

The Daily Tar Heel

RIVALRY EDITION 2025

DO OR DIE

FOLLOWING DAMAGING CLOSE-GAME LOSSES, UNC MUST DEFEAT DUKE TO KEEP ITS TOURNAMENT HOPES ALIVE

The Daily Tar Heel

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LANEY CRAWLEY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
EDITOR@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

SARAH MONOSON
PRINT MANAGING EDITOR
PRINT.EDITOR@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

EMILY GESSNER
DIGITAL MANAGING EDITOR
DIGITAL.EDITOR@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

AISHA BAIOCCHI
SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR
ENTERPRISE@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

SIERRA PRESIDENT
DEI COORDINATOR
DIVERSITY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

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SPORTS@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

EMMA MOON
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

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ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

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DESIGN@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

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ASSISTANT DESIGN EDITOR

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PHOTO@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

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ASSISTANT PHOTO EDITOR

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SPORTS PHOTO EDITOR
PHOTO@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

SURABHI DAMLE
DATA EDITOR
RECORDS@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

HARI POTHARAJU
ASSISTANT DATA EDITOR

NATALIE BRADIN
AUDIO-VISUAL EDITOR
AUDIOVISUAL@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

AMELIE FAWSON
ASSISTANT AUDIO-VISUAL EDITOR

MAGGIE MCNINCH
COPY CHIEF
COPY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

AVERY THATCHER
DEPUTY COPY CHIEF
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ASSISTANT COPY EDITOR

KAITLYN CANO
ASSISTANT COPY EDITOR

VIYATHMA HAPUARACHCHI
AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT EDITOR
ONLINE@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

ABBY MISS
ASSISTANT AUDIENCE
ENGAGEMENT EDITOR

MAGGIE BUCK
ASSISTANT AUDIENCE
ENGAGEMENT EDITOR

HISTORY

Honoring the Dean E. Smith Center

Iconic venue has
hosted nearly 40 years
worth of games

By **Harry Crowther**
Senior Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

and **Beckett Brantley**
Senior Writer

Time stood still.
The date was Jan. 18, 1986. The occasion could not have been bigger. Undefeated, top-ranked North Carolina was about to square off against undefeated, third-ranked Duke.

It was the first game in the brand-new Dean E. Smith Center. The bright afternoon light poured in. A crowd of 21,444 packed the arena. Freddie Kiger, who was on official stats for the broadcast crew, said the building resembled a palace.

“It was a time when all who were there thought we’d be in a building that would last forever,” Kiger said.

The official carried the basketball to center court. He tossed it up between Duke’s Danny Ferry and UNC’s Brad Daugherty.

The moment marked the beginning of the Smith Center’s now-nearly-40-year history. The original hardwood floor with a Carolina Blue outline of the state, now named after Roy Williams, is still at its heart. The building has become a cathedral of the sport. Players, coaches and classic games have created an enduring legacy. Banners and jerseys hang from the rafters. Four national championship teams have played there.

But with recent discussions of a major renovation or even building a new arena, the timelessness felt on that opening day might reach an end date.

Origin

UNC outgrew Carmichael Arena, the building that had replaced Woollen Gymnasium in 1965.

“Even in its best days, it was small,” said former UNC student Chris Newbury, who attended games at Carmichael and the first at the Smith Center. “It was cramped. It was hard to get around.”

Interest in building a new arena began as the program’s profile rose in the ‘70s. Support became strong when John Swofford was promoted to athletic director in 1980. Hargrove “Skipper” Bowles was tasked with leading the fundraising effort. Without public funding, some doubted enough money would be raised. The University commissioned a feasibility study that said the campaign could only be successful if there were major individual gifts of more than \$5 million.



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNC ATHLETICS

The Dean E. Smith Center underwent construction in 1985.

The initial goal was \$30 million. Bowles made speeches across the state to privately raise at least \$35 million.

Donations ranged from \$1 to \$1 million. The sole million-dollar gift came from Walter R. Davis, for whom Davis Library is named.

Ground was broken for the new arena on April 17, 1982. More than 20,000 cubic yards of rock and about 150,000 cubic feet of dirt were removed from the site, once a wooded ravine near Mason Farm Road. The building took nearly four years to build. It stands 340-feet wide, 380-feet long and 140-feet high.

It needed a name.
Blucher Ehringhaus, the University’s assistant director of development assigned to the project, was at The Carolina Inn for a meeting with Bowles and other committee members during construction. They discussed naming the building after then-current head coach, Dean Smith.

“He was dead set against it,” Ehringhaus said. “First, he said, ‘You only name buildings after people who are dead, and I’m not planning on dying anytime soon.’ And second, ‘I think it’s a terrible idea to name it after me. I think all this money ought to go to medical research.’ He said that dozens of times.”

Everyone chuckled after Smith left the room.

“And somebody, I think it was probably Skipper, said, ‘Well that’s the one time I won’t listen to him,’” Ehringhaus said.

The first game against Duke delivered an instant classic.

Duke’s Mark Alarie scored the first basket in the Smith Center.

UNC’s Warren Martin scored on an assist from Kenny Smith.

Duke head coach Mike Krzyzewski received a technical for protesting a call before the Tar Heels went on a 12-0 run. UNC led, 80-69, with just over five minutes to play. North Carolina held on for a 95-92 victory.

It was UNC’s 18th straight win to begin the season. Eleven future NBA players appeared in the game.

“There was an incredible bolt of lightning and electricity that was maintained for the entire event,” Kiger said. “The game [was] frenetic, exciting, back-and-forth. It was everything that you could ever want to imagine for the first game in the Smith Center.”

1993

UNC christened the Smith Center with its first national championship banner born out of the colossal facilities in 1993.

“Of course [coach Smith] wanted to win, but he would say, ‘Getting there is a lot about how hard you worked, how much preparation you made, the sacrifice that everybody made,’” then-assistant coach Dave Hanners said. “‘The last game, the championship game, there was some luck involved in that, whether you won or lost, but you know the 35 games that came before that, that’s not luck.’”

Three months before hoisting the trophy, in January 1993, Florida State rolled into town.

The year before, the Seminoles conquered North Carolina in their first-ever ACC game. Former Florida State guard Sam Cassell chided the Smith Center faithful, coining the infamous

“cheese and wine crowd” dig, calling the fans laidback and casual.

And for the first 30 minutes of it seemed that they might roll over the Tar Heels again. With 9:30 remaining, UNC was down 20.

But the crowd stood and cheered. One fan waved a banner that read, “HEY SAM! HI ESPN! NO WIN(e & cheese) TONIGHT!!”

Little by little, the Tar Heels worked themselves back into the game. With just under two minutes to go, Eric Montross hit a shot to cut Florida State’s lead to one.

The Seminoles inbounded the ball. Charlie Ward picked up his dribble near half-court and launched an arcing pass to an open Bob Sura. As the ball neared Sura’s outstretched arms, UNC’s George Lynch raced up the court, plucking the ball out of the air and slamming the ball into the hoop.

Florida State didn’t score again. The fans stormed the court.

The Smith Center crowd, along with the team, completed the comeback.

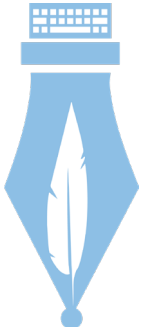
“The fans were just as eager to beat Florida State probably because Sam Cassell called our fans cheese and wine,” Lynch said. “So for us to be able to get back at him, that was a shining moment.”



Read the full story online.

CORRECTIONS

- The Daily Tar Heel reports any inaccurate information published as soon as the error is discovered.
- Contact Print Managing Editor Sarah Monoson at print.editor@dailytarheel.com.
- Corrections are printed here and noted in the online versions of our stories, which are also edited to reflect the new information.



Editor’s note: All statistics in this paper are updated as of Jan. 27.

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Printing: Triangle Web Printing Co.

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Mail and Office: 109 E. Franklin St.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Laney Crawley, editor, 962-4086
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LEGEND

Remembering Marvin Williams’ game-winner 20 years later

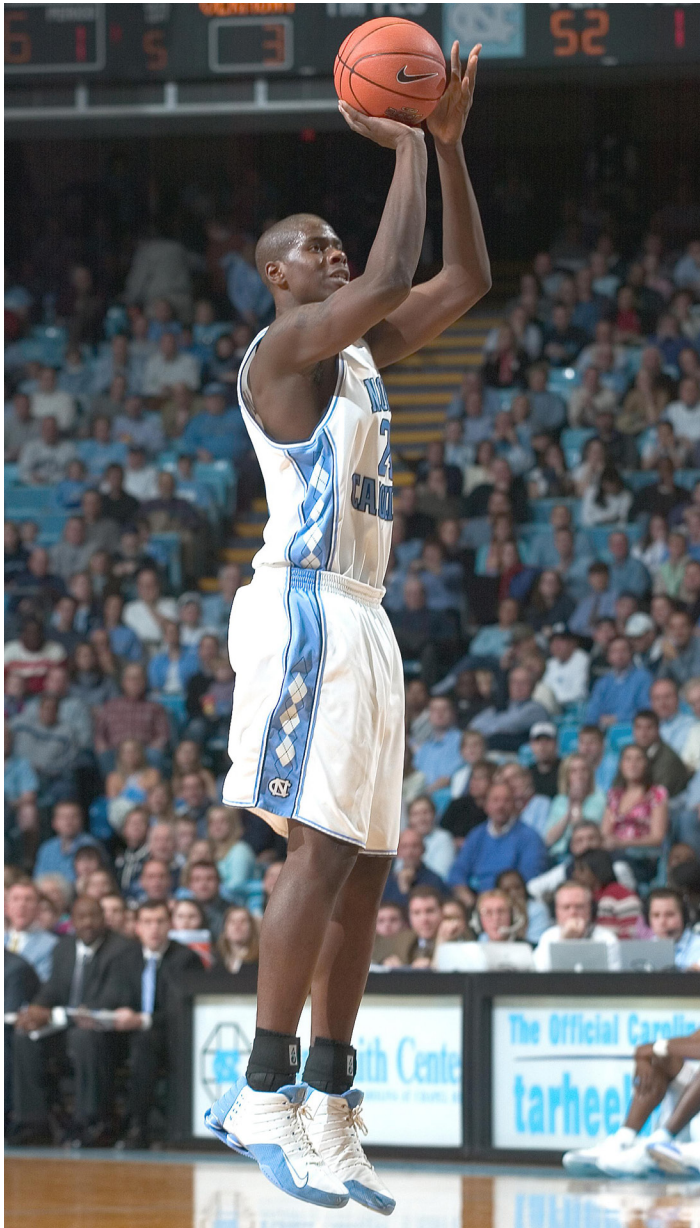


PHOTO COURTESY OF UNC ATHLETICS
Marvin Williams (24) makes a 3-pointer during a game against Vermont on Dec. 21, 2004 in the Dean E. Smith Center. UNC won 93-65.

Then-first-year forward clinched game, marked comeback

By Cade Shoemaker
Senior Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

Roy Williams gets chills just talking about it.

The date was March 6, 2005, when No. 2 North Carolina trailed No. 6 Duke, 73-71, with 19.4 seconds remaining. UNC guard Raymond Felton was at the foul line with a pair of free throws and the chance to complete a 9-point comeback in the final three minutes of regulation.

Felton took the first shot. Nothing but net.

He got the ball back for the second attempt, took two right-handed dribbles, spun the basketball in his left hand and let the game-tying free throw fly.

Instead, Felton’s shot sprung off the back of the rim and into a swarm of arms vying for the rebound. The ball popped out in the scuffle.

It glanced off of Tar Heel center Sean May, bouncing toward UNC’s bench. Then first-year forward Marvin Williams grabbed it near the right block. In one motion, he elevated toward the basket, released a shot, and was fouled.

His attempt banked off the glass and fell through the net as the referee’s whistle blew.

The Dean E. Smith Center exploded.

“It was like the roof came off. Literally, off the top of the Smith Center,” Jackie Manuel, a former guard on the 2004-05 team, recalled. “The moment was surreal.”

Marvin Williams’ game-winning shot not only completed UNC’s improbable comeback but gave Roy Williams his first career win over Duke, 75-73, as the head coach of North Carolina.

“The Smith Center, at that moment, is the loudest I’ve ever heard it in my entire life,” Roy Williams said. “And that’s a memory that sticks with me forever.”

After sinking the ensuing free throw, North Carolina defended Duke for the remaining 17 seconds and forced two missed shots to seal the game.

“The Smith Center, at that moment, is the loudest I’ve ever heard it in my entire life. And that’s a memory that sticks with me forever.”

Roy Williams
Former UNC men’s basketball head coach

UNC’s victory was triumphant. Not because it was the first win against Duke in Roy Williams’ tenure at North Carolina, but because of what it meant for the seniors playing in their final home game.

A senior group, including Manuel, Jawad Williams, Melvin Scott and others endured an 8-20 record their first season at UNC. They lost to the Blue Devils seven times during their career, winning only once before the 2005 game. For them, this win over Duke wasn’t just another rivalry game but cemented the fact that UNC basketball was back on the national stage.

“That moment was kind of like the icing on the cake of ‘We’re here now,’” Manuel said. “We reached a point of what we all dreamed about, and we

can celebrate not just as a team, but as a Carolina family, the Carolina fan base, that we were back.”

After the game, North Carolina cut down the nets in the Smith Center. Williams had asked the team if they wanted to the game prior, when UNC clinched a share in the ACC title, but the seniors voted against it “because they were focused on beating Duke.”

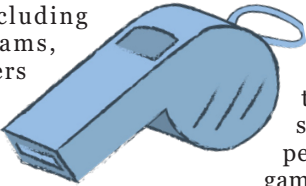
This added an extra burden for Roy Williams in the days leading up to the game.

“That’s the most pressure I ever felt, was Senior Days,” Williams admitted. “Because I wanted those guys to go out with a win.”

Thanks to Marvin Williams’ heroics they did. UNC captured the ACC title, and the win became a defining moment in the careers of the Tar Heel seniors.

“I’m so thankful and fortunate that we all had a chance to experience what that feels like and what that felt like to be in that building, playing in a big-time game, and be able to come on the winning side of that game,” Manuel said. “There’s a lot of people that play this game, and they can’t say that my last home game ‘We won.’”

Although UNC went on to win the 2005 national championship that season, it’s Marvin Williams’ game-winner that lives in UNC-Duke infamy and still gives Roy Williams goosebumps 20 years later.



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TAR HEEL VOICES

How Adam Lucas and Jones Angell bring the rivalry to life

Storytellers have left their mark on UNC basketball for 20 years

By Caroline Wills
Sports Editor
sports@dailytarheel.com

Jones Angell was nervous for the first time in his entire color commentating career.

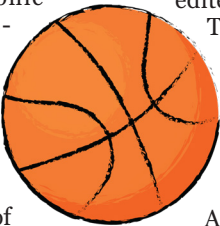
Angell did all of his usual preparation for the broadcast. He filled out the centerpiece of his research — the spotting board — with stats, the depth chart and all the names on each roster on his computer to refer to during the game. He watched Duke’s film. The nerves persisted.

He wasn’t the only one. In his hotel room in New Orleans, Adam Lucas was pacing back-and-forth, occasionally glancing out the window.

Time moved slowly, so Lucas did the only thing he could: he turned to writing. The article went live on GoHeels.com that afternoon, as an apology for his anxiety-level for the next few hours. Fans reached out to share how much they related.

One of the most iconic moments in the UNC-Duke rivalry would unfold in front of their eyes a few hours later.

It was April 2, 2022. At 9 p.m. ET, the Tar Heels would face the Blue Devils on the hardwood of Caesars Superdome with a trip to the national championship on the line. For the first time in the history of the rivalry, the teams would meet in the NCAA tournament — in the Final Four, no less.



And like at every other game North Carolina has played over the last 20 years, Angell and Lucas were there to tell the story. In addition to serving as the play-by-play announcer on the Tar Heel Sports Network, Angell co-hosts the Carolina Insider Podcast with Lucas — a columnist for UNC Athletics, author and frequent contributor to Jones’ broadcasts. And through their various forms of storytelling, the two have left a mark on the UNC-Duke rivalry.

“There is just a different feeling, a different excitement, a different edge [leading up to a rivalry game],” Angell said. “You’re writing down your notes a little bit faster. You’re just doing everything at a little higher level because there is an energy around this game.”

2001: The beginning

Angell spent most of his college career at UNC in a small studio tucked inside the Dean E. Smith Center —the home of the Tar Heel Sports Network.

Inside, Angell practiced using radio equipment. As an intern for the radio show, he filmed footage, edited audio and edited video.

Then, he earned the chance to practice on-air. He learned how to act when the red recording light started flashing. Former play-by-play announcer Woody Durham — the voice Angell listened to growing up during men’s basketball and football games — mentored him.

After Angell graduated in 2001, he was contracted to broadcast UNC women’s soccer, women’s basketball and then baseball for ten



PHOTO COURTESY OF ADAM LUCAS

Adam Lucas and Jones Angell pose for a portrait with UNC junior forward Jalen Washington after speaking with him on the Carolina Insider Podcast on Monday, Jan. 13.

years. Then Durham retired in 2011. Angell stepped into his place.

“Being able to be that conduit to the program for a lot of people, whether that’s football or basketball and being the voice that they associate with the games, with the commentary,” Angell said. “It’s a responsibility that I don’t take lightly because I know how important that person was to me when I was a younger fan.”

Across campus at the UNC School of Law during the 2000-2001 basketball season, Lucas was in his second semester at the University. Because he was a talented writer,

everyone he knew told him to go to law school.

Watching 9 p.m. North Carolina basketball games started to interfere with his 8 a.m. courses.

One morning in his contracts class, Lucas was cold-called.

His professor, Thomas Hazen, asked a few questions. Lucas didn’t have the answers. He watched a basketball game instead. Hazen requested Lucas stay after class.

100 seats emptied. Lucas trudged his way over to his professor. Hazen gestured to the empty seats.

“The people who sit in those seats feel the same way about the law

as you do about Carolina sports,” Hazen told him.

This puzzled Lucas.



Read the full story online.

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Daily Tar Heel beats Chronicle

Writer Aidan Lockhart sent a behind-the-back pass to staffer Jack Morris on the corner. Silence. Bang. Twenty DTH staffers on the sideline erupted. Forty Duke Chronicle writers stood silent. In the annual DTH-Chron basketball game, The DTH won two out of three games. Despite wearing matching pennies and bringing out the mascot, The Chron couldn't muster the talent needed. A Chronicle videographer with a Steadicam rig filmed it all. He filmed as Cade Shoemaker notched assist after assist. He recorded Connor Gould giving it his all. Maybe he finally put the camera down when Ansel Whitley hit the game-winning three. So, as The Chron sits down to watch footage of them losing a pickup game, enjoy these photos of The DTH celebrating its win.

DTH/VIYADA SOUKTHAVONE

— Emma Moon



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ANALYSIS | POSITION PREVIEWS

How does UNC's backcourt match up with Duke's?

Both teams bring talented guard play to rivalry game

By Kendall Allen
Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

Coming into the season, UNC had an evident game plan: run, run and run some more. What the Tar Heel guards lack in height, they make up for in speed and athleticism. UNC's backcourt intensity will be a key factor in shutting down the Blue Devils when they face off on Saturday.

Graduate guard RJ Davis leads the Tar Heels in scoring with 17.7 points per game and is second in assists at just under four per game. According to Kenpom, the Blue Devils only allow 87.2 points per 100 possessions, second best in the country.

UNC's all-time leader in 3-pointers will have his work cut out for him against Duke's elite defense. While Davis is shooting a career-low 29.5 percent from deep, he'll need to bring his best if the Tar Heels are going to win this one.

Junior guard Seth Trimble is one of UNC's most formidable defenders, leading the Tar Heels with nearly two steals a game. His combination of stamina and explosiveness makes him an excellent perimeter defender.

Trimble will likely be tasked with marking Duke's first-year guard Kon Knueppel. Knueppel has established himself as one of the Blue Devils' best sharpshooters this year, featuring a smooth jump shot. With his high release point, Knueppel can knock down jump shots in small pockets of space. So far, he is hitting on 37.9 percent of his 3-pointers, averaging just over six attempts per game. If Trimble can run Knueppel off the line, Duke's offense will take a significant hit.

Sophomore guard Elliot Cadeau has shown flashes of being an elite playmaker. With a lightning-quick first step and shifty handle, Cadeau can force his defender off balance before launching a dime to an open teammate.

Cadeau leads UNC in assists with 6.1 per game and is the first Tar Heel to have three career games with at least 10 assists since Kendall Marshall. Additionally, Cadeau's most significant development in the off-season was his long-range shooting, with his 3-point percentage going from 18.9 percent to 29.4 percent.

When receiving a kick-out pass, Cadeau often hesitates to shoot from outside the arc. If Cadeau can play confidently, he can take the Tar Heels' offense to another level.

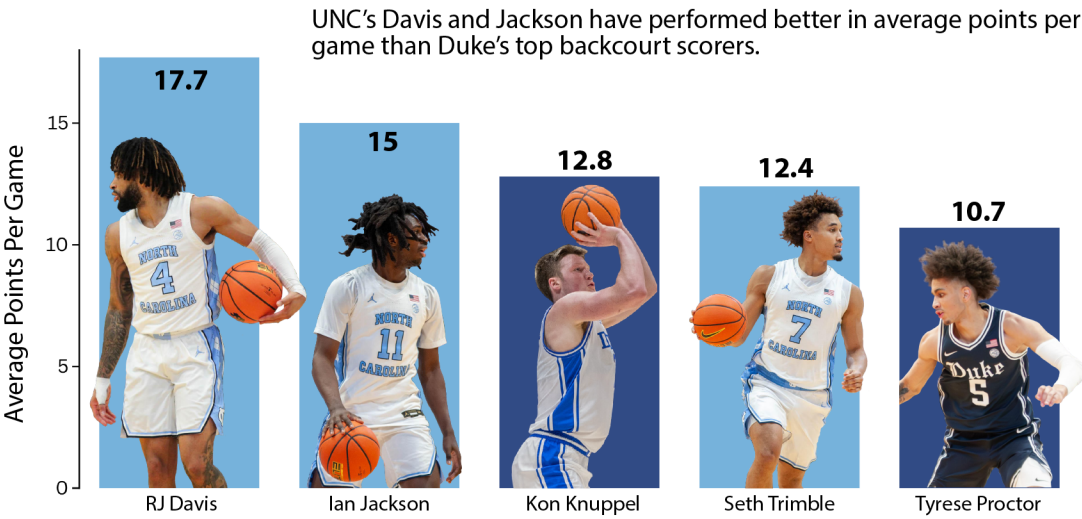
First-year guard Ian Jackson quickly became one of North Carolina's best scorers this year. Jackson exploded onto the scene with a 23-point outing against Alabama and has not slowed since. Against UCLA, he led a 16-point comeback, scoring 24 points on 8-13 shooting.

Following that game against the Bruins, Jackson has scored 20 or more points five times. Jackson is a pure bucket-getter, and that's precisely what UNC needs against the Blue Devils this year.

First-year guard Drake Powell has emerged as one of the North Carolina's most versatile players this season. Powell's stocky 195-pound frame allows him to stonewall smaller guards or bully his way into the paint on the offensive end. Powell is averaging 6.8 points per game, while shooting 46.1 percent from the field and 37.7 percent from deep.

However, Powell's primary assignment will be matching up against one of the nation's best wings in Cooper Flagg. At 6-foot-

RJ Davis leads backcourt scoring with 17.7 points per game



Source: University of North Carolina Athletics, Duke Athletics | Note: This data was updated on Jan. 26, 2025. Photos courtesy of Sophia Gray, Emma Plumly, Alyssa Ting, Emma Plumly and Kennedy Cox.

DTH DATA/LUCY BALLENTINE

9, 205 pounds, Flagg can get to his spots all over the floor, allowing him to lead the Blue Devils in all major statistical categories.

Recently, Flagg broke the ACC first-year single-game scoring record with a 42-point game against Notre Dame.

UNC's key to slowing down Flagg is smothering him. Flagg's handle, while solid, is by no means elite, and he can often be forced to settle for difficult 3-pointers and pull-up jumpers. Forcing Duke's star to take tough jump shots will minimize his impact.

In order for North Carolina to come out on top, solid guard play will be a key factor in both of UNC's matchups with Duke this season.



DTH/VIYADA SOUKTHAVONE

UNC sophomore guard Elliot Cadeau (3) dribbles the ball during a game against Boston College in the Dean E. Smith Center on Saturday, Jan. 25. UNC won 102-96.

X: @dthsports

Lack of size hinders North Carolina frontcourt

Hubert Davis has not found a suitable replacement at center

By Dylan Stalter
Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

North Carolina entered this season with a question the program hadn't asked for the past five seasons: who's going to be the starting center?

When the Tar Heels fell to Alabama in last season's Sweet Sixteen, then-graduate center

Armando Bacot — a man who once said he “would die for this school” — walked off the floor for the last time. He made four all-ACC teams en route to claiming the program's all-time rebounding title, once held by former forward Tyler Hansbrough. It was clear his absence would be felt this season. Eyes turned to head coach Hubert Davis to see how he would patch this hole.

Internally, it was “next man up.” Heading into his junior year, forward Jalen Washington appeared poised to make the leap. High school highlights showcased shifty footwork and a smooth jump shot. Paired with a 7-foot-4

wingspan, the once five-star recruit appeared a viable replacement.

Graduate forward Jae'Lyn Withers was another name expected to step up to the plate. Despite averaging just 12 minutes per game last season, Withers made noticeable impacts on the glass and recorded 16 points and 10 rebounds in the first round of the NCAA tournament against Wagner.

But both players have not contributed in the ways many thought they would. Questions began to rise after North Carolina's losing effort to a Hunter Dickinson-led Kansas team. The 7-foot-2 center posted 20 points and 10

rebounds over the outsized Tar Heels. The questions remained unanswered entering the Maui Invitational, where Johni Broome's 23 points and 19 rebounds highlighted Auburn's dominant win over UNC. Now, North Carolina must prepare for a game against one of the best teams in the nation on Saturday: No. 2 Duke.

Both Washington and Withers started during UNC's season-opener against Elon, but Davis has since experimented with the frontcourt rotation, utilizing a pair of transfer forwards from Nashville schools.

Junior Ven-Allen Lubin offered efficiency at the rim, averaging 12 points while leading Vanderbilt in field goal percentage last season.

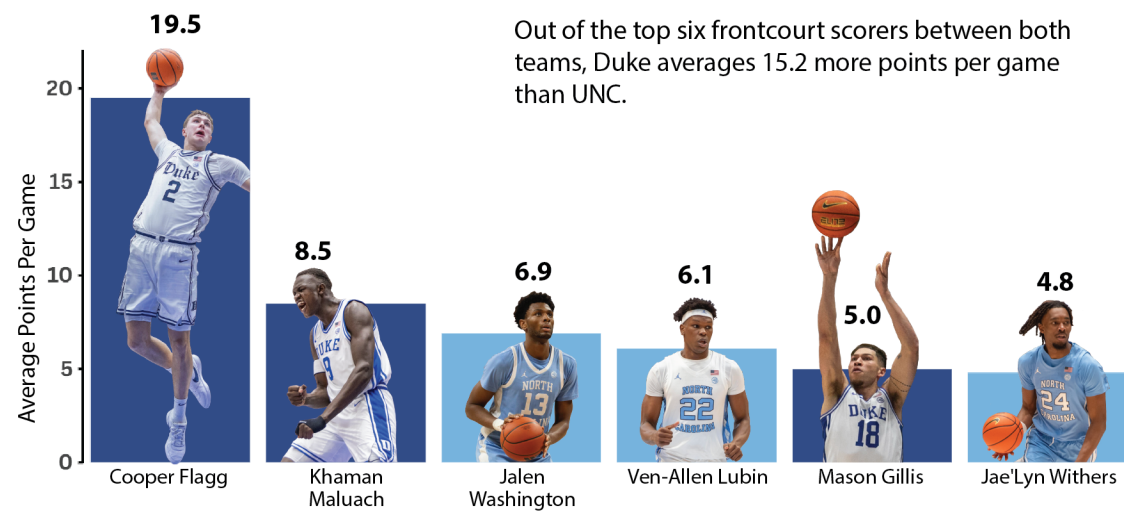
While athletic with a solid post presence on both ends of the floor, Lubin's 6-foot-8 stature did not help the lack of height in the North Carolina locker room. With the Tar Heels, he is averaging 6.1 points and 4.7 rebounds per game.

UNC also brought in junior Belmont transfer Cade Tyson as a stretch-four candidate. Tyson averaged 16 points last season, shooting over 46 percent from outside the arc. While he scored 23 points against LaSalle in December, the forward has yet to see consistent playing time or efficiency since.

The lack of size caused ripple effects on the team's style of play. Long gone are the days of the post feed to Bacot for a layup or an open kick-out 3-pointer. This team rarely even looks for postups this season, looking to their guards instead.

Rebounding woes have slowed down the Tar Heels as well. A team that flew in the transition game last year now ranks outside the top-150

Cooper Flagg leads frontcourt scoring with an average 19.5 points per game



Source: ESPN | Note: This data was updated as of Jan. 26, 2025. Photos courtesy of Andy Jiang, Alyssa Ting, Olivia Paul, Cassidy Toy Reynolds, Wanyu Zhang and Lara Crochik.

DTH DATA/EMMA TAYLOR

X: @dylanstalterr

FEATURE

Seth Trimble emerges as key piece for UNC basketball

The junior guard found his place after withdrawing from the transfer portal

By Alexandra Jones
Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

It's always been there for Seth Trimble. His explosive dunks and mind boggling lay-ins were tell-tale signs of an impending breakout. But the junior guard had to be patient. During his first-year, Trimble cobbled together a few minutes here and there. Stuck behind veteran guards, he averaged just shy of 10 minutes and two points per game. The next season, his minutes never dipped below double digits. The defensive advantage of having Trimble in the lineup became evident, but he still struggled offensively, averaging just five points per game. But this season has been different. Trimble's offensive numbers have skyrocketed. His points per game have more than doubled, increasing from 5.2 to 12.4. As one of the four UNC players averaging double figures, his minutes have followed suit, nearly doubling from 17.1 to 30.3. He has started in 13 games. But it's an increase that almost never happened. And now, Trimble has become a key piece of a UNC team looking for a statement win against No. 2 Duke on Saturday. "With this team, the offense that we play, I've been able just to really strive and take the steps that you guys haven't seen, but that I know they've seen every day in practice," Trimble said after his 33-point performance against Memphis in October. Following UNC's loss to Alabama in the Sweet 16 last season, Trimble found himself at a crossroads. He entered the transfer portal on April 9, looking for a place to fit in offensively. But nowhere else felt quite right. After Trimble announced his intention to transfer, Danny Green was one of the Tar Heels who took time to reach out. In their conversation, Green explained his journey at North Carolina: from not earning a starting role until his senior year to later embarking on a 15-season NBA career. It resonated with Trimble. Two weeks later, he withdrew from the portal. "I didn't feel that type of love from any other school," Trimble said. "It was meant to be." Over the offseason, Trimble lived in the gym. He spent eight hours there daily, devoting three to honing his individual craft with assistant coach Marcus Paige. Green took Trimble under his wing. They worked out together at UNC for two weeks in the summer. Then, Green invited the junior to L.A. to train even more. Trimble focused on getting more on-ball reps, coming off screens and hunting 3-point shots to enhance his drive-first identity. Graduate guard R.J. Davis frequently went head-to-head with Trimble during offseason practices. R.J. Davis detailed the constant back-

and-forth between stops and scores during their one-on-ones. "We get at it," R.J. Davis said. "We just get into each other's heads." And in North Carolina's preseason exhibition game against Memphis on Oct. 15, Trimble's work immediately showed. He eclipsed the 30-point mark with an assertive one-handed slam in transition — in typical Trimble fashion. After the performance, he said he's been "that guy" on offense since high school. At UNC, he just had to wait his turn. Through the first 12 games of the season, Trimble ranked second in scoring on the team, averaging 14.8 points and scoring in double-figures in all but one game. He exploded for 27 points against Dayton and led UNC to its first ACC win against Georgia Tech with 19 points. But after recording 12 points against UCLA, Trimble was confined to the bench once more. This time, it was with a head injury suffered in practice. He missed three games. Post-concussion, Trimble struggled to find the bottom of the net, scoring zero points in his return game and a pair of four point performances off the bench. He was frustrated. But Trimble refused to surrender to the setback. The next game against California, he broke through for 12 points, six rebounds and three steals. Trimble had found his rhythm again, even if he wasn't starting. "I just felt that Seth was off the charts," head coach Hubert Davis said after the win over Cal. "His energy, effort, attention to detail, he was all over the place." Then, a two-game losing skid warranted a lineup change. Hubert Davis told Trimble the team needed him to get back to his identity from earlier in the season — back to a version of himself that was "relentlessly attacking, shooting without hesitation and craving to get stops on the defensive end" in order to find success. Against Boston College, the junior guard's name was called during the starting lineup for the first time since Dec. 21. He played 43 out of 45 minutes in the overtime thriller. He scored 18 points. He had a career-high 12-rebound double-double, the second of his career. He scored four points in 18.6 seconds — two of which came from the game-tying layup to force extra time. "Today kind of felt like a complete Seth Trimble performance, just from my energy to my intensity on the defensive end," Trimble said following the win. Coming up, Trimble will get another stab at Duke. In last year's home matchup, he recorded 10 points in 20 minutes. But his role is different now. He'll have a chance to channel this newfound momentum — to show the improvements his early season performances teased — against UNC's rival. "[I'll] continue to do the little things that I've been doing all year, that's when the big things are going to come," Trimble said.

X: @alexjdjones_



DTH FILE/OLIVIA PAUL

UNC junior guard Seth Trimble (7) shoots a 3-pointer during the men's basketball game against UCLA at Madison Square Garden in New York City on Dec. 21, 2024. UNC won 76-74.

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PREVIEW

Three keys for UNC to win critical Duke game

The Tar Heels face an uphill battle against the No. 2 Blue Devils

By Marvin Lee
Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

The UNC men's basketball team has had a rough season. The Tar Heels have eight losses, including seven Quad 1 losses and one to Quad 2 Stanford.

After coming into the pre-season ranked No. 9, they have underperformed.

Now, North Carolina will face a seemingly invincible Duke squad on Saturday in Cameron Indoor Stadium.

With UNC teetering on the bubble ahead of the NCAA tournament, it's do or die. A win against Duke could turn the entire season around, but a loss could be disastrous.

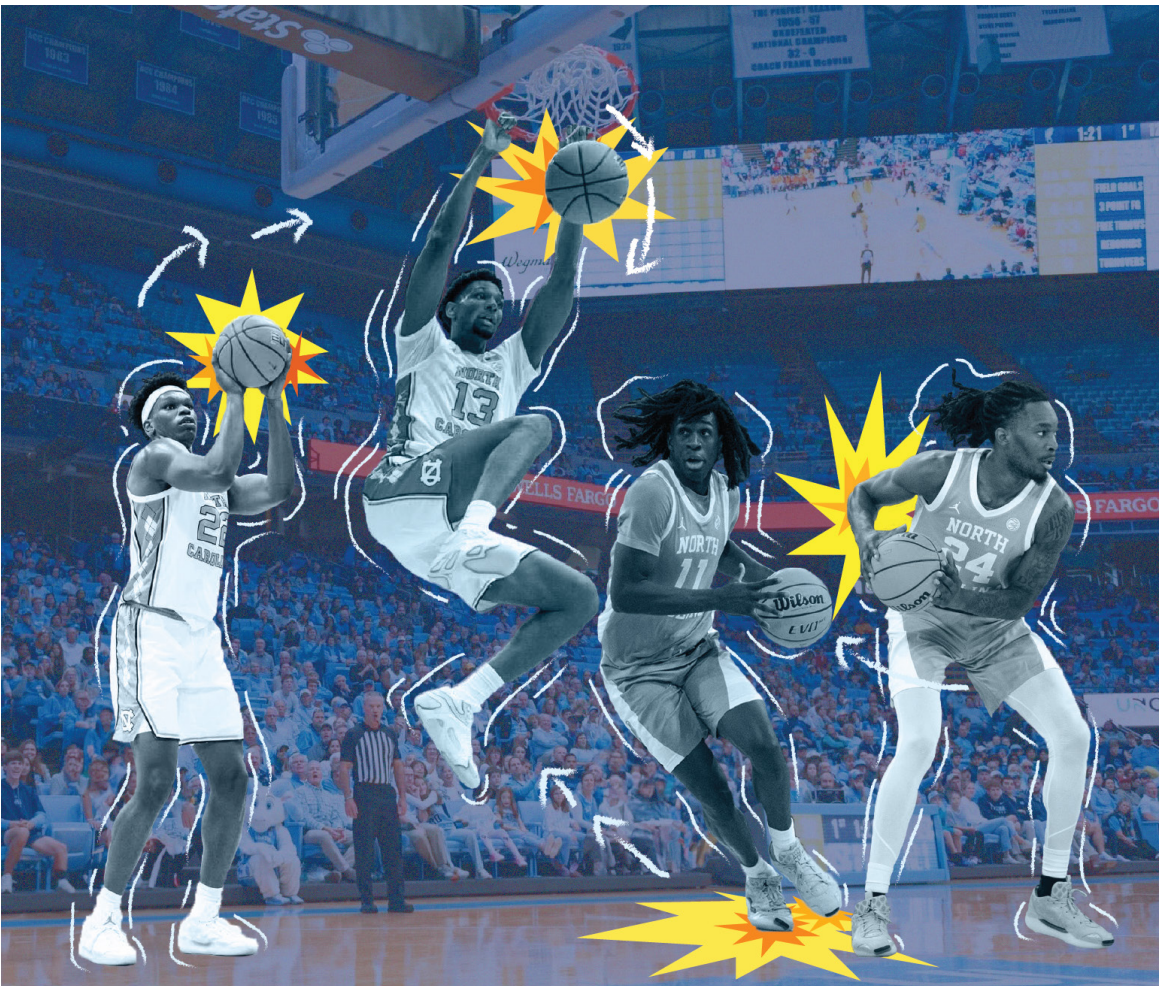
Heading into the game, here are three keys before the rivalry matchup:

Increase the pace

UNC plays at one of the fastest paces in the country, ranking within the top-20 in possessions per game. But in ACC play, the pace has slowed, giving the Tar Heels fewer opportunities to score.

Against teams like Kansas and Florida, UNC scored 89 and 84 points, respectively. Against conference opponents, North Carolina is averaging 75 points per game.

The Blue Devils boast a top-10 scoring defense. However, their pace of play ranks amongst the slowest in the nation. The team routinely holds its opponents to season-lows.



DTH DESIGN/SARAH FENWICK

Photos courtesy of Olivia Paul, Connor Ruesch and Nate Skvoretz.

Pace could easily determine who comes out on top in Durham. A game with opportunities to get out in transition is likely to favor the Tar Heels, who rank in the top-25 in fast break points.

UNC must return to the speed it showed early in the season to obtain a resume-boosting win.

Efficient play from first-year guard Ian Jackson

During conference play, North Carolina's wins are seemingly due to the contributions of first-year guard Ian Jackson.

Jackson logged a seven-game stretch in December and January

where he scored 18 or more points in every contest. UNC won six out of those seven games, including a win over a ranked UCLA squad — North Carolina's only Quad 1 victory.

While the 6-foot-4 guard has proven himself as dynamic around the rim, his outside shooting has been key to the recent Tar Heel

wins. If North Carolina wants to have a chance at leaving Durham with a win, Jackson is going to need to have a big game.

From baseline to baseline on both sides of the floor, a complete performance from the first-year is key to a UNC victory.

The battle down low

North Carolina has faced issues all year in the paint due to the lack of a true center. Duke and FSU are tied for the tallest teams in the nation, each averaging 6-foot-7 per player. The Blue Devil's 6-foot-9 Cooper Flagg and 7-foot-2 Khaman Maluach make up a lot of the team's height.

Duke ranks 39th in the nation in total rebounds. The Blue Devils are second in combined rebounds and first in combined opponent rebounds within the ACC. UNC ranks outside of the top-150 in total rebounding percentage.

The quartet of UNC forwards — first-year Drake Powell, junior Ven-Allen Lubin, graduate Jae'Lyn Withers and junior Jalen Washington — have to work in tandem to force the Blue Devils out of the paint, especially against Flagg.

The Tar Heels have to balance their attention on Flagg and Maluach with a group rebounding strategy to keep the towering first-years from pushing the game out of reach.

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HYPE

How Tar Heels prepare for UNC-Duke basketball games

Long lines and lucky rituals dictate Tobacco Road rivalry preparation

By Emma Moon
Assistant Sports Editor
sports@dailytarheel.com

Matt Jones didn't expect his game day to smell like chlorine. He didn't expect to be trapped inside a natatorium for two hours.

The air was sticky with no AC to break up the humidity. Jones, alongside fellow UNC students, jammed themselves into "very vertical" seating — the type of seats that promise back pain before you ever sit down. Knees were crunched to chests. Clothes clung to skin.

"You're just sitting there in this room, uncomfortable, squished in like sardines," Jones said. "I just want to watch Carolina beat Duke."

Eventually, Jones' frustration culminated into one wish. He shared it with his friend, Matthew, who bore the natatorium's conditions with him. Jones wished for his AirPods. The silence was driving him crazy. He couldn't take it anymore. Matthew pulled out his own pair from his pocket. One AirPods in Jones' ear. One in Matthew's. Country artist Zach Bryan soothed the friends, making the time go faster ahead of opening tip.

"It wasn't like we were suffering," Jones said. "But there were complaints. It wasn't the most fun waiting experience."

Although UNC students don't leave the comfort of their bedrooms to stay



DTH FILE/CASSIDY TOY REYNOLDS

UNC students cheer on the men's basketball team as they prepared to play Stanford at the Dean E. Smith Center on Jan. 18. UNC lost 72-71 in the final seconds of the game.

in tents like the Blue Devils ahead of rivalry games, they experience one long day of discomfort. When Duke and UNC play at 6:30 p.m., students wake up more than 12 hours earlier. They attend College GameDay, with lines forming as early as 7:30 a.m., and then they wait. Oh, and they wait some more, scattered around locations like UNC's business school, the Koury Natatorium or just outside the doors of the arena. In March, the Tar Heels will do it all again to see the two teams square off in the Dean E. Smith Center.

Still, the conditions don't hinder the anticipation.

Last year, then-junior Abby Moore's excitement started four days ahead of the game when she saw nine numbers listed in a Microsoft Excel sheet. The sheet was created by Carolina Fever,

an organization that provides students assured admission into the UNC-Duke game for attending different sporting events throughout the school year. It's simple: The more sporting events a student goes to, the more points they earn. Moore hadn't missed one game.

The nine numbers in the spreadsheet were Moore's PID, her student identification number. Her roommate, Caroline Sevier, saw her PID as well. The information drove them out of their bedrooms and into the kitchen.

They secured two tickets to a top-10 matchup against Duke and would be the first 200 people inside the arena. The pair later found out they would hold the first and second spots.

"We were running around the kitchen, screaming, texting

everybody," Moore said. "We're gonna be the first ones in. This is crazy."

And preparation for the game commenced. Jones' pair of lucky socks — the ones he wears every UNC game day — were ready. Junior Ansel Whitley laid out his white Jordans 3s he reserves for North Carolina basketball games.

Moore and Sevier made themed posters until midnight the night before the game. Sevier laid out her head-to-toe Carolina Blue outfit, even down to her underwear. Then, she entered her bedroom, turned all the lights off, lit a candle and gathered her UNC-themed pins. Sevier hovered each pin over the flame, manifesting good intentions to the tune of "Hark the Sound" playing on a speaker. It's her tradition.

"I want to win," Sevier said. "We want to win. So I do that with mine and my housemates' pins, which is kind of weird, but it was something I did and still do."

Then came the waiting outside the stadium and figuring out when to eat. Granola bars were stuffed in bags ahead of concession stand runs.

But after what feels like years, the doors to the Smith Center finally opened. Sevier and Moore were the first students inside. The pair planted their feet on Roy Williams Court, claiming spots on the baseline. Whitley was also somewhere near the court. Jones sat in the upper level.

And the rest was a blur.

An RJ Davis 3-pointer here. An Armando Bacot dunk there. The players and bench hitting the "too

small" over then-Duke center Kyle Filipowski all en route to a 93-84 victory over the Blue Devils.

Although it's hard to put the rivalry into words, Jones described it as a justification for everything. There's pride on the line and history at stake. No one can understand the feeling unless they're inside the arena.

"I'm tired of them thinking they're smarter," Jones said. "I'm tired of them thinking they're better at sports. I'm tired of this, that and the other. We are better. We are Carolina. We are the school."

And on that night and in that specific game, North Carolina proved it was better.

As Sevier and Moore readied themselves to celebrate following the win, eventual first-year UNC players Drake Powell and Ian Jackson sat in front of the roommates. At that moment, the pair knew more about the rivalry and its traditions than the players. Powell and Jackson will take the court for their first rivalry game on Saturday.

In that moment, Jackson asked Sevier and Moore a question.

"Do we rush the court?" Jackson asked.

As masses of people began rushing out the Smith Center, Moore responded quickly.

"No," Moore said. "We'll meet you on Franklin Street."



X: @emmahmoon

WORD ON THE STREET

What is it like to camp in K-Ville?

How over 200 tents of students are passing time until Feb. 1

By Megan Smith
Senior Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

Looking onto the patches of grass outside Cameron Indoor Stadium, it's clear Duke students in "K-Ville" love decorations, especially themed after Blue Devil first-year guard Kon Knueppel.

Named after former Head Coach Mike Krzyzewski, K-Ville is the site where Blue Devils live in tents for the weeks leading up to the UNC-Duke game in Durham.

Speaking of decorations, there's the "K-Ville Time KONnections" tent with the popular word game plastered outside of it. There was also "The Konfu Panda Dojo," featuring characters from the movie but with players' heads cropped onto them. One tent even had a hand-made chicken coop with hay lying around to match the "Kon on the Cob" theme.

Sitting between snow and empty boxes of booze are over 200 tents like these. The Crazies camp out for weeks through the cold and discomfort for a chance to watch one of the most anticipated games of the year. And here's how they justify doing it:

What made you want to camp out?

"It's part of the tradition. I think a lot of it is about this year specifically. We have an incredible team. Last year we lost to UNC twice, so this is like their revenge year. The team's really good. UNC's really bad. There's that. No offense." - first-year Sam Piesman

"This is my third time tenting, so I know how worth it is to be in Cameron for the UNC game. I just couldn't lose that opportunity for my last year." - senior Kareena Legare

"I've also never done it before and all of my friends were doing it. It's senior year, so why not." - senior Marianna Mavares

What's been the hardest part of this experience?

"As fun as it is to hangout with other seniors, it's annoying to be like, 'Oh, I just had class. Time to sit in a cold tent for three hours.'" - senior Isabella DiMeo

What kind of activities do you do to pass the time while camping out?

"There's a lot of time to hangout with friends. We play card games. A lot of homework. Honestly just walking around this area, like we have A Boogie wit da Hoodie concert tonight, so I was



DTH/HEATHER DIEHL

Duke juniors Julian Diaz, Erin O'Rourke and Nickhil Arayath play Yahtzee in their tent to pass the time on Friday, Jan. 24.

checking that out. Just kind of messing around, I'd say." - Piesman

Tell me about the "tenting test."

"We all had to take a pretty specific basketball test on all the players — obviously all their stats, but then random facts about them that includes a lot of stalking, like in-depth Instagram, TikTok, crazy stalking, which is a little weird." - senior Annika Socia

"Now it's fun because we can walk around campus and see the players and just know way too much information about them." - Legare

X: @meganosmith



DTH/HEATHER DIEHL

Students occupy the hundreds of tents that make up K-Ville.



DTH/OLIVIA PAUL

A tent in K-Ville is accessorized with "Barbie" decorations and posters with Duke players.

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Q&A



DTH FILE/NATHAN KLIMA

UNC forward Theo Pinson (1) dunks the ball in the final seconds of UNC's win over Duke on Feb. 8, 2018, in the Dean E. Smith Center. UNC won 82-78.

Theo Pinson discusses UNC-Duke rivalry

2017 national champion remembers notable games, campus atmosphere

By Anna Laible

Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

"Run Your Race" podcast host Theo Pinson — a 2017 national champion and one of 12 Tar Heels to play in two national title games — has experienced countless memorable UNC-Duke rivalry moments.

Staff writer Anna Laible spoke with Pinson in late January ahead of the first UNC-Duke game of the year. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

The Daily Tar Heel: When I say UNC-Duke, what comes to mind?

Theo Pinson: Battles. It never fails — the anticipation, build-up. Best college game. Best rivalry in sports. Never misses, regardless of what records are, what players are there. My last dunk in my senior year at home. So, just good times. A lot of good times.

DTH: Reliving your rivalry days, what are some of the moments that have stayed with you from those UNC-Duke games?

Pinson: One is going into Cameron Indoor Stadium and winning our regular season championship [in 2016]. That kind of boosted us to make a run to the national championship, but we ended up losing to Villanova unfortunately. That year, since that game, when we won in the Duke game — that run from there to the national championship was probably the most fun I've had in my life.

DTH: What was it like walking onto the court for a rivalry game? What was the atmosphere and what were the emotions running through the tunnel, warming up for those games?

Pinson: It starts when you go to class, people kinda look at you like, "You got a big game today and you're just in class like it's nothing." I'm like, "Bro, look, I've been playing basketball my whole life. This probably means more to you than me, honestly." I'm going to go out there and do what I need to do to win this game.

I honestly love the fact that we had it on days we go to class because they can see we're regular people. I have to come [to class], and the teacher is looking at us like, "Big game tonight." I'm like, "Oh, really? Duh."

You are sitting there a little antsy, waiting on the game to start and to get to

the game, but it's cool seeing everybody saying, "Good luck tonight," and, "Get the win." The buildup is always fun.

DTH: Do you have a favorite UNC-Duke game from your time on the team?

Pinson: Personally, my last one [in 2018] was probably the most fun just because it was a 50-50 split of fans, it kind of went back-and-forth and we ended up coming out on top and winning. It was my last game versus Duke, so you're only as good as your last game, and I won it. I played pretty well in it too.

DTH: You are currently hosting the podcast "Run Your Race" with AJ Richardson. In your conversations with former UNC players and coaches on the podcast, what have been your favorite stories you've heard about the UNC-Duke rivalry?

Pinson: I mean, just the intensity. It's just a mutual respect between two schools. We all understand what goes into it. The fans are really into it. The game is just a little more loud than usual. You can play anybody else, and it's loud, but you play Duke, it's going to be rocking and there's literally nothing like it.

It's just a different feeling.

We always remember the wins, but we do remember the losses also — only [Tyler Hansbrough] is the one that got lucky and won all four in Cameron. That's legendary. For him to do that, that's elite.

I wish I could've done that. I think I only got one in Cameron. Kudos to him.

X: @anna_laible



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID WELKER

UNC forward Theo Pinson (1) strips the ball from Duke's Trevon Duval (1) during the ACC semifinals on March 9, 2018, in New York.



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AROUND ATHLETICS

UNC-Duke rivalry through the lens of other sports

The infamous feud isn't contained to just basketball season

By **Brian D'Aguanno**
Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

and **Sofia Szostczuk**
Staff Writer

When people first think of the UNC-Duke rivalry, they most often think about men's basketball. It is one of the most famous and legendary rivalries in the sports world.

While men's basketball oftentimes gets the majority of the attention, the rivalry holds meaning across every sport at North Carolina.

Since 2024, UNC has a 19-11 record over the Tobacco Road rival.

Although the volleyball team swept the Blue Devils in 2024, they did not conquer this feat last season.

In 2023, Duke took the first match, 3-1. However, the Tar Heels did not go down without a fight in the second matchup, ultimately defeating Duke, 3-2. It's a match senior libero Maddy May and junior setter Zoe Behrendt will never forget.

In that match, UNC had one goal in mind. "Let's just do what we can to keep them out of the tournament, try to crush their faith of having a postseason," Behrendt said. "And we were like, let's do it, one, because we don't want them to play the postseason and two, because it's Duke."

The Tar Heels found themselves down 24-21 in the fourth set.

But then, UNC won four straight points to take a 25-24 set lead. May threw her arms into the air. Players at the net jumped in the air. The players watching from the bench slid onto the ground.

After trading points, North Carolina eventually took the fourth set 28-26 to force a fifth.



DTH FILE/VIYADA SOUKTHAVONE

UNC volleyball players celebrate a point together during the game against Duke on Oct. 4, 2024, at Carmichael Arena. UNC won 3-0.

Then, the Tar Heels won it, defeating the Blue Devils 3-2 and squashing Duke's NCAA tournament hopes.

Due to skill, location and scale of team, Behrendt said players that are getting recruited by UNC are also likely getting recruited by Duke. This can foster the rivalry before even stepping foot in Carmichael Arena.

"The rivalry is strong, but we also know people on their team, so it was a mixture of respect but also knowing the rivalry runs deep," women's tennis senior Carson Tanguilig said. "At the end of the day, we want to be the better blue."

The UNC-Duke rivalry in women's tennis has been one-sided recently, with the Tar Heels winning their last three matchups with the Blue Devils.



DTH FILE/NATE SKVORETZ

UNC senior Carson Tanguilig strikes the ball during a singles match against Duke at Ambler Tennis Stadium on March 30, 2024. UNC won 4-1.

But still, there's a different feeling associated with Duke matches.

"It makes it a little bit more exciting," Tanguilig said. "The adrenaline definitely pumps for sure just because of the legacy of the rivalry and knowing you only have four years to do it. Definitely in those big moments you are a lot more locked in, team's a lot more energetic and I think the whole atmosphere just changes a little bit because of how deep rooted it is."

This mentality permeates through other teams as well. The North Carolina men's wrestling team has not lost to Duke since the 2015-16 season, meaning no current Tar Heel wrestler has ever lost to the Blue Devils.

The mindset of wrestlers changes when facing off against Duke. In such a heated match, preparation and performance elevates.

"It's obviously iconic," redshirt junior Lachlan McNeil said. "There's a little bit more emphasis, when we wrestle Duke, on making sure we get bonus points and showing dominance. The rivalry alone spurs us on to really kind of push in these duels."

Understanding and appreciating the competitive nature of UNC and Duke across sports is important in building context to the stories of the historic rivalry.

From volleyball to wrestling to tennis, games against Duke always have a deeper meaning.

"Rivalries are historic, and they have gone back for years and years," May said. "You grow up in [North Carolina], and it's like you are taught to be either a Duke or a UNC fan."

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Evaluating UNC's season performance so far

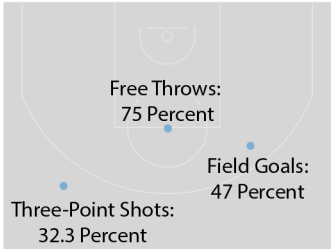


DTH DESIGN/KATRINA DONG

Photos courtesy of Cassidy Toy Reynolds, Nate Skvoretz and Viyada Soukthavone.

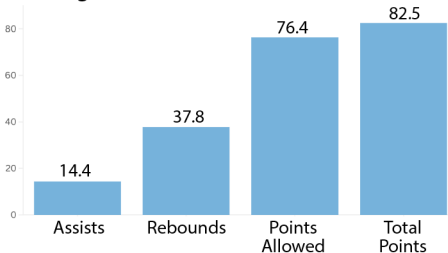
UNC scores approximately 83 points per game

UNC has a free throw percentage of 75 percent. The team currently makes 47 percent of their field goals and 32.3 percent of three-point shots.



Source: ESPN | This data was updated on Jan. 26, 2025.

Average Per Game



On average, UNC records 14 assists and 38 rebounds per game. The team allows approximately 76 points on average.

DTH DATA/IFEOMA OBIOHA

North Carolina's struggles result in C+ overall grade

By Shannen Horan
Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

Although there were high expectations for UNC — who ranked No. 9 in the pre-season — the Tar Heels have failed to meet them.

North Carolina is 1-4 against ranked opponents this season. While it seemed like the Tar Heels were figuring things out during a four-game winning streak, UNC suffered its only Quad 2 defeat of the season against Stanford in a one-point loss. And in February, the Tar Heels will be tested again against the No. 2 team in the nation. But this time, it's not just a ranked opponent on the court — it's UNC's biggest rival, Duke.

And this year the Tobacco Road rivalry has more at stake than just crowning the "better blue." UNC could be on the bubble of NCAA tournament selection.

So before facing the toughest ACC test of the year, let's look at how UNC has fared this season.

Offense: B

The offense struggled to find a consistent rhythm at the start of the season but has found its tempo more recently. UNC is ranked No. 29 in the nation, averaging 82.5 points per game.

Graduate guard RJ Davis has been a key player throughout his five years at UNC, but he's been underperforming during his final season. Despite averaging around 17 points per game, he hasn't been playing at the same caliber

as previous seasons. He recorded a season-low seven points against California in January. Compared to last season, his 3-point percentage is down by over 10 percent, and he's averaging almost four less points per game.

This has allowed first-year guard Ian Jackson to step up.

Jackson has already cemented himself in North Carolina's record books by becoming the first Tar Heel to score 23 or more points in four straight games in his first season. Additionally, Jackson's 20 points against California pushed him to record 159 points in the last seven games. The total is one shy from tying the UNC scoring record for a first-year in seven straight games, which was set by Tyler Hansbrough in 2005-06. Jackson averages 15 points per game.

With Davis underperforming, the Tar Heels have shot under 33 percent from behind the arc.

Defense: C

The defense continues to be North Carolina's Achilles' heel, allowing 76.4 points per game. A big contributor to the defensive disparity is the team's inability to rebound. UNC ranked 89th in total rebounds and No. 265 in offensive rebounding in the country.

Despite this, UNC has started to lean on its defensive blocks. The team has 82 blocks for an average of four per game. They have mostly been handled by junior center Jalen Washington, who leads the team with 24. His most notable block came at the end of North Carolina's game against N.C. State to secure UNC's 63-61 win.

Duke is ranked No. 6 in the nation in scoring defense. If the Tar Heels want to compete against the Blue Devils, they will need to step up defensively.

Starters: B

North Carolina's starting lineup has seen some shifts throughout the season, and has just recently found some sort of stability. First-year guard Drake Powell replaced graduate forward Jae'Lyn Withers in the lineup against Alabama in December and has remained in that role since. Powell averages 6.8 points and 3.5 rebounds per game.

Jackson replaced junior guard Seth Trimble in the lineup against Campbell in December, as Trimble was suffering from an upper-body injury. Jackson has since held onto his spot in the starting five.

Despite these early adjustments, the overall core of UNC's lineup remains largely unchanged, with veterans such as Davis, Washington and sophomore guard Elliot Cadeau anchoring the squad. So far, the trio has averaged a combined 35 points per game.

Bench: C+

North Carolina's bench has shown flashes of potential with Withers and junior forward Ven-Allen Lubin, but has remained somewhat inconsistent. UNC's bench only averages 23.38 points per game and ranks 135th in the nation.

The bench's overall contribution has been limited, putting additional pressure on the starting lineup to carry the load. As the Tar Heels prepare for a must-win game against the Blue Devils, the bench's production is a cause for concern.

Overall: C+

X: @dthsports

Despite youth, Duke's balanced roster dominates the ACC

Blue Devils boast efficient offense and defense

By Brian D'Aguanno
Staff Writer
sports@dailytarheel.com

The No. 2 Duke men's basketball team may be the best in the country.

Over two months into the season, the Blue Devils are 17-2 and sit atop the ACC with an undefeated conference record.

As UNC prepares for its game against Duke in February, here are letter grades for each aspect of the team over halfway into the season:

Offense: A

Duke boasts one of the most efficient offenses, ranking sixth in the country. Ball distribution is a big part of the Blue Devils' offense, averaging over 17 assists per game, which is the 14th most in college basketball. But Duke's offensive talent is what separates them from the rest.

First-year forward Cooper Flagg leads the way, averaging over 19 points and four assists per game. Another first-year, forward Kon Knueppel, is averaging 12.8 points per game, providing the Blue Devils with another go-to scoring option.

Defense: A+

While the team's offense has been effective thus far, Duke's defensive prowess has been the main story. The Blue Devils allow 59.3 points

per game, which is third best in the nation. Opposing teams shoot just 37 percent from the field, coming in at fifth best in the country.

The addition of All-ACC defender forward Maliq Brown has bolstered Duke's defensive tenacity, with Brown averaging two stocks a game. However, while Brown is out with a knee injury, the Blue Devils must rely on 7-foot-2 center Khaman Maluach to improve the team's rim protection.

Frontcourt: A+

Two words: Cooper Flagg.

First-year, and potential future first-overall pick, Flagg has led the way for the Blue Devils. Flagg leads the team in points, rebounds and assists per game, while also being an elite defender. The forward is the odds-on favorite to win National Player of the Year, giving the Blue Devils one of the best frontcourt players in the country.

The Blue Devils run through Flagg, but their other two first-years, Knueppel and Maluach, bolster Duke's formidable frontcourt.

Backcourt: B+

Guard Tyrese Proctor leads the way for the Blue Devils' backcourt, averaging almost 11 points per game and shooting just under 40 percent from beyond the arc. Tulane transfer, Sion James, has been a pleasant surprise, averaging over three assists per game and shooting over 37 percent from three.

While the offense runs through Duke's frontcourt, Proctor and

James help maintain Duke's scoring attack. The Blue Devils have talent off the bench with sophomore Caleb Foster and first-year Isaiah Evans, but the players must become more consistent to increase the backcourt's production.

Starters: A

While the Blue Devils have three first-years in the starting lineup with Flagg, Knueppel and Maluach, don't take their inexperience for weakness. The trio is one of the best starting frontcourt combinations in the nation, averaging over a combined 40 points per game — more than half of Duke's average scoring output.

Proctor and James make up the starting backcourt, giving the lineup playmaking and perimeter shooting. The duo help elevate the rotation to one of the best in the country.

Bench: B+

Brown's injury is a huge blow to the team's depth, as he was averaging just under 18 minutes per game. But forward Mason Gillis, who averages over 14 minutes, will see an increased role in Brown's absence.

The bench backcourt duo of Foster and Evans will need to step up for the Blue Devils. Both guards are talented scorers that lack consistency, but if either can find their rhythm, Duke's bench unit might become even scarier.

Overall: A



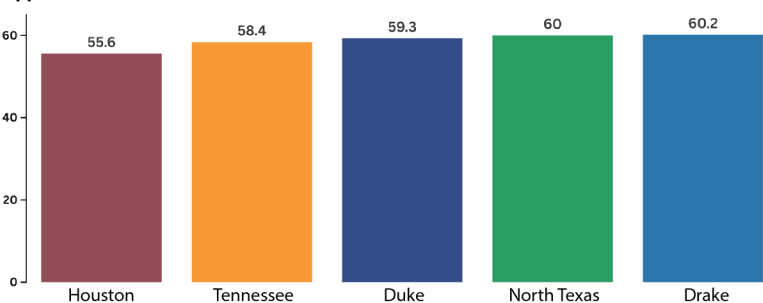
DTH DESIGN/ZOEY MORRIS

Photos courtesy of Wany Jiang, Alex Long and Nicole Nie.

Duke holds opponents to just over 59 points per game

Duke is currently ranked third nationally among Division 1 NCAA basketball teams for points allowed per game. Houston and Tennessee are ahead of them with 55.6 and 58.4 points respectively.

Opponent Points Allowed Per Game



Source: Team Rankings | Note: Data updated as of Jan. 26, 2025.

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The season is on the line in Duke matchup

North Carolina men's basketball is in a do-or-die situation

By Matthew Maynard
Assistant Sports Editor
sports@dailytarheel.com

Do or die.

It's the theme of this year's rivalry issue, but it's also the theme of UNC's season entering its first matchup with No. 2 Duke.

After a difficult non-conference schedule featuring five top-25 matchups, the Tar Heels wanted to enter ACC play on a better note. And for a while, it looked like they found their groove. But back-to-back losses to Stanford and Wake Forest added yet another blemish to UNC's already battered NCAA tournament resume. UNC has just one Quad 1 win in eight games and one Quad 2 loss so far.

And for a team that is sitting on the bubble for the NCAA tournament, this upcoming game against Duke is do or die.

On Saturday, North Carolina has the chance to tally its best win of the season as it travels to take on Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium. The Tar Heels had high expectations entering this season with returning All-American graduate guard RJ Davis and after bringing in two top-15 recruits. They haven't lived up to the hype at all. The lack of a true inside presence hasn't helped either. And now, the Tar Heels have their backs against the wall.

Entering the season, North Carolina ranked as the No. 9 team in the country. RJ Davis, along with sophomore guard Elliot Cadeau, junior guard Seth Trimble and first-year guard Ian Jackson were slated to be one of the best backcourts in the country.

But RJ Davis has struggled. The reigning ACC Player of the Year has averaged just over 39 percent from the field and is hitting only 29.5 percent of his 3-pointers.

His average last season? 42.8 percent from the field and 39.8 percent from beyond the arc.

In his last Duke game at Cameron Indoor Stadium, RJ Davis has the chance to do what he's done before: help UNC win when they need it most. And although his jersey will forever hang in the rafters after last season's ACC Player of the Year award, it begs the question: will people remember

his elite senior season, or his struggles in his final year in Chapel Hill?

Meanwhile, it looked like all of Cadeau and Trimble's offseason work had paid off in UNC's season-opening win against Elon. The pair combined for 32 points and, along with RJ Davis, helped put the game away in the closing minutes.

But after Trimble missed three games with a concussion, he looks hesitant. Cadeau's outside shot hasn't gotten to where it needs to be. He's hitting on just 29.4 percent, which is close to an 11 percent increase from last season.

There's one player that's lived up to the hype — Jackson. After spending most of the early season coming in as a substitute, Jackson earned his place in the starting lineup during Trimble's absence. He's been on a tear since then.

But problems arise for Carolina when he doesn't shoot well. Against Stanford and Wake Forest, Jackson scored six and seven points respectively. The Tar Heels lost both games.

Heading into Duke and relying on a first-year who has never played in one of the most storied rivalries is not ideal.

The bigger question for Head Coach Hubert Davis' squad is the height matchup down low. After having multiple seasons to find a replacement for Armando Bacot who graduated last year, Hubert Davis failed to find a true successor.

While he was adamant in the preseason about not missing out on any bigs in the portal and that he was happy with his roster, it's come back to haunt him. The Tar Heels rank No. 89 in rebounds per game, far from what is typically expected of a UNC team. So, against a Duke team that features 6-foot-9 Cooper Flagg and 7-foot-2 Khaman Maluach, junior forwards Jalen Washington and Ven-Allen Lubin have the chance to prove everyone wrong. Or right.

Questions surrounding Hubert Davis' job security have already been swirling this season, but a win over Duke would calm all those nerves. Sure, it helps that he landed five-star forward Caleb Wilson in the 2025 class — along with other top recruits Isaiah Denis and Derek Dixon — but right now, winning is what matters.

It's do or die.

X: @mdmaynard74



DTH FILE/HEATHER DIEHL

Head Coach Hubert Davis hugs UNC then-sophomore guard Seth Trimble (7) as he leaves the court during the men's ACC quarterfinal basketball game on March 14, 2024.



DTH FILE/HEATHER DIEHL

UNC graduate guard RJ Davis (4) pauses between plays during a close game against Kansas at Allen Fieldhouse on Nov. 8, 2024. UNC lost 92-89.

DTH sports editors predict a double-digit UNC loss



DTH/ANNA CONNORS

By Caroline Wills
Sports Editor

DUKE 82 — UNC 67

Along with having multiple offensive weapons, this year's Duke team is a defensive powerhouse. The Blue Devils rank No. 3 in the nation in defense, according to KenPom. They hold opponents to an average of 59.3 points per game and are the tallest team in the nation. Duke is in the top-30 for overall rebounds while UNC ranks 89th.

Earlier this season, North Carolina lost to Kansas, 92-89. The Jayhawk defense ranks No. 4 in the nation — the best defensive team UNC has played so far. Although the Tar Heels had a second-half comeback that ultimately fell short, they trailed by as much as 20 in the first half. Even with an improbable second half comeback, it still wasn't enough.

So, it's hard to say what the Tar Heels need to overcome the Blue Devils when they lead in almost every major statistical category, but UNC needs to be firing on all cylinders and rely on the magic that somehow makes these rivalry games close. Otherwise, it's looking pretty bleak.

UNC is entering Cameron Indoor Stadium outsized and outmatched.

Duke is on a tear. The Blue Devils are undefeated in the ACC and on a 13-game win streak. North Carolina's eight losses in its first 20 games are its most since the 2019-20 season. Now, the Tar Heels are 13-8 and 6-3 in ACC play.

It's no secret North Carolina has a size problem. The tallest player — junior forward Jalen Washington — stands at 6-foot-10. Duke has not only height, but an abundance of talent in the frontcourt. The average height of its roster is 6-foot-7. It's an edge the Blue Devils will exploit on Saturday.

Ultimately, this matchup is going to come down to whether the UNC guards make shots — and do so often enough to keep up with Duke's high-powered offensive weapons. And with graduate RJ Davis still facing shooting struggles and first-year Ian Jackson receiving extra defensive attention, the Tar Heels won't survive this trip to Durham.



DTH/ANNA CONNORS

By Emma Moon
Assistant Sports Editor

DUKE 72 — UNC 61

The Blue Devils present a plethora of problems for the Tar Heels. Duke's roster is riddled with top-ranked talents and projected first round NBA Draft picks that all pose a matchup nightmare for UNC.

But, North Carolina graduate guard RJ Davis has been here before. He's been on a team with its back against the wall, needing a big time win at Cameron Indoor Stadium against the Blue Devils. He's been on a team that's gotten it done — and one that hasn't.

Despite Davis' shooting struggles this season, he will still be a key piece in this matchup. If Davis can find his footing — in a place where he scored just nine points last season — the Tar Heels have a chance at keeping it close.

However, UNC can't just rely on him. Recently, first-year guard Ian Jackson has served as a litmus test for the Tar Heels. When he plays well, and scores more than 18 points, UNC has won all but one game. Jackson's shot selection and poise will need to be near perfect against a talented Duke team.

For North Carolina to leave Durham with its best win of the season over No. 2 Duke, everything will have to go right — from the guards to the bigs to the coaching. And despite these rivalry games always ending up close, especially when you least expect it, North Carolina likely won't be able to keep up.



DTH/ANNA CONNORS

By Matthew Maynard
Assistant Sports Editor

DUKE 78 — UNC 63

INCONSISTENCY STUNTS NORTH CAROLINA THROUGH DIFFICULT SCHEDULE

By Caroline Wills, Emma Moon and Matthew Maynard

COMING UP SHORT IN FIRST TEST

Preseason No. 9 UNC traveled to Allen Fieldhouse in November, where a then top-ranked Kansas awaited. The Jayhawks dominated in the first half. Hunter Dickinson exposed North Carolina’s size disadvantage on his way to scoring 20 points. At half-time, the Tar Heels faced a 15-point deficit, unearthing familiar feelings of the 2022 national championship game. Cue the second half comeback. The trio of North Carolina veteran guards — graduate RJ Davis, junior Seth Trimble and sophomore Elliot Cadeau — rallied to each contribute double-digit points. As time expired, Cadeau missed a 3-pointer with a chance to tie it in front of UNC’s bench. The Tar Heels showed flashes of the team they could be.

NON-CONFERENCE WOES

North Carolina’s schedule didn’t get any easier. The Tar Heels fell into a three-game losing skid. After staging a 21-point, second-half comeback against Dayton in the first round of the Maui Invitational in November, the Tar Heels finished the tournament 1-2. UNC fell to then-No. 4 Auburn and came up short in overtime to Michigan State. In all three games, North Carolina fell into double-digit deficits in the first half and mounted furious comebacks. Only one comeback succeeded. UNC returned to Chapel Hill for the ACC/SEC Challenge in December, taking on then-No. 10 Alabama. The Tar Heels were slaughtered, 94-79. Facing the tenth toughest schedule in the nation according to KenPom, North Carolina came away with zero Quad 1 wins through this stretch.

UCLA

In December, North Carolina finally earned that elusive Quad 1 win. But it didn’t look like the Tar Heels would pull through. UNC committed 11 first-half turnovers. The team also fell behind early, shooting 37.5 percent from the field in the first half. The same trends continued into the last 20 minutes. After falling behind by 16 points in the second quarter, the Tar Heels went on a run with just over 12 minutes remaining. UNC outscored UCLA 33-15 in the remaining minutes, snapping the Bruins’ nine-game winning streak. The match marked first-year guard Ian Jackson’s breakout game. The guard scored a then-season-best 24 points. He went 8-13 from the field and recorded four rebounds. The game ignited Jackson, and the first-year scored 20 or more points in six of the next seven games.

STANFORD AND WAKE FOREST

Riding a four game winning streak, the Tar Heels hosted Stanford in the first-ever conference matchup between the two teams on Jan. 18. A close first half ended in a one-point halftime lead for North Carolina, but Jaylen Blakes and Maxime Raynaud both had double figures at the break. And it was Blakes — a Duke transfer — who sealed the game for Stanford, running the length of the floor and hitting a pull up jumper over Trimble for the game winner as the Cardinal won, 72-71. UNC then traveled to take on Wake Forest. After falling behind by 10, North Carolina attempted a comeback, but it was too little, too late. The Tar Heels fell, 67-66, marking the first time since 1968 that UNC lost back-to-back games by one point.

COASTING THROUGH THE CONFERENCE

Since then, the Blue Devils have kept it rolling. The Cardinals were the first of five straight ACC teams to lose to Duke by double digits, and both SMU and Pittsburgh lost by more than 25. Notre Dame was the first team to get back within 10 against the Blue Devils, but an ACC freshman record 42 points from Flags kept Duke’s conference sheet spotless. Despite losing Brown to injury, the Blue Devils have continued to stifle the opposition while lighting up the scoreboard.

ROAD TEST IN LOUISVILLE

Luckily for the Blue Devils, freshman Isaiah Evans lit Cameron Indoor on fire just a few games later against then-No. 2 Auburn. The Fayetteville, N.C., native connected on six first-half 3-pointers against the Tigers after not seeing the court against the Wildcats or Jayhawks. Even though Evans cooled down in the second half, Duke finished the game shooting 50% from the field and 40.9% from deep. Syracuse transfer Malik Brown was crucial in containing All-American John Broome, and Flags paced the Blue Devils with 22 points. In the end, Duke did not need any final-second theatrics, as a few key shots from junior Tyrese Proctor helped secure a 84-78 victory.

WIN OF THE YEAR

The Blue Devils’ exceptionally young roster learned some tough lessons early on in the season, as both of Duke’s two losses this season came before freshman Cooper Flags’ 18th birthday. Against then-No. 17 Kentucky Nov. 12, Duke — without Stion James and Khaman Maluach down the stretch — hung around in a tied game with 1:14 to play. However, Flags lost two key turnovers in the final 15 seconds that sealed a 77-72 defeat. Two weeks later against then-No. 1 Kansas, Flags again faltered down the stretch, and fellow rookie Kon Knueppel could not successfully convert on an opportunity to take the lead with three seconds remaining. After the losses, Duke was in dire need of an offensive spark coming out of Feast Week.

FRESHMAN NERVES

By Dom Fenoglio

BATTLE-TESTED BLUE DEVILS SOAR IN ACC PLAY