

The Daily Tar Heel

TUESDAY, MAY 23, 2023

130 YEARS OF SERVING THE UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 131, ISSUE 12

GAMES SET, MARCH

DTH PHOTO/ADRIAN TILLMAN

DTH DESIGN/CARSON ELM-PICARD



“

I really hate losing.

SERENA WILLIAMS

”

The Daily Tar Heel
Established 1893
130 years of editorial freedom

CAITLYN YAEDE
SUMMER EDITOR
MANAGING.EDITOR@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

ETHAN E. HORTON
SUMMER MANAGING EDITOR
DIGITAL@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

EMMY MARTIN
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
EDITOR@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

ELIZA BENBOW
SUMMER UNIVERSITY EDITOR
UNIVERSITY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

WALKER LIVINGSTON
SUMMER CITY & STATE EDITOR
CITY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

MATTHEW MAYNARD
SUMMER SPORTS EDITOR
SPORTS@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

ALLI PARDUE
SUMMER AUDIENCE
ENGAGEMENT EDITOR
ONLINE@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

EMMA GEIS
SUMMER COPY CHIEF
COPY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

CARSON ELM-PICARD
SUMMER DESIGN EDITOR
DESIGN@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

ADRIAN TILLMAN
SUMMER PHOTO EDITOR
PHOTO@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

Mail and Office: 109 E. Franklin St.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Emmy Martin, editor, 962-4086
Advertising & Business, 962-1163
News, Features, Sports, 962-0245

One copy per person;
additional copies may be purchased
at The Daily Tar Heel for \$.25 each.
Please report suspicious activity at our
distribution racks by emailing
dth@dailytarheel.com

© 2012 DTH Media Corp.
All rights reserved

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**
Senior Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

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 determined, 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 team point behind an explosive doubles



DTH/ADRIAN TILLMAN

The UNC women’s tennis team poses with their trophy after winning the NCAA Tournament on May 20, 2023.

performance and ended N.C. State’s 11-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.

“We knew the matches were going to get longer and they were going to get tougher,” Kalbas said. “And, as the match went along, you could see our team getting tougher.”

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-breaker. 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.

“She has an incredible way of knowing when the team really needs her and stepping up,” he said.

With Crawley surviving a second set tie-breaker and Scotty closing in on a match victory, it was up to Tanguilig to add the final point or all the pressure

would fall on Tran and Yarlagadda to complete their comebacks.

After dropping 4-6, the UNC sophomore said she focused on her serve, playing disciplined and staying in every point going into the final set. Minimizing N.C. State junior Amelia Rajecki’s forehand and outlasting her in drawn-out rallies pushed Tanguilig over the edge at the 2-2 breakpoint and a three-game winning streak carried her to the precipice of victory.

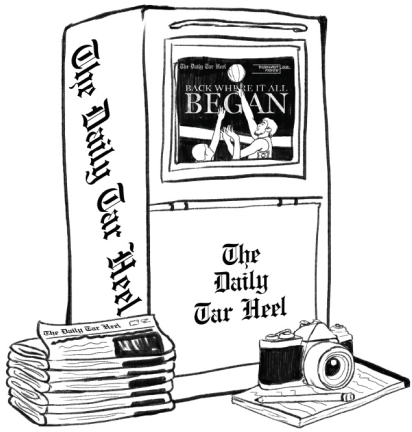
The teammates whose comebacks motivated her throughout her tie-breaker watched in anticipation on the sidelines through Tanguilig’s final game point.

When she pounded her last forehand into the vacant side of the court and it bounced past Rajecki, the last point of the NCAA Tournament was finally won.

Twitter: @carolinewills03



Press on.



Help Us Build the Future of The Daily Tar Heel.

Donate to The Daily Tar Heel at StartThePresses.org

SEMIFINALS

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

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

By Caroline Wills

Senior Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

ORLANDO, Fla. – In the NCAA women's tennis semifinal match, the key for a North Carolina victory was winning the most deuce 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 doubles point losses, junior Fiona Crawley and graduate student Abbey Forbes assisted in ending the drought. Head coach Brian Kalbas said the team reviewed and studied video to prepare for Georgia's doubles teams in practice on Thursday and right before Friday's match.

"Abbey in particular saw exactly what I was talking about and what she needed to do," he said.

The pair came out on top in three

out of four decisive deuce points in their 6-1 victory.

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

Officially earning the doubles point, senior Elizabeth Scotty and sophomore Carson Tanguilig won half of their match's deuce points in their 6-2 win on court two. Even when the Bulldogs fought back from down 15-40 to deuce, 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 early lead.

"They were just like, 'Wow, this is uncharted territory,'" he said.

Scotty's dominance in deuce points continued in her singles play, allowing her to grab points from four out of seven deuce games. Her 6-4, 6-4 victory added the final point to the scoreboard and clinched the Tar Heel win.

After winning a key break-point to pull ahead 4-3 in the first set, Scotty faced a late-set push from Georgia first-year Anastasiia Lopata, leading to another deuce point. Withstanding a long back-and-forth rally, the North Carolina senior nailed a return down the line to an unreachable spot to win the



DTH/ADRIAN TILLMAN

Junior Fiona Crawley (left) and graduate student Abbey Forbes celebrate a point against N.C. State on May 20, 2023. The Tar Heels won, 4-1.

set and prevent Lopata from tying the game score 5-5.

With every tied game and set score, Scotty had an answer. And, in the second set, when the set score was tied for the last time, she pushed ahead and won, allowing the Tar Heels to inch closer to victory. So, when Lopata's final shot hit into the net and Scotty clinched the match in UNC's favor, she threw her arms out and cheered.

Though she said she prefers to be the first point on the board, Scotty said she will do anything to help her team.

"It's always great to be the clinch, but I always say anyone who's competing out on the court has such an impact," she said.

"Everyone on the sidelines has such an impact."

That connection between UNC teammates is what makes this year's team so special and unique, Kalbas said. He said togetherness will be what the team relies on in the championship match-up — through every close point.

"We feel that if we bring our brand of team tennis, whether we win or lose, we're going to feel good about it," he said. "We've been doing that so far. So, if we can play nine matches strong, 10 players tough tomorrow, then we'll feel really good about it."

Twitter: @carolinewills03

SEASON ANALYSIS

Lineup changes prove vital in road to historic NCAA women's tennis title

Team regroup, makes game plan after ACC Championship loss

By Caroline Wills

Senior Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

ORLANDO, Fla. – To win the program's first-ever national championship, head coach Brian Kalbas said he had to learn how to make changes and take risks.

A perfect, undefeated regular season, an ITA Indoor National Championship title and a No. 1 ranking, Kalbas said, put a target on the North Carolina women's tennis team's back heading into the postseason.

At the ACC Tournament, the N.C. State Wolfpack handed the Tar Heels their first loss of the season and a blow to their confidence. Without change, another successful regular season would go down in the record books as another postseason drop-off.

For four straight years, UNC has

entered the NCAA Tournament as one of the top-two seeds, but for the past three years, the team struggled to match their dominant regular seasons with a championship trophy. The Tar Heels fell short in the NCAA Semifinals in 2019, 2021 and 2022. The last time they advanced to the finals was in 2014, where they fell 3-4 to the UCLA Bruins.

Kalbas said the last three years of having that target on their backs and entering the tournament with nearly-perfect records, meant there were few opportunities where the Tar Heels learned from losses and figured out how to improve their game.

But, the ACC Championship loss in April provided that rare opportunity for the team to re-group and fix the gaps in their game plan.

"They made us better," Kalbas said. "We had to kind of look inward and figure out some things because, you know, we hadn't lost. For us to kind of have a little more of a growth mentality and look at some different things, the openness of this team to do that was special."

So, before the first round kicked off in Chapel Hill, Kalbas made a drastic change to the line-ups. The doubles pairs that had been playing together all season and had only lost the team point three times were all reconfigured. Instead of playing at the No. 3 seed, graduate student Abbey Forbes moved up to the No. 1 spot with junior Fiona Crawley.

First-year Reese Brantmeier traded the No. 1 seed for the No. 3 seed to play alongside junior Reilly Tran, and senior Elizabeth Scotty moved down a court to play with sophomore Carson Tanguilig.

The changes did not stop there. Crawley, the No. 1 collegiate women's tennis player in the country, swapped her spot as the team's top singles player with No. 8 Brantmeier. Now, instead of playing on court one, Crawley competed at the No. 2 seed.

Finally, instead of playing in both singles and doubles matches, Forbes vacated her post as the team's No. 4 singles player to allow senior Anika Yarlagadda to step up to play at the No. 6 position.

Despite these late, drastic changes, Kalbas said the team was willing to switch things up for the sake of putting their best foot forward.

The changes paid off. In singles, Crawley won every singles match in the tournament and posted a much-needed point on the scoreboard for her team in every tight match. Brantmeier clinched victories in three out of four singles matches in Orlando against ranked opponents — including the No. 3-ranked singles player, Georgia's Lea Ma.

Although the new doubles pairs struggled to find their rhythm in the Super Regionals and Quarterfinals, the teams took every loss in stride and as a learning opportunity. When

the North Carolina doubles pairs finally clinched the doubles point over No. 3 Georgia in the Semifinals, the path for a championship match appearance was laid.

With memories of the ACC Tournament in the back of their mind, the hard work and willingness to make changes lifted UNC to grab the doubles point against N.C. State in the national championship — against doubles teams that Kalbas called the best in the country.

"It's just kind of what we've been working for all year," Tanguilig said.

Kalbas also realized that finally winning a NCAA National Championship trophy was not all about hitting the extra ball in practice or preparing the perfect game plan, but rather about mentality — playing for each other.

Together.

Senior team captain Sophia Patel served a crucial role in team mentality and the team's MVP, Kalbas said.

"She was our MVP of this year," he said in a post-game press conference. "She didn't play in our line-up, but we would be nowhere without her leadership, her guidance and support."

After every match clinched in the tournament, Patel was one of the first players to race onto the court to congratulate her teammates. And every time a Tar Heel hit their match-winning stroke, their team captain was the first person they looked for on the sidelines.

When the trophy was won, Patel was the person to accept it on behalf of her teammates.

A trophy that would have been unattainable without the selfless team culture Kalbas calls their brand of "team tennis."

Twitter: @carolinewills03

COLUMN

Covering UNC's women's tennis historic run

By Caroline Wills

Senior Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

I'm a big believer in the butterfly effect.

Three simple decisions led me to sit in the stands of the USTA National Campus in Orlando, Fla., to write about the North Carolina women's tennis team winning their first NCAA National Championship.

The first was a decision to pick up a tennis racket for the first time and join my high school's women's tennis team. Lots of sweat, intense tan lines and long matches under the hot North Carolina sun built a foundation for a love of the sport, even if my short tennis career ended once I graduated.

Five years later, I joined The Daily Tar Heel sports desk and altered the trajectory of my journalism career. When Hunter Nelson replied to my email about switching desks, sitting in my tiny north campus dorm room, I went from journalist to sports journalist.

The final path-altering moment occurred over Christmas break. As a senior writer, I could choose any spring sport to become the beat writer for. Women's tennis was the obvious choice.

Throughout the past few months, I aimed to uplift The Daily Tar Heel's women's tennis coverage and uncover the underlying narratives of a historically talented team and the winningest coach in ACC women's tennis history.

Women's tennis beat writing has taken me from Cone-Kenfield Tennis Center, right outside to the brand-new, crisp blue courts of the Chewning Tennis Center, Cary and now Orlando.

Almost every weekend, I took a bus to UNC's tennis facilities to watch the Tar Heels knock down opponent after opponent.

I've seen junior Fiona Crawley — the No. 1 collegiate women's tennis player — belt the national anthem at the top of her lungs on senior day for her graduating teammates before a big match against Duke. On Super Bowl Sunday, I watched for almost three hours as Carson Tanguilig battled it out in three close sets and a tie-breaker at the ITA National Indoor Semifinals.

I had a front-row seat and a bright-red sunburn to prove it when N.C. State spoiled UNC's perfect record in the ACC Championship match, and I saw the tears and disappointment that followed.

I drove eight hours to watch UNC take on Florida, Texas and Georgia, and worked tirelessly with summer sports editor Matthew Maynard to provide high-quality coverage in anticipation for this historic moment.

So, when Saturday arrived and the stage was set for another N.C. State versus North Carolina championship match-up, I held my breath. Not because I was breaking my objective-spectator headspace that all good journalists should have, but because putting out a victory edition was something I wanted to do more than anything. It was a chance to be a part of DTH history.

And, at approximately 9:30 p.m., I looked up from my laptop in the press conference room to see the national championship trophy on the table in front of me. I leaned back in my seat, took a deep breath and then went back to writing.

Every story, every memorable post-game interview, and now, a special edition all because of those three seemingly-simple decisions — butterfly effect, indeed.

Twitter: @carolinewills03



DTH/ADRIAN TILLMAN

Sophomore Carson Tanguilig looks on between points against N.C. State on May 20, 2023. UNC won, 4-1.



HISTORY MAKERS

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.

PHOTOS BY ADRIAN TILLMAN

