot. The jump resulted in disaster for UNC as the Gamecocks grabbed the misdirected UNC tip and laid it in to win the conference championship, 52-51.

South Carolina would later fall on its collective face in the Eastern Regionals while North Carolina would advance into the N.I.T. and roll over Massachusetts (who had a player named Julius Irving), 90-49; Providence, 86-79; and Duke, 73-67. In the championship game they blasted Georgia Tech, 84-66.

As the 1971-72 season opened, everyone associated with Carolina was very excited (and for good reason) because most of the '71 championship team were back as well as Bob McAdoo,

the whiz from Vincennes, Indiana, Junior College. The excitement around Durham-Chapel Hill was so thick you could have cut it with a knife as the season opener neared. South Carolina was now out of the ACC, having opted for independent status. In the league, Maryland was fielding a very strong quint, and the University of Virginia was to have its best squad ever. Duke and N.C. State would both be formidable adversaries. The conference (now the most powerful in the U.S.) would be more balanced than ever, preventing easy spoils to any of the contenders.

Rice University journeyed to UNC's Carmichael Auditorium to open the season and went home thoroughly embarrassed as Carolina dismissed them, 127-69. The next to fall was Pittsburgh, 90-75. And after a regrettable interruption by Princeton (89-73), the Heels went on a twenty-game winning streak, taking down such notables as Virginia Tech, 93-69; Wake Forest, 99-76, and finishing N.C. State off in the Big Four title game, 99-68.

Then in December, 1971, while Don McClean was topping pop-charts with "American Pie," the Tar Heels were showing Europeans some No. 1 American basketball. In Real Madrid, Spain, UNC whipped Barcelona, 87-74; Chile, 87-65; and in the championship they eased past tough host Real Madrid, 83-77. These teams were the national Olympic teams of their nations whose members had been playing together for years — virtually pro teams. Interestingly, Madrid had several former U.S. collegiate players on their squad and they seldom lost in this tournament.

Now the Tar Heel fans really began to talk up their team. Many said that they were the best Carolina quint ever, others said "Bring on No. 1 ranked UCLA, we'll pulverize 'em." The Tar Heels were now ranked second nationally behind the Bruins, who were destroying everyone on the West Coast. Would the two powerhouses meet in the NCAA finals? That remained to be seen but most sport fans across the nation drooled at the thought of such a titanic clash.

The year 1972 rolled in and the powerladen Heels rolled on. Harvard succumbed, 96-78; St. Joseph's, 93-77; and Bradley, 75-69. The Tar Heels were



DTH staff photo

Bobby Jones did it . . . and does it again

blowing their opponents out so badly that they seldom had to use their vaunted four-corner offense to preserve victories. Carolina swept the annual North-South double header in Charlotte by romping past Furman, 118-66, and Clemson, 81-61. Then came a crucial showdown with Virginia at Charlottesville. The Cavaliers had already upset top-five-ranked Maryland and were off to their best start ever. When the Heels arrived in town, UVa was 12-0 and there were signs hanging in University Hall that proclaimed "UCLA, the Virginia of the West! Before 8,500 berserk fans and a regional tv audience, Carolina won the hard-fought spectacular, 85-79.

Wake Forest fell again, 92-77. On a cloudy dreary day in Durham, 9,000 Duke fans nearly tore up Cameron Indoor Stadium as Duke broke the UNC winning streak with a last second overtime basket to sink the Heels, 76-74.

Next, before a national tv audience, Carolina got back to its winning ways against top-ten-ranked Maryland, 92-72. Wake Forest fell again, 71-59. The despised N.C. State Wolfpack paid a visit to Chapel Hill and were blown away, 101-78; Clemson went down again, 73-50; Georgia Tech was humiliated, 118-73;

Maryland proved to be a rude host in College Park as they edged the Heels, 79-77 in overtime. Notre Dame was run out of Madison Square Garden, 99-74; then against Virginia in Chapel Hill, the Tar Heels joined the elite 1,000 win club by pasting the Cavs, 91-78. N.C. State pulled a major upset in Raleigh, 85-84, touching off a wild victory dance by the State fans as the buzzer sounded. Duke was beaten, 93-69, to end the regular season. The Heels were now the ACC Regular Season Champs for '72 but it would be worthless if they lost in the ACC Tournament in Greensboro.

Duke was the opening night opponent and were promptly eased out, 63-48. In the semi-finals, in the championship, UNC hardly worked up a sweat in disposing of Maryland, 73-64.

Now it was NCAA Eastern Regional time and UNC headed off for Morgantown, West Virginia, to take on former ACC member South Carolina. The Gamecocks were a big bruising team and they were ranked No. 5 nationally. Their record was 23-4 entering this war with North Carolina. The winner would get regional bragging rights, while the loser would go home in shame. On March 16, 1972, the blood bath was on; it was the semi-finals of the Eastern Regionals. On one side of the arena the USC fans waved Garnett and Black pom poms, while on the other side UNC waved Blue and White ones. To the surprise of everyone, the game quickly became a rout as the Tar Heels blew out to a 14 point half time lead. In the second half the story was finished rapidly, furnishing the Heels with sweet revenge for the '71 ACC Tourney debacle with an impressive 92-69 win.

In the Eastern Championship, the Tar Heels toyed with Pennsylvania, 73-59.

Now it was on to Los Angeles and the NCAA final four. The Heels were upset by Florida State, 79-75, thus preventing the epic match with UCLA for the NCAA title. UCLA would barely beat Florida State, 81-76, in the championship contest. North Carolina would grab third place by thumping on an excellent Louisville team, 105-91.

The Durham Herald honored the Tar Heels by proclaiming them "Our Champions", and both national polls honored them by ranking them No. 2 even after the NCAA Tournament.

Yes, in 1971-72 UNC won five tournament titles from Spain to Hawaii en route to a 29-5 record. It's small wonder that Carolina fans grin when they think of this team, one of the all time collegiate greats.

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