I really hate losing.

SERENA WILLIAMS
NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP

Women’s tennis wins first NCAA title

No. 1 North Carolina defeated No. 4 N.C. State 4-1 on Saturday

By Caroline Wills
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ORLANDO, Fla. — When sophomore Carson Tanguilig looked to the courts around her during her match-deciding third set, all she could see was her teammates playing every point like it was their last.

Beside her, junior Fiona Crawley launched a cross-court return to an unreachable spot, fighting back from down 5-6 to force a set tie-break.

To Tanguilig’s left, senior Elizabeth Scotty was leading in her second set after a closely-fought first set and intense tie-break.

“It’s a motivator,” Tanguilig said in the post-game press conference. “It’s like, ‘If she can do it, like, why can’t I do it?’”

The No. 1 North Carolina women’s tennis team won the program’s first-ever NCAA national championship with a 4-1 win against No. 3 N.C. State on Saturday. Crawley, Scotty and Tanguilig’s tie-break victories in singles contributed to clinching the match victory.

“This match was us,” head coach Brian Kalbas said at the press conference. “We were tough, we were competitive, we were feisty and we were resilient.”

In a battle of sheer will, toughness and stamina, the Tar Heels played every point of the title match like it was the deciding one. The survivalist mentality was crucial to withstand long, physically-demanding rallies, deuce points and make-or-break tie-breakers.

Even though UNC grabbed the first point behind an explosive doubles performance and ended N.C. State’s 13-game clinch streak, the Wolfpack did not back down. Five out of six singles matches went into a tie-break at some point in the match – including junior Reilly Tran and senior Anika Yarlagadda, who both forced a third set after falling in the first.

“When the first set wins were split evenly 3-3 between the two teams, all eyes fell on Scotty’s match to determine who held the advantage. Thanks to the doubles point, the Tar Heels only needed to win three singles matches, while the Wolfpack needed to win four.”

Scotty fought back from a 5-6 deficit to force a set tie-break. If her first set was to end in a loss, UNC’s momentum would be stunted and control of the match could quickly slip through their fingers. And, when she fell behind 3-6 in the first-to-seven game, devastation seemed imminent – the next point could have easily been the last.

Jumping on the ball early dictating ball movement and a double fault at the serve allowed the North Carolina senior to chip away at the deficit until it was tied once again. When Scotty finally took the lead, she did not relinquish it, giving her team a much-needed boost in momentum. Winning that first set was “gigantic,” according to Kalbas.

“When she pounded her last point in the third set, an all-over the edge at the 2-2 breakpoint and a three-game winning streak carried her to the precipice of victory.”

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No. 1 UNC secures NCAA Semifinals victory over No. 3 Georgia

Doubles point propels Tar Heels to first NCAA championship match since 2014

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ORLANDO, Fla. – In the NCAA women’s tennis semifinal match, the key to North Carolina’s victory was winning the most doubles points.

For the majority of the tied 40-40 game scores, the North Carolina women’s tennis team survived long rallies and aggressive plays to outlast the No. 3 Georgia Bulldogs.

Now, the team will have an opportunity to play for the program’s first-ever national title.

Lifted by meticulous doubles play and patient singles performances, the Tar Heels defeated Georgia for the third time this season with a 4-0 victory on Friday, sending UNC to their first NCAA championship match since 2014.

After two straight team double-point losses, graduate student Abbey Forbes assisted in ending the drought. Head coach Brian Kalbas said the team reviewed the past three years, the team struggled to find their rhythm in the Super Regionals and Quarterfinals, but rather about mentality— playing for each other.

Despite these late, drastic changes, Forbes vacated her post as the No. 2 seed. Kalbas also realized that the doubles point against N.C. State was the person to accept it on their behalf.

Forbes was all over the court, aggressive at the net and unswerving in the backcourt. A Forbes overhead launched into the far corner earned the UNC doubles team its first double win and a 1-0 lead. Forbes also held ground during long rallies, winning the final double point and clinching the match.

Officially earning the doubles point, senior Elizabeth Scotty and sophomore Caron Tangjulig won half of their match’s double points against Georgia’s 6-2 win on court two. Even when the Bulldogs fought back from down 15-16, the pair finished out their games and prevented Georgia from gaining momentum.

Kalbas said the doubles point clinch was a representation of a complete performance, and the team was “giddy” in the huddle after taking the lead.

“Then we were just like, ‘Wow, this is uncharted territory,’” he said.

Scotty’s momentum was key to the doubles points continued in her singles play, allowing her to grab points on court one. Her 6-4, 6-4 victory added the final point to the scoreboard and clinched the Tar Heel win.

After a key breaking point-to pull ahead 4-3 in the first set, Scotty faced a late-set push from Georgia's top singles player. With one set to go, the pair had to finish out their games and clinch the match.

Withstanding a long back-and-forth rally, the North Carolina senior nailed a return down the line to an unreachable spot to win the set and prevent Lopata from tying the game score 5-5.

So, before the first round kicked off in Chapel Hill, Kalbas made a drastic change to the lineup. The No. 1 singles and game set score, Scotty had an answer. And, in the second set, when the set was tied for the first time, she pushed ahead and won, allowing the Tar Heels to inch closer to victory.

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After a dominant regular season in which the No. 1 North Carolina women’s tennis team went undefeated, the team finally claimed the program’s elusive first national title. In the past four seasons, UNC has entered as one of the top-two seeds in the NCAA Tournament, but failed to get past the semifinals in 2019, 2021 and 2022. This year, a win over No. 4 Georgia propelled the Tar Heels to their first title game since 2014. In the national championship — which was a rematch of the ACC Championship match in which UNC lost to rival N.C. State — lineup changes provided a crucial advantage. The Tar Heels got their revenge against N.C. State, as they downed the Wolfpack 4-1 in Orlando.