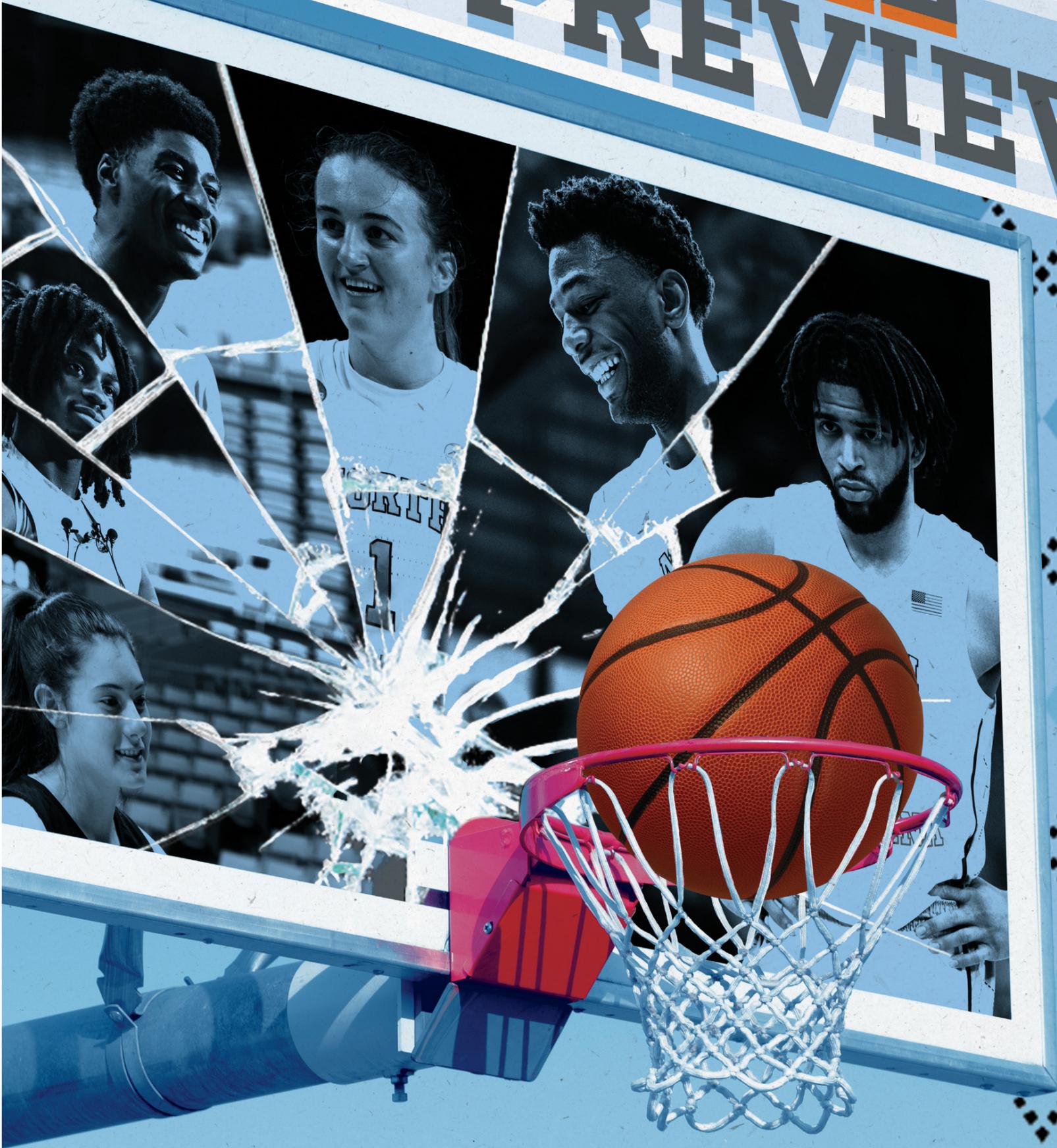


# BASKETBALL PREVIEW



DTH FILE/LARA CROCHIK, GRACE RICHARDS AND NATE SKVORETZ  
DTH DESIGN/CARRIE-ANNE ROGERS

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“ I’ve always said things are better when the ball goes in the basket. ”

ROY WILLIAMS



# vote early, nc.

the easiest way to vote is early with  
your physical student ID.

**EARLY VOTING ENDS:  
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2**

**ELECTION DAY:  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5**

**What to bring:** Student ID or NC driver's license; the physical card, not a digital ID.

**Need to transfer your registration or register as a new voter?** Use same-day registration available only during Early Voting.

For more information, visit [progressnc.org/college](https://progressnc.org/college).

Problems at the polls? Ask to use a provisional ballot and call the Hotline: 888-OUR-VOTE

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131 years of editorial freedom

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- Contact Print Managing Editor Sarah Monoson at [print.editor@dailytarheel.com](mailto:print.editor@dailytarheel.com) with issues about this policy.
- Last week's article "Cristóbal Palmer discusses infrastructure, inclusivity" incorrectly referred to the Carrboro Bicycle Coalition as the Triangle Bicycle Coalition. The Daily Tar Heel apologizes for this error.



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## LEADERSHIP

## RJ Davis returns to resolve unfinished business

The guard plays for a 'bigger purpose' in final season

By Caroline Wills

Sports Editor  
[sports@dailytarheel.com](mailto:sports@dailytarheel.com)

"I'm back."

At 3 a.m. on May 1, RJ Davis' message to the world was simple, to the point. No drawn-out explanation. Just a highlight video and a two-word caption.

Reflecting on the Instagram post during a media day in October, he brushed off the conspiracy theories surrounding the reason for the timing.

Was he on the West Coast? Nope, he was at home in New York.

So why post at that hour, nearly two months after the end of the season?

"I posted a little bit late, but I did it on purpose," he said. "No one can know my next move. That was a way to keep you guys on edge."

But it's deeper than wanting to be an enigma. Davis returns to UNC as the unanimous preseason ACC Player of the Year with the hopes of cementing his legacy even more at North Carolina. The graduate guard led the team and conference in scoring last season, averaging a career-high 21.2 points per game.

He earned consensus First-Team All-American, was named the 2023 ACC POY and became UNC's first ever Jerry West Award winner, given to the best shooting guard in the nation. He set the all-time scoring record in the Dean E. Smith Center with 42 points against Miami in February. The list of accomplishments from his senior season goes on.

Although he chose the route of simplicity, the brevity of the announcement post doesn't represent the difficulty leading up to the decision.

After the 89-87 loss to Alabama in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament last year, the guard took time away from basketball. He sat with his thoughts and emotions about the game. Then, he thought about his future. For a month.

He dreams of playing in the



DTH FILE/SAURYA ACHARYA

UNC fifth-year guard RJ Davis (4) celebrates a successful three-pointer during the NCAA tournament on Saturday, March 23.

NBA. Following his historic senior year, Davis submitted his name for feedback about his draft stock. But he still had an extra year of college eligibility because of COVID.

"If anybody tells you that it's not stressful, they're lying to you because this is stressful," Davis said in a vlog posted to his YouTube channel on May 1. "My mind changes every day."

Ultimately, Davis said there were more things he wanted to accomplish at North Carolina.

"He's the best player in college basketball. He's proven that time and time again. This is just another year for him to prove that."

Elijah Davis

Senior guard

He still aspires to win a national championship.

The all-time scoring record isn't something he's pressuring himself to hit, although he is 784 points away — meaning he'd have to average 24.5 points per game in the regular season alone — from hitting Tyler Hansbrough's 2,872 mark.

That doesn't mean Davis isn't looking to score as much as possible, either. Scoring is his forte. He'll cry

tears of joy if he happens to hit the record in the process.

Beyond the wins and accolades, he wants his teammates to remember him, not just as a player, but as a leader.

"It was such a hard decision because I wanted to chase my dream and accomplish those, but it's a bigger purpose for me," Davis said.

RJ Davis has never been a "rah-rah, loud type of personality," Hubert Davis said. In the past, he always led by example. Now, in his final year, the graduate guard wants to be more vocal.

At an open practice in October, Davis was the only player whose voice could be heard echoing alongside Hubert Davis' exclamations around the mostly-empty Smith Center. The guard shouted words of encouragement during a fast break drill, occasionally yelling "Live ball!" as a reminder to increase the pace.

Hubert Davis granted him the power to call a timeout whenever he wants in practice. When the team slacks off, it's the fifth-year pulling them into a huddle to regroup.

First-year forward James Brown

vividly remembers a practice in September where the energy was lacking and they were giving up sloppy turnovers. Davis told the group the lack of energy was unacceptable. The Tar Heels haven't needed another one of those discussions.

Hubert Davis also named his graduate guard a "connector" for the team.

"It could be really easy as a fifth year senior to say, [forward Drake Powell], [guard Ian Jackson] and [forward James Brown], they're freshmen, I'm gonna be over there," the head coach said. "No, he's with them. He's taking them out to breakfast. He's taking them out to lunch."

It's simple: he's back because there's more work to do. More to prove. More records to break. More accolades to add to his resume. More things needed to solidify the legacy he aspires for.

"The way he carries himself, the way he is in the classroom, the way he works out, the way he practices, everything just screams pro," senior guard Elijah Davis said. "The fact that he's not in the NBA right now is just not right. He's the best player in college basketball. He's proven that time and time again. This is just another year for him to prove that."

X: @carolinewills03

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# University

## The Daily Tar Heel

### COMMUNITY

# 'I feel the love': Donations pour in for crossing guard

Fundraiser supports beloved campus worker's anniversary

By Emmy Benton

Senior Writer

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Sherita Baker started crying when she got a text that the GoFundMe was up to \$4,000. Seeing that notification quickly turned a normal Thursday at work into a day she would never forget.

Baker has been a crossing guard at UNC since 2021. She and her husband, Cole Baker, are celebrating their one-year wedding anniversary in November.

Sophomore Hannah Benson saw a post on YikYak that Baker and her husband wanted to do something special for their anniversary, but probably wouldn't be able to afford it. She wanted to help out in some way, and was encouraged to set up a GoFundMe by her friends.

Benson asked Baker's permission before she started the GoFundMe to make sure she was comfortable with it.



DTH/MCKENZIE BULRIS

Sherita "Rita" Baker motions for pedestrians to cross South Road on Oct. 28.

"At first, I was kind of reluctant and I didn't want to say yes because I don't do it for recognition," Baker said. "I do it because I want everybody to know that somebody's out there watching them, that somebody cares. That's what matters to me, honestly."

With Baker's approval, Benson

posted the link to the GoFundMe on Thursday to YikYak, and it spread to other social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook shortly after. The GoFundMe gained traction almost immediately after it was posted, with donations totaling more than \$3,000 by the end of the day.

Now nearing \$4,500, the GoFundMe has almost tripled its initial goal.

"I just want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart," Baker said. "It really means a lot. I never expected you guys to donate as much as you have, and I really appreciate it. I feel the love."

Tiffany Lang, a first-year student, is one of around 400 donors so far. She found the GoFundMe through Instagram and said people were sharing the link to donate on their stories and talking about it both in person and online.

"Mrs. Rita spreads positivity to our community through her bright and kind personality," Lang said. "I don't see her often because I normally take the bus, but she radiates positivity and kindness, which brightens my day the few times I see her at her crosswalk post."

Baker said she was overwhelmed by the generosity of the students and members of the community. She called her husband right away to tell him the news, and she said he was in disbelief. The couple thanked God

for the support they were receiving, and said the money was coming at a time when they needed it the most.

"I was really struggling last week, but this just shows the miracle of God," Baker said. "He really brings people into your life for a reason."

Benson said she was grateful she could help, but emphasized that it was a group effort to get the GoFundMe to where it is now. She said she was shocked by how much money the campaign raised in a short amount of time, but said it shows the power of Baker's love for everyone on campus.

Benson said she wanted to show Baker the same kindness she shows to so many others and was happy that the donations could help her feel appreciated.

"I hope that it reminds her that she does make a difference every day she shows up, and that we're all so grateful to have her on our campus," Benson said.

X: @dailytarheel

### ELECTIONS

## Voters reflect on using the One Card as valid ID

Physical cards are acceptable photo ID, but not mobile

By Sajni Patel

Staff Writer

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On Aug. 20, the UNC Chapel Hill physical and mobile One Cards were approved as valid forms of voter ID by the N.C. State Board of Elections.

38 days later, the N.C. Court of Appeals overruled this decision, unanimously agreeing that the mobile One Card was no longer a valid form of voter identification.

An Oct. 17 email sent to all UNC students said that due to the recent change in the voting policy, students and employees who only had mobile One Cards would need to make other arrangements to show accepted forms of voter ID.

A physical One Card remains a valid form of voter identification. However, UNC first-year Aracely Perez said a lot of people still think a digital One Card is acceptable too.

"I think that a lot of the information that Chapel Hill has given, it is so convoluted," she said.

This year, the One Card Office began phasing out physical One Cards in favor of mobile One Cards for first-year students. Perez said that by making students go out of their way to get a physical card, it makes them less inclined to use it as voter identification.

"The physical One Card, without the chip technology of the standard One Card, is available at no cost for any faculty, staff or student who only obtained the mobile One Card," the University said in the Oct. 17 email.

For students who have previously received a physical One Card from the third floor of UNC Student Stores, a replacement can be obtained for a fee of \$10. Once requested, University Media Relations said in an email statement that they can print the cards in "a matter of minutes," and have printed 618 physical One Cards since Aug. 1 — an estimated 10-15 cards daily.

Vijaykrishna Bajaj, a first-year out-of-state student, said that he is registered to vote. However, since he doesn't have an N.C. ID, Bajaj said he would not have been able to cast his ballot in North Carolina without the new One Card policy.

Bajaj said that when students are told that they can use the mobile One Card to vote, they plan to vote with it. But when the state reverses that decision, it sends a mixed message to students.

"Even if it's a slight depression in vote, these confusions and constant afflictions at the state level are going to cause a number of students to turn away from the ballot box this week," he said.

After being recruited by lawyers at the Democratic National Committee, Bajaj was also a witness at the initial court case, which the N.C. Board of Elections won. He said that the judge's closing statement was interesting.

"[The judge] said something to the effect of that this court, or no court in this state, is going to tell thousands of UNC students that have already made their plan to vote, that they cannot vote even if they've done everything right," he said.

Bajaj said that he thinks that this is a message that resonates with a lot of students on campus.

X: @sajniupatel



DTH FILE/BRENDAN TIERNEY

UNC dental hygienist major Alex Gutierrez swipes into Chase Dining Hall with a One Card on Feb. 5, 2023.

### ACCESSIBILITY

## Students share experiences with testing accommodations

EOC provides exam schedules based on space availability

By Regan Butler

Staff Writer

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UNC's Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office website states that students with accommodations must schedule their exams using the online hub at least one week in advance.

Sophomore Maren Molinaro said she tried to use her testing accommodations for the first time for a recent midterm.

Although Molinaro said she scheduled her midterm two weeks in advance, she said the EOC Testing Center was experiencing overflow and didn't prepare for her specific accommodations.

When she arrived at the testing center to take her midterm, she said she encountered a long wait that cut into her exam time. After Molinaro signed in, she was told to take her midterm anywhere in the overflow room, she said.

Molinaro said she was confused because her accommodations include ergonomic seating and an alternative testing location. These specific accommodations are intended to mitigate stress-induced pain she experiences due to her chronic condition.

Test schedules are based on the availability of space in the testing center, UNC Media Relations wrote in an email to The Daily Tar Heel. Media Relations wrote that those who wish to test at the location must allow for flexibility in scheduling as determined necessary by the center.

"It's really confusing and hard to actually schedule the exams through ARS," Landon Cable, a sophomore with testing accommodations for anxiety and bipolar disorder, said.

When he went to the EOC Testing Center to sign up for a chemistry exam he had about two weeks ago,



DTH DESIGN/ZOEY MORRIS

Cable said he was turned away on two different days due to the center's schedule being full. Cable said there was no way for him to know that the testing center was at capacity because the online hub wasn't working.

He said his chemistry professor accommodated him independently of the EOC Office by letting Cable take the exam in his personal office.

Cable said the EOC Office is now sending students weekly email reminders to schedule exams with the center.

Molinaro said that upon request, another testing center staff member gave her two seating options in different private testing rooms for her midterm, and she chose one that worked for her.

However, she said she was unaware until later that the staff had not restarted her time limit to compensate for the shuffle. She said she had to forgo an accommodated 30-minute break to finish her exam on time.

"So, my accommodations, at this point, aren't helpful," Molinaro said.

After her experience at the testing center, Molinaro said she emailed the EOC Office about the occurrence. She said they responded quickly and made the proper arrangements for her future testing.

Media Relations wrote in an email to The DTH that no one from the EOC

Office was available for an interview about testing accommodations.

A testing coordinator from the center also declined to comment when asked in person and over email about accommodations, saying they were told to direct any inquiries from The DTH to Media Relations.

Alexandra Morrill, a sophomore who used her testing accommodations for the first time this semester, said she did not know she could get accommodations for her ADHD until a friend informed her this summer. This prompted Morrill to get an official ADHD diagnosis and apply for EOC accommodations, which were approved, she said.

The testing accommodations provide Morrill additional time on assessments and a distraction-free testing area, which she said allowed her to focus and go at her own pace.

She said testing center staff cares about student success regardless of individual accommodations, creating a judgment-free zone.

"It's just peaceful in a way, and the instructors aren't rude," Morrill said. "They're very understanding as well."

But Cable said the office should improve its system.

"I guess my whole message is: If you're going to do it, do it right," he said.

X: @reganxbutler

# City & State

## The Daily Tar Heel

WESTERN N.C.

### Gov. Cooper proposes hurricane relief budget

#### Chambers debate how much aid should be given and where

By Joseph Cole  
Staff Writer  
city@dailytarheel.com

On Oct. 23, Gov. Roy Cooper proposed an additional \$3.9 billion in state funding to relieve communities impacted by Hurricane Helene and other recent natural disasters.

Of the remaining \$33.4 billion in estimated hurricane relief costs for western North Carolina, the proposed funding would cover 12 percent.

The funding would go toward covering nine different sectors in need of financial support according to the governor's office, including economic, housing, utility and natural resource, transportation, agriculture, government, education, health and human services and Tribal and Federal Land relief.

N.C. Rep. Allen Buansi (D-Orange) said he was appreciative of the governor's proposal because it was a comprehensive next step in addressing hurricane relief.

"There are so many needs right now in western North Carolina — from food to childcare centers to needed assistance with rent, mortgage and utilities and also for

folks who are having mental health challenges, as well as for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities," he said.

"[There] are a lot of folks out there who have families and who also have to somehow get themselves together to go out and work," he said.

N.C. Sen. Graig Meyer (D-Caswell, Orange, Person) said while both chambers of the North Carolina General Assembly are aligned in providing aid for families affected by Hurricane Helene and other natural disasters in western North Carolina, there have been differences of opinion in the policymaking process.

The debate between the chambers is primarily about the total amount of aid the state should give and who should receive it, he said.

"In this case, I think it's not surprising that the legislature didn't just accept the governor's recommendations in whole — because that rarely happens — but it was surprising that the legislative bill this week was so far away from the governor's recommendations," Meyer said.

Funding relief efforts for Hurricane Helene are a long-term investment that will take many years to fully pay out, Buansi said. The state will need to pursue more actions than just the proposed funding, he said, and there needs to be a consistent



DTH/HEATHER DIEHL

Gov. Roy Cooper answers questions from the media about western North Carolina in Graham Memorial after a rally for Josh Stein on Oct. 28.

effort in supporting the recovery of western North Carolina.

He also said there has been a large circulation of misinformation about FEMA's responsiveness about the assistance being sent to western North Carolina.

"For folks on the outside, it is extremely important that we not get entrenched in partisanship when it comes to disasters that hit people," he said.

Tazanna Jones, a student at UNC, said the current biggest issue for western North Carolina is communication. There are still ongoing issues including a lack of

Wi-Fi, empty grocery shelves and power and water advisories, she said.

"There's just so much more room for natural disasters to become worse than in the city, and that's my opinion, because of how much more land and how much everything up above there is, so I think that there needs to be a better understanding of those regions in order to help more efficiently in the future," Jones said.

Gov. Cooper's proposal has been sent to deliberations in the NCGA, where they will decide what to include in a final appropriations act.

X: @thecitystate

### BRIEFS

#### Meantime to open new location

The Meantime Coffee Co. will open their second location at the Innovate Carolina Junction on Nov. 8. Founded in 2016, Meantime is UNC's only student-run cafe. It is currently located on the first floor of the Campus Y building. The cafe currently employs 32 students and promises all baristas a living wage through their partnership with Orange County Living Wage.

— Taylor Motley

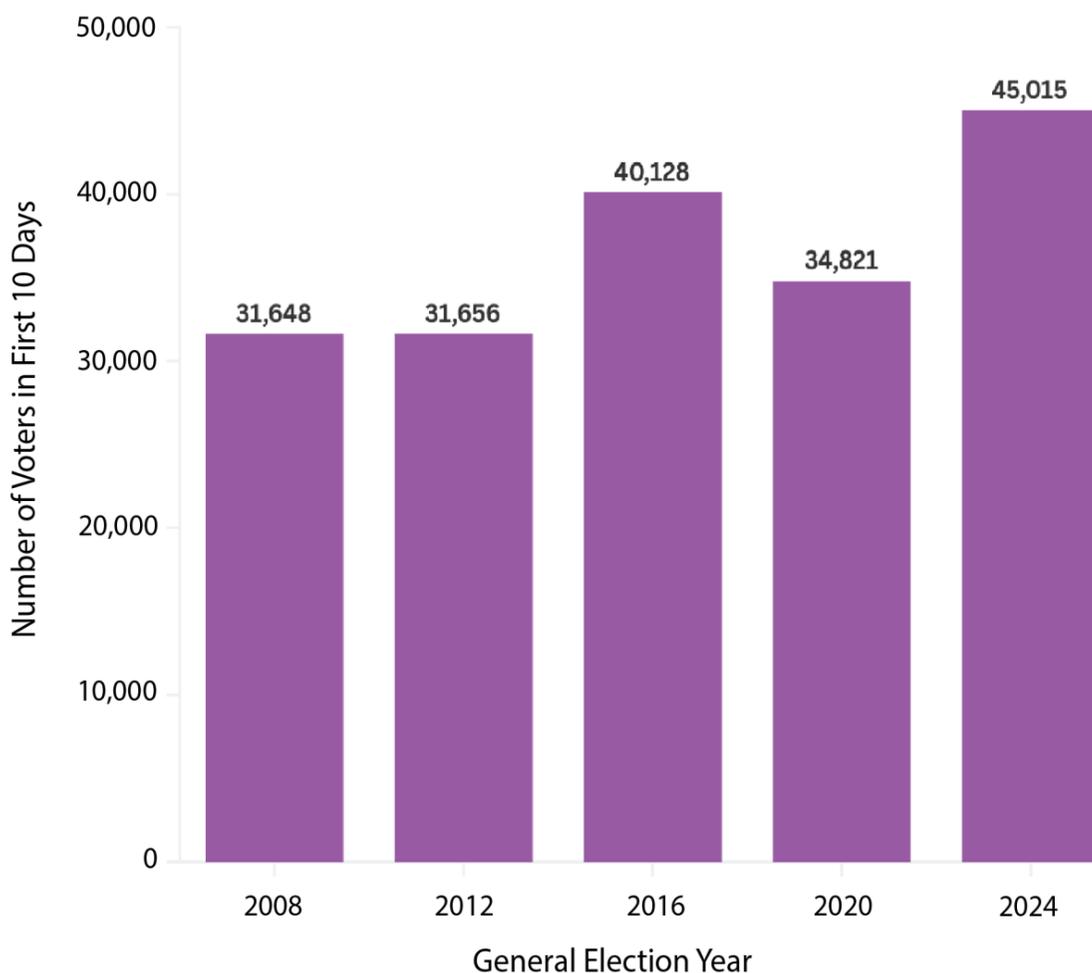
#### OCS students join N.C. honors chorus

Earlier this month, Efland-Cheeks Global Elementary students Christian Adkins and Amarah White were selected to perform with the North Carolinian Elementary Honors Chorus. The Honors Chorus typically receives over 600 audition recordings and selects around 180 of them, Efland-Cheeks Music Teacher Cheri Thomas said. The selected students will perform on Nov. 10.

— Sheridan Barry

### Early voting participation in Orange County exceeds previous general election years

In Orange County, 45,015 voters have cast their ballots early, surpassing the turnout recorded during the first 10 days of early voting in every general election since 2008.



Source: Orange County Board of Elections | The graph above shows the amount of early votes cast within the first 10 days of early voting in each respective general election. For 2024, this data includes votes cast up to Oct. 26.

DTH DATA/EMMA TAYLOR

**YOPO**

**BUY 1 GET 1 FREE!**

Buy one cup and get the same cup size for free. Toppings extra for both cups. Must present coupon in store. May not be combined with other offers.

EXPIRES 11/06/2024

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Buy any medium or large cup and get 3 free toppings! Must present coupon in store. May not be combined with other offers.

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## REVIEW

## 2024 N.C. State Fair provides food, rides and local art

A look at the event with college students and tight budgets in mind

By Adele Harris

Staff Writer  
lifestyle@dailytarheel.com

To me, the fair is a quintessential part of North Carolina's culture. Where else could you go and get a deep-fried Kit Kat, smell the vinegar-based barbecue air and see so many vibrant colors that your eyes almost hurt?

In addition to the classic state fair fare, there were also local artisans in the Village of Yesteryear. Artists sold their work, massive pumpkins brought fall aura and watermelons weighing hundreds—sometimes thousands—of pounds were shown off by farmers from across the country. Those parts of the fair were equally important to the overall experience.

## Food

Fluffy's Donuts was a standout. The flavors ranged from classics to flavors like banana cream pie and PB&J. I ordered the strawberry lemonade donut, which was the donut of the day, and it was worth the \$10.

Another standout was the country ham biscuit from the Pittsboro Kiwanis Club, which was only \$4. I enjoyed the appropriately buttery biscuit paired with the thick cut of salty ham.

As the day wore on and it began getting hotter, I stopped by Tiki Tea and got a blue raspberry iced tea. I was not expecting much, as I went for that flavor, as I had never seen blue raspberry in the same category as iced tea, but I was pleasantly surprised at how well the flavors went together.

## Rides

I bought the unlimited ride wristband when I got to the fair, which cost \$40. For me, as someone who is a bigger fan of fair food and games in comparison to the rides, that price wasn't worth it. If you're at the fair to get on as many rides as possible, I recommend it. I wish I had saved my money for games and food, which were not included with the wristband.

The ride furthest out of my comfort zone was the Tesla AC, a blue and white ride that whips riders around in circles while also spinning in an individual seat.

After that tornado-like experience, I went on my favorite ride, the Super Slide. It's a massive rainbow slide that you go down on a blanket. This was more my speed—literally. Despite the many stairs I had to climb to get to the top, the time riding down was so fun and made me feel like a little kid again.

## Art

My favorite part of the fair was the Village of Yesteryear, where I got to see local artisans hand-weaving chairs and using water color paints

to create what would become original artwork. The winner of the best booth competition was Cory Plott, who hails from Clyde, N.C. He was selling his handmade pottery. Plott was so compelling that I ended up buying his last two blue mugs for \$30.

There is so much to do at the N.C. State Fair that it all cannot be put into one review. The radiant joy I felt from fairgoers all around me speaks to how much the fair means to people. I would highly recommend going when it returns next fall. In the meantime, go visit and support local artists and farmers, as we shouldn't save our appreciation for just one week of the year.

X: @dthlifestyle

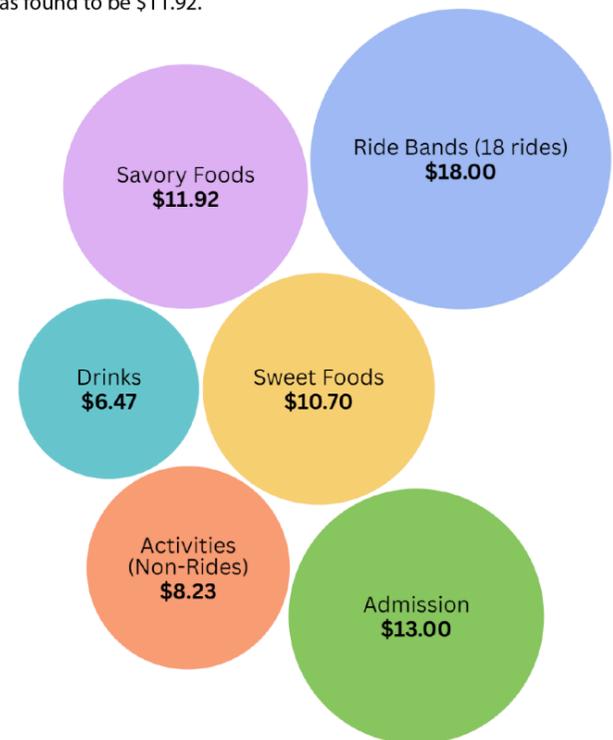


DTH/MICHAEL PEARSON

Fairgoers venture around the grounds of the North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh on Saturday, Oct. 26.

## Cost Analysis: A day at the N.C. State Fair

Based on 23 vendors, the average cost of a sweet food item at the fair is \$10.70. For savory foods, 54 stands were analyzed and the average was found to be \$11.92.



Source: N.C. State Fair | Food, drink and activities prices are calculated averages based on data collected by Ella Cluff. Ride bands and admission tickets are the standard at-gate rate. Prices don't include tax, extra charges, add-ons, customizations or drink refills. Foods were classified by judgement as either sweet or savory and price averages include the cost of sides. Not all vendors were included in calculations.

DTH DATA/ELLA CLUFF

## ACTIVITIES

## 'Haunted Road on Rossburn Way' returns

The event was held on Saturday and will reappear on Halloween

By Jaya Nadella

Staff Writer  
lifestyle@dailytarheel.com

For Chapel Hill resident Jon Baumler, during Halloween season, his house isn't just a home; it is a bone-chilling and mysterious trail waiting for visitors to stumble across its path. Eerie blue and purple fluorescent lights shine upon the house at 304 Rossburn Way, with a "Beware" sign displayed in the window.

The seasonal attraction took place this past Saturday and will occur again on Thursday, Oct. 31. The crew bringing the event to life is composed of scare actors from a range of ages, including approximately 30 teenage volunteers who live in the neighborhood.

Baumler said that his plans for the haunted trail each year draw inspiration from trends and popular culture, specifically movies and shows.

"I like to take that [approach] because it will be popular and people will relate to the different actors and everything they're going to encounter in the show," he said.

This year's trail is a haunted funhouse, modeled after the horror movie "IT." The setup includes classic distorted carnival mirrors to enhance the sinister experience for visitors. Some actors take on an animatronic persona, similar to what is portrayed in the film "Five Nights at Freddy's."

Scare actor Rob Morrison is taking on the head role for this year's trail, starring as Pennywise the clown. He used YouTube videos as



DTH DESIGN/LIZA SMITH

a reference tool to help him channel the character.

"I learned his various laughs, starting low. I know that sometimes he can be very soothing, because he wants to get people to trust him, and then once they do, that's the last thing they'll remember," he said while talking about recreating Pennywise's iconic laugh.

For Morrison, his involvement in the show also extends to his family.

His daughter Sasha also partook in the event as an actor.

Actor John Tompos, who is also Baumler's father, took on the role of the carnival ringmaster, who hired

"It's a good feeling that I can be a part of this and help people have a good time."

John Tompos  
Actor

some bad clowns that overtook his circus for the worst. He said that he was trying to add a little bit of comedy to enhance his performance for guests.

Tompos, although being recruited by his son to partake in the event, also finds lots of personal joy in the role he plays. He believes this event brings some much needed cheer to the surrounding community.

"It's a good feeling that I can be a part of this and help people have a good time. I think we're all too serious sometimes, and I think you have to let things go and just suspend belief and have fun," Tompos said.

While the haunted trail definitely creates an unexpected thrill for guests, it is also family-friendly and accessible to young children. At a point in the middle of the trail, guests can choose to embark on a path with one of two different scare levels offered. The less scary path is more toned down and suitable to those with lower scare tolerances.

The more frightening path, on the other hand, turns dark quickly.

"It's pretty evident right away, because the lights go away. There are just little flickering candles and at one point you're just inside of a dark maze which is sort of Pennywise's domain," Baumler said.

The "Haunted Road" has been going strong for multiple years now. Baumler first started the event when he and his wife were living in Madison, Wisconsin, and recruited a couple of his neighbors to put on a show to entertain trick or treaters.

Now, after many years, he sees the haunted trail as a valuable chance to use his creativity for good and give back. At the end of the trail this year, visitors have the chance to make donations to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

The event's impact continues to grow each year. What ultimately started as an impromptu scare performance with friends flourished into a Halloween tradition that continues to bring great happiness to the surrounding community.

"It's such a huge production, and it's a labor of love," Morrison said.

X: @dthlifestyle

PERFORMANCE

# Students kickstart Halloween with ‘Rocky Horror’

The show has been a tradition in Chapel Hill since 1978

By Morgan Brenner

Assistant Lifestyle Editor  
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On Friday and Saturday night, a performer dressed in a black corset stepped onto the Varsity Theatre’s stage; then another, and another. “The Rocky Horror Picture Show,” the 1975 musical horror film, started playing on a projection and Dr. Frank-N-Furter — the film’s main character — began mouthing Richard O’Brien’s “Science Fiction/Double Feature,” her lips a bright, bloody red.

As several performers appeared, audience members might have wondered whether these performers were poking fun at the movie playing or were somehow in on the joke.

A performer sashayed to the corner of the stage and grabbed a chair. Dragged it to the center and turning it, toward the audience, a large red mouth was revealed. The performer squatted over the chair, black heels glinting under the Varsity Theatre’s bright stage lights.

“At the late night, double feature, picture show,” the ensemble members mouthed, prompting cheers from the audience.

The annual production of Rocky Horror has been a cult Halloween classic in Chapel Hill since 1978. Now a tradition by UNC student theatre group, Pauper Players, students performed on Friday and Saturday dressed in a lingerie and fishnet stockings, dancing and shouting across the stage in an entertaining frenzy.



DTH/EMMA DENMAN

Students perform during the 9 p.m. performance of Rocky Horror at the Varsity Theatre on Saturday, Oct. 26.

Mouthing and miming “Rocky Horror” is part of a musical tradition that started in 1973, when David Bowie’s ex-wife allegedly shouted, “No, don’t do it!” during a scene with Riff Raff and Dr. Frank-N-Furter. Audiences and actors alike have been shouting at the show, or the film after it was released in 1975, ever since.

The 1975 film follows fiancés Janet Weiss and Brad Majors, who get stuck during a storm one evening due to a flat tire — the same evening Brad proposes to Janet. Desperate, they find “the light”: the manor of mad scientist and transgender woman, Dr. Frank-N-Furter.

“There’s a light,” Janet sings in the original movie, her mime — portrayed by UNC students Jessica Cotton and Anushka Saroha — mouthing along. Ensemble members yelled at the audience to turn on the lights, before shouting again to turn them off. This happened more than once causing audience members to hurriedly put their phones away and laugh.

This year’s production maintained the energy of years past but with more choreography, Meredith Alt, a sophomore psychology major and ensemble member, said.

“In the movie, it’s just the lips,” she said. “But in our production, we

have five ensemble members doing choreography that I love.”

While leads perform in two separate casts, ensemble members performed all four shows, responsible for the bulk of the dancing as well as spoken or shouted lines.

The storyline of the original movie is extremely odd, Alt said. The point of the mimed production is not necessarily to replicate the movie itself but rather, it’s the students’ performances, and the way they engage with the movie.

Marleigh Pearson, first-year theatre major who portrayed Brad, said that while the student production

is a lot of fun, actors put a lot of time into getting their characters just right. Pearson, for instance, had to learn how to behave like a man, altering her posture to do so while being a cisgender woman who has exclusively played female roles in the past.

As a family tradition, Pearson has been watching Rocky Horror for 15 years. She said that the film symbolizes mainstream queer culture in ways that were surprising at the time, considering the film’s content. Dr. Frank-N-Furter not only is a transgender woman, but the show features queer identities such as characters Riff Raff and Magenta hailing from the planet Transsexual.

“It’s been this piece that let queer culture be mainstream since the 70s, which is, and unfortunately, still something we struggle to do today,” she said. “So, I love that something that’s so loudly and proudly queer, not just sexually, but also just queer, like a British person say, this is a super weird show.”

Kayala Purdie, a senior biology major and ensemble member, said that the UNC student production is a distinct part of campus tradition, and she was thrilled to be able to participate in theater without having done so in the past.

“I think it’s something that brings so many people together — people like me that aren’t into theater, but then get to do it, people that get to see their friends or just go have a nice time during Halloween,” she said. “It’s just something that unifies the campus all around Halloween. I love it. It’s a rite of passage. Everyone gets to experience it. It’s so lay fun.”

X: @morgan\_mbrenner

## Fall 2024 Phi Beta Kappa Initiates



- Whitney Elizabeth Abed — Chemistry
- Noah Richard Abernethy — Business Administration / Economics
- Maddox Bruce Sproles Ady — Sociology / Political Science
- Kshitiz Adhikari — Chemistry
- Uredojo Aluana Agada — History / Information Science
- Morounfoluwa Agbebi — Neuroscience
- Rishi Aila — Public Policy / Business Administration
- Walid Alt Amrou — Computer Science / Economics
- Sarah Elizabeth Albert — Neuroscience
- Alexa Renee Almond — Psychology
- Zane Abdeen Alsebai — Chemistry
- Tayton Charles Avis — Environmental Sciences
- Michael Adam Angell — Biology / Chemistry
- Robyn Gloria Ardern — Human Development and Family Science / Music
- Roshni Arun — Neuroscience / Biology
- Agrima Awasthi — Economics / Mathematics
- Sarvesh Bandaru — Business Administration / Neuroscience
- Garrett Isam Barnes — Political Science / Public Policy
- Emma Christine Barrett — Economics / Exercise and Sport Science
- Ryan Barrett — Economics / Public Policy
- Gabriela Gisele Barros — Computer Science / Neuroscience
- Ezekiel Noble Barton — History / Peace, War, and Defense
- Isabella Anne Barm — Global Studies / English and Comparative Literature
- Nicole Elizabeth Belcher — History / Communication Studies
- Edward Tate Bennett — Romance Languages
- Avanish Bhardwaj — Chemistry
- Disha Bhowmik — Neuroscience / Biology
- Alisher Binagambetov — Biology
- Harrison Black — Chemistry
- Laith Louai Blan — Neuroscience
- Erin Delaney Louise Blayer — Political Science / Geography
- Juliana Marie Boerema — Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures / Peace, War, and Defense
- Alexandra N. Born — Business Administration / Environmental Studies
- Abigail Boyer — Environmental Health Sciences
- Mason Boyles — Computer Science
- Kathryn Scott Bragg — English and Comparative Literature / Global Studies
- Benjamin Luke Branson — Religious Studies
- Tyler James Britt — Physics
- Caroline Clark Broadfoot — History
- Ethan Alexander Brown — Exercise and Sport Science
- Sydney Addison Buck — Political Science / Exercise and Sport Science
- Alyssa M. Cadiz — Biomedical Engineering
- John Cake — Political Science
- Janie Carpenter — Economics / Global Studies
- Caroline Carrig — Neuroscience
- William Cameron Cash — Mathematics / Archaeology
- Sarah-Courtney Cavatoni — Biomedical Engineering
- Shaan Arsalan Chaudhry — Neuroscience
- Kaixuan Chen — Statistics and Analytics / Biology
- Rachel Brooke Choffin — Clinical Laboratory Science
- Benjamin Charles Church — Data Science / Exercise and Sport Science
- Veronica Cifuentes — Nutrition
- Grayson Clark — Computer Science
- Jackson Thomas Collie — Economics / Mathematics
- Paige Anne Collins — Public Policy / Medical Anthropology
- Sara Rosemary Conklin — Sociology
- Caleb Austin Cook — Neuroscience
- Jillian Victoria Cowart — Exercise and Sport Science
- Annabelle Craig — Psychology / Peace, War, and Defense
- William Holloway Craig — Neuroscience / Chemistry

- Anna Elizabeth Crist — Biology / English and Comparative Literature
- Lindsay Cummings — Exercise and Sport Science
- Lindsey Ann Cunningham — Political Science / Philosophy
- Alisa Dalola — Business Administration
- Cathy Le Dang — Psychology / Sociology
- Kyle Davis Daniels — Economics / Environmental Sciences
- Katherine Ann Dasher — Biology / Psychology
- Mireya Kathryn Caballes de los Reyes — Psychology / Sociology
- Palak Nirav Desai — Neuroscience / Psychology
- Caroline Jean Dickey — Neuroscience
- Clara Elise DiVincenzo — Biology / Statistics and Analytics
- Siri Domata — Neuroscience
- Tanvi Dongre — Business Administration / Economics
- Elizabeth Christine Dorsett — Psychology / Philosophy
- Natalie Rose Druffner — Chemistry / Music
- Grace Sue Dunaway — Business Administration / Economics
- Aditi Duttachowdhury — Public Policy / Political Science
- Katie Dyson — Biology
- Eliana Sirene Edwards — Biology
- Michael Chen Eng — Chemistry
- Yiyang Fan — Biostatistics / Mathematics
- Katelyn Elise Feinsmith — Neuroscience / Psychology
- Rikhil Fellner — Computer Science
- Jacob Fessler — Computer Science
- Maxmillian James Field — Biology
- Courtney Marie Fisher — Media and Journalism / Peace, War, and Defense
- Kayla Noelle Frank — Biomedical Engineering
- Lyssa Natalie Frank — Biomedical Engineering
- Camilla Raquel Fratta — Biostatistics / Music
- Anya Kennedy Frazer — Physics / Music
- Ruide Fu — Mathematics / Computer Science
- Shreya Gandhi — Biology
- Emilie Elizabeth Manon Ganti — Public Policy
- Martim Silva Gaspar — Computer Science
- Owen Garrett Gast — Public Policy
- Aaron Isaac Geller — Public Policy
- Kendra Gentry — History / Political Science
- Ethan Gibbons — Health Policy and Management
- Gabriela Karina Giulumian — Psychology / Mathematics
- Maeve Goldberg — Geography / Public Policy
- Justin Francis Goldman — Political Science / Romance Languages
- Charlotte Olivia Goldstein — Public Policy / Political Science
- Amaria Victoria Gonzales — Latin American Studies
- Isabella Grandic — Chemistry
- Roy Anthony Greco, Jr. — Political Science / Peace, War, and Defense
- Gabriella Frances Gross — American Studies
- Isabella Rose Grumet — Neuroscience
- Ashley Habig — Biology
- Benjamin Samuel Hadad, IV — Computer Science
- Ava Dorothy Hall — Nutrition
- Daniel Bruce Hall — Biology / Psychology
- Ava Rita Haraldsson — Sociology / English and Comparative Literature
- Ben Anderson Harmon — Political Science / Public Policy
- Madison S. Harr — Psychology / Communication Studies
- Jacob Luke Harrington — Psychology
- Sasha Hase — Political Science / Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures
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- Wangchen He — Statistics and Analytics / Mathematics
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- Joseph Daniel Hinchcliffe — Biology

- Tara Layne Hinton — Environmental Studies
- Sarah Hitchcock — Environmental Studies / Political Science
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- Charles Alexander Holt — Biology
- Charlotte Olivia Honeycutt — Chemistry
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- Nicholas Hottell — Chemistry
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- Hailley Jackson — Statistics and Analytics
- Emily Mary Jenkins — Economics / Interdisciplinary Studies
- Ryan Powell Johnston — Psychology / Political Science
- Olivia Grace Jones — Environmental Health Sciences
- Logan Kaelin — Political Science / Public Policy
- Garrett Kane — Economics
- Ashwath Shastry Kapilavai — Physics
- Daorsa Kastrati — Political Science
- Kathryn Wells Katzenbach — Psychology
- Noor Sami Kazi — Economics / Public Policy
- Aum Kendapadi — Computer Science / Business Administration
- Franklin Dugald Kennedy — Biology
- Michelle Kieul — Computer Science / Information Science
- Ella Susanne King — Biology
- Sussana King — Philosophy
- Abigail R. Kokush — Public Policy
- Samuel Thomas Korylak — Economics
- Lucy Genevieve Kraus — Environmental Sciences
- Atharv Sharan Kripak — History
- Rotimi Kukoyi — Health Policy and Management
- Benjamin Lee Kulberg — Business Administration / Economics
- Andrew Kuttner — Psychology / Exercise and Sport Science
- Heidi Alexis Lane — Exercise and Sport Science / Sociology
- Christie Nicole Lannom — Public Policy
- Dylan Hale Jinyoung Lee — Music / Mathematics
- Henry Terrence Lee — Biology / Psychology
- Stevie Rae Levite — Psychology
- Edward Gallardo Lezada, III — Philosophy / Public Policy
- Hanyan Li — Psychology
- Torry Li — Chemistry / Mathematics
- Zhengtao Li — Business Administration / Statistics and Analytics
- Luojia Liu — Business Administration / Mathematics
- Connor Ricardo Lopez — History / Peace, War, and Defense
- Sydney Mason Lorenz — Archaeology
- Elizabeth Lyons — Political Science / Religious Studies
- David John Major — Chemistry / Romance Languages
- Hudson Malsch — Biology
- Nicholas Mann — Mathematics / Statistics and Analytics
- Katherine Amidei Marks — English and Comparative Literature
- Alec Marsh — Neuroscience / Romance Languages
- Miguel Angel Martinez Leal — Biomedical Engineering
- Barrett Arnold Massand — Global Studies / Asian Studies
- Patrick Steven McCaw — Mathematics / Statistics and Analytics
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- Rachael Moldow — Psychology / Human Development and Family Science
- Andrew Clark Mooring — Business Administration / Economics
- Lillian Morris — Global Studies / Political Science
- Cole Morse — Exercise and Sport Science

- Carolena Rosa Moscatello — Nutrition
- Sydney Caroline Mudd — Neuroscience
- Kevin Edward Murphy — Economics / Peace, War, and Defense
- Urael Eliam Mussie — Material Engineering
- Puja B. Nakkala — Neuroscience
- Aidan Isabella Nance — Neuroscience / Psychology
- Daniellejen Nares — Business Administration
- Nathaniel Steven Neef — Biology
- Maxwell Nelson — Environmental Sciences / Public Policy
- Maxim Nemecek — Economics / Statistics and Analytics
- Anh Nguyen — Biomedical Engineering / Mathematics
- Christopher Tri Nguyen — Health Policy and Management
- Cecelia Nobles — Psychology / Women’s and Gender Studies
- Camila Noriega Talleri — Psychology / Sociology
- Ashley Jordan Novak — Economics / Environmental Studies
- Sophie Claire Nutt — Economics / Public Policy
- Elizabeth Ogden — Psychology / Sociology
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- Zoe Alice Parkhomovsky — Public Policy
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- Ria Manish Patel — Nutrition / Neuroscience
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- Anna Marie Pederson — Sociology
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- Noel Meredith Pratt — Political Science
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- Vish Ravichandran — Computer Science
- Matthew Joseph Reddy — Computer Science
- Tucker Daniel Roberson — Economics
- Kathryn Suzanne Robinson — Dramatic Art / Communication Studies
- Savannah Robinson — Psychology / English and Comparative Literature
- Matthew Jacek Rodzen — Neuroscience
- Marisa Rosa — English and Comparative Literature
- Jacob Andrew Rose — Biomedical Engineering
- Caroline Elizabeth Ross — Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures
- Anna Rayne Rouse — Exercise and Sport Science
- Skyah J. Rule — History / American Studies
- Michael Steven Rutigliano — Computer Science / Mathematics
- Hasti Sadri — Political Science / Peace, War, and Defense
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- Samantha Rae Valour — History / Political Science
- Bailey Gray Van Wormer — Computer Science
- Neha Venkatesh — Mathematics / Neuroscience
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- Evan M. Violette — Health Policy and Management / Biology
- Samyuktha Vipin — Computer Science
- Naveen Vridhachalam — Neuroscience
- Zoe Tabitha Hazel Wade — Exercise and Sport Science / Biology
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- William Wang — Business Administration / Computer Science
- Mary Elizabeth Warden — Biology / Romance Languages
- MK Ware — Communication Studies
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- Mary Jane Watkins — Environmental Studies / Political Science
- Olivia Cavallo Welsh — Psychology / Linguistics
- Zachary Weston Westmoreland — Political Science / Peace, War, and Defense
- Emma Mae Whitaker — Philosophy
- Ava Claire Widener — Biology
- Jakob Williams — Political Science / Dramatic Art
- Erica Brooke Williamson — Medical Anthropology
- McKinley Chase Windram — Neuroscience
- Enzo Ferreira Wolf — Political Science
- Ethan Joseph Wood — Mathematics / Statistics and Analytics
- Holden Wright — Economics / Political Science
- Yinglei Xu — Statistics and Analytics
- Derek Yuyang Yao — Biostatistics / Mathematics
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- Joseph Michael Yordy — Mathematics / Statistics and Analytics
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- Alifa Younus — Biology
- Rachael Meng Yuan — Neuroscience / Psychology
- Maya Yun — Psychology
- Michael Lu Zhang — Economics / Philosophy
- Boyang Zhu — Statistics and Analytics / Information Science
- Tingan Zhu — Computer Science / Mathematics
- Molly Zimmermann — Romance Languages

# Opinion

COLUMN

## Halloween is no trick — it's a societal necessity

By Mary Thomas Watkins  
Editorial Board Member  
opinion@dailytarheel.com

Despite the tense black cats and aggressive orange gourds, Halloween is a unique practice in societal trust. In fact, Halloween may just be essential to preserving Americans' trust, respect and appreciation for one another.

The act of dressing unfamiliarly and panhandling for sweet neon sludge from your neighbor is a bold indicator of domestic prosperity. A child's memories of traipsing through a cool October night instills in them a cautious fearlessness. Children can venture into the depths of their neighborhood, stand on a stranger's porch with the safety of their parents close behind.

If that sounds alarming to you, that's only because we've made it to be.

In the past few decades, our community has become increasingly alarmist, conspiratorial and suspicious. If you don't believe me, just look at your aunt's Facebook.

Now, the trick-or-treating tradition may conflict with modern parenting trends. As child psychologist Jennifer Lukomski said, "people who don't normally let their child out unsupervised in the backyard are asked once a year to let that same child ring the doorbells of strangers and ask for candy." Have we overwhelmed our children with "stranger danger" rhetoric to the point that any sort of societal trust is impossible? In fact, the chance of a child being abducted and harmed by a stranger is 0.00007 percent, despite pervasive worry.

Our suspicion has grown beyond a proportional response into cultural sickness. Our lack of trust in one another harms ourselves, our children and our holidays. That's not just an anecdotal truth, but polled and proven.

### THE LOST ART OF TRICK OR TREATING



BY: EMMA LEWIS

Multiple studies by The Pew Research Center indicate that our trust in one another as neighbors, Americans and humans is treacherously weak. We teach our children to be scared of those that don't look, act or live like them. Our own suspicion and fear is, itself, the biggest threat to community safety.

Our overly-critical, low-trust mentalities have led to decreased Halloween participation all-around. The latest polling had only 35 percent of American families intent on trick-or-treating. Those children who do venture out are met with dim, undecorated doorsteps or ferried off to the overly sterilized pen that is a trunk-or-treat.

Trick-or-treating encourages children to explore their neighborhood, meet neighbors outside of their immediate circles, form bonds across racial and religious lines and map their surroundings independently. The script itself, "trick-or-treat," is a simple way of improving children's language skills, with sweet gratification.

Celebrating Halloween is an essential practice for strengthening communities despite the pulls of social polarization. Regardless of form, the benefits of trick-or-treating have never been more important.

X: @marytwatk

COLUMN

## Vote all the way down your ballot

By Mary Blake Nobles  
Editorial Board Member  
opinion@dailytarheel.com

If someone were to ask you who you're voting for, your mind would naturally go to a presidential candidate. It makes sense — it's the most high-profile race in the country, and with that comes the most publicity through news stories, debates and incessant ads. It's also the reason why so many people feel their vote is useless.

When we primarily associate our vote with what's at the top of the ticket, our impact can feel insignificant. It's valid to feel unheard in presidential elections, whether you're from a state disproportionately represented in the Electoral College or from a state that repeatedly votes opposite of your party. And considering the recent occasions where the Electoral College vote doesn't reflect the popular vote, it's understandable to become disillusioned with the idea that your vote even matters.

But really, it's all the more a reason to direct your attention to local elections where, with a smaller electorate, your vote carries more weight and you're likely to feel the impacts much sooner — it's why you have to vote down the ballot.

On North Carolina ballots, races are ordered by the size of the electorate. With that order often comes a perception of their importance. At a certain point, wherever that perceived importance tapers off, many people stop voting. This phenomenon is called voter roll-off, and it's a central part of America's civic engagement problem. As voters willingly sacrifice their ability to influence the governance of their state, county or city, they reinforce voter apathy.

A study conducted in 2022 examined voter roll-off rates of

the last decade in state legislative races. Roll-offs occurred in a significant amount of the races they analyzed, and affected Democratic candidates more than Republican.

While voting down-ballot is a notable improvement from voter roll-off, it shouldn't stop there. The mere bubbling next to a candidate's name without knowledge of who they are or what policies they support is still, even if to a lesser extent, a form of inaction.

As voters reach candidates with less media coverage or more obscure offices, the burden falls on the voter to carry out their own research. Many don't. Instead, they vote along party lines.

This shortcut shirks the responsibility to look up candidates and what they stand for. While a candidate's party is increasingly indicative of their policies, party-line voting can be a crucial mistake. Taking that extra step can lead voters to discover that the only candidate in the N.C. Auditor race with actual experience as an accountant is Libertarian Bob Drach.

Equally important to knowing your candidates is understanding the roles of their potential offices and how they will affect you. It's unrealistic and mostly unnecessary for every voter to spend hours researching every race on their ballot. Today, this information is more accessible than ever; spending just 15 minutes on Ballotpedia can provide voters with enough clarity to make an informed decision.

High-stakes election seasons can understandably plant doubt in voters' trust in institutions and belief that their vote matters, but accepting that outcome only allows apathy to persist. Allow yourself to have a voice by fully exercising your right to vote. As you move down your ballot, don't stop voting, but even more so, don't stop caring.

X: @mbnobles

COLUMN

## The climate crisis is more than a partisan talking point

By Maggie Mead  
Columnist  
opinion@dailytarheel.com

In October 2020, then-presidential candidate Joe Biden said climate change is "the number one issue facing humanity. And it's the number one issue for me."

However, as America trudges through the final days before the 2024 election, it's increasingly apparent that neither current presidential candidate sees it that way. According to Vice President Kamala Harris, climate change is a pocketbook issue that can be solved through a diversified investment portfolio in fracking and renewable energy. Or, to the real estate-savvy former president Donald Trump, it's a valuable opportunity to create more oceanfront property.

Since Biden shared his stance, the earth has become a more dangerous place to live. To protect the health of current and future generations, we must demand actionable policy and long-term cooperation from politicians to address this threat. Climate change must be more than a partisan talking point.

The effects of climate change have been felt in our community. Last

month, Hurricane Helene ravaged western North Carolina, an area that was unequipped to handle its effects. The extreme amounts of total rainfall experienced in Appalachia before the hurricane, which contributed to catastrophic flooding, was made 70 percent more likely by climate change.

For so long, climate change has been an issue stamped "later." It was talked about as a problem that would affect some future generation of bright young people, who, by then, would be equipped with the wisdom and technology to solve it with ease. It's increasingly apparent that this nebulous future is now, yet, due to the partisan nature of our political system, America lacks concrete policies that address this threat.

During his time in office, Trump inhibited climate remediation initiatives. He withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, which had previously committed our country to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 26 to 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. Furthermore, he rolled back more than 125 rules and policies designed to protect the environment and lower emissions and promised to continue to do so if re-elected.



DTH DESIGN/KAITLIN STRATEMEIER

Harris' stance on climate change is more beneficial than Trump's outright denial of its existence. Her platform engages with the issue by investing in renewable energy infrastructure and capping industry emissions. As Biden's vice president, she took part in the creation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, historic legislation that allocates \$47 billion to help America weather the new age of environmental

disasters caused by anthropogenic climate change.

However, while Harris has expressed an intent to address climate change in her platform through the creation of a "clean energy economy," she has hedged her policies with appeals to voters in fossil fuel-dependent sectors, exemplified in her promise to support fracking in Pennsylvania. Her platform has taken a distinctly economic angle on climate

policy rather than humanitarian, which renders her policy stance vague and disappointing.

This reluctance to take a hard stance on climate change is seen across the political spectrum, and for good reason. Shifting our fossil fuel-reliant society away from non-renewable energy sources will cause periods of economic, social and cultural upheaval. However, the period of turmoil that this change will cause is dwarfed by the effects of unchecked climate change.

Our politicians are not adequately addressing the threat that climate change poses. Increasing partisanship in combination with four-year presidential term limits has prevented concentrated legislative efforts to create long-term plans that create adequate clean energy infrastructure. Preventing the climate crisis from worsening depends on our community's ability to collaborate across all sectors of life to create a comprehensive solution.

The climate has already changed and we're the generation that's going to live through it. To have any chance at preventing things from getting worse, climate action must be at the forefront of our candidates' priorities.

X: @dthopinion

# Sports

## The Daily Tar Heel

PERSONALITY

### Five-star recruit Ian Jackson brings talent and confidence to UNC's backcourt

Head coach Hubert Davis says first-year is 'gonna fit in great'

By Matthew Maynard  
Assistant Sports Editor  
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Ian Jackson walked with a limp growing up.

His teammates compared the first-year guard to Captain Jack Sparrow from "Pirates of the Caribbean." His AAU coach, Daman Brown, nicknamed him "Captain Jack."

And although his limp and the growing pains in his knee are gone, the moniker has stuck.

It's one Jackson has embraced. It's become his Instagram username. It's the inspiration behind his "Captain Jack Show" podcast.

Both on and off the court, the name represents leadership qualities he exudes. His loud presence. His flashy dunks. His dynamic scoring ability.

Entering his first year at UNC, Jackson will help anchor one of the best backcourts in college basketball. Standing at 6-foot-4, the guard will likely slot into the small forward position for the Tar Heels during the 2024-25 season, adding another scoring threat to the offense. While Jackson has been blunt about his potential and desire to spend just



DTH/GRACE RICHARDS

UNC first-year guard Ian Jackson (11) lays the ball up during media day on Friday, Oct. 4, at the Dean E. Smith Center.

one year in college basketball, he isn't worried about that right now.

Out of high school, Jackson was a five-star recruit, ranking as the No. 8 player in the nation. In his senior year at Our Saviour Lutheran School, Jackson averaged 23.9 points, 6.1 rebounds and 3.1 assists, leading to his participation in the McDonald's All-American game.

Jackson will be a versatile scorer on the offensive end for the Tar Heels, adjusting perfectly to the

fast-paced style North Carolina plans to utilize this season.

"He's always loved to play in an up-tempo style, pace," head coach Hubert Davis said. "And it's one of the many reasons why I think he decided to come here. So he's gonna fit in great out there on the floor."

But when Jackson committed to North Carolina in January 2023, he didn't tell anyone. Not even Hubert Davis. Instead, Jackson went on TV and announced his commitment.

"I don't know what told me to do that, but I did it," Jackson said. "I got it done and everybody was surprised."

Jackson is one of seven brothers. Being in the younger tier of that seven, he was always trying to compete.

"I appreciate them," Jackson said. "They pushed me for years. Now I beat them, but back then it was hard beating them."

But it wasn't just his brothers that had an influence on Jackson.

In eighth grade, the Bronx, New York native saw fellow New Yorker and now teammate RJ Davis play while Davis was a junior in high school. Although he didn't meet him then, Davis' dominance on the court stuck out to him.

When it came down to making a college decision, Jackson remembered how UNC fans treated Davis — or "Ari" as Jackson calls him — on his visit to North Carolina. During his visit, the two went to Davis' house and hung out together.

That familiarity with someone from his area, who found success at North Carolina, played a role in Jackson's commitment.

And now, Jackson gets to play in a backcourt entirely from up North, made up of those he knew growing up: Davis and sophomore guard Elliot Cadeau.

Throughout high school, Jackson was used to having the ball in his hands. But with a loaded backcourt for the Tar Heels, he

has adjusted his off-ball movement during summer and fall workouts.

To fit in with the offense, he's been working on backdoor cuts to help spread the ball around.

"He's done a surprisingly good job moving off the ball, just more than I thought," junior guard Seth Trimble said. "You gotta be on alert cause if you're not, he's just one of those guys who'll give it to you."

Beyond the court, where Jackson lives up to his Captain Jack nickname — or "Capt" as the team calls him — Trimble said Jackson is incredibly outgoing and has the New York confidence in him.

He talks quickly, he's funny. He's got energy, he's loud. Louder than "Ari."

"He's a great personality for this team," Trimble said.

While "Capt" has the talent to be a one-and-done, he knows that individual awards only come from the team's success.

"I just got a whole lot of confidence in myself off the floor, and it leads into on the floor," Jackson said. "[I] understand that these guys [have] been here and I'm a freshman, but I put in the work too. We all put in the work and I trust my game, so that's where my confidence comes from."

X: @mdmaynard74

RETURNER

### Junior Jalen Washington in position to be key frontcourt contributor

UNC looks to fill the five after departure of Armando Bacot

By Anna Page Lancaster  
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Over the summer, Jalen Washington woke up every day before 7 a.m. to condition in his home state of Indiana. And he stayed at it all day.

He ran hills and lifted weights to make every day count. His older brother, Jimmie Washington, would go to work, come back home and still find the junior forward preparing for the 2024-25 season until late in the evening.

Washington is entering his third year at North Carolina with a clear opportunity: become the starting center after Armando Bacot graduated last season.



DTH/NATE SKVORETZ

UNC junior forward Jalen Washington (13) dunks the ball against Johnson C. Smith on Sunday, Oct. 27.

During the 2023-24 season, Washington averaged 3.9 points and 8.4 minutes per game. But without a solidified five on the roster, the junior knows he is ready for more responsibility this season. Over the summer, Washington worked on getting stronger and has continued to rely on the fiery mentality he's always possessed.

And it all started with NBA 2K. In the 2000s, the brothers spent their days on 2K and NBA Street Vol. 2. Playing as icons like Michael Jordan and LeBron James, Jimmie and Jalen quickly fell in love with basketball.

"I was always a little bit crazy about playing against him," Jalen Washington said. "I always wanted to beat my brother."

Playing 2K at home soon transformed into pickup games in the backyard after school.

Jimmie Washington, who also played basketball in college at Indiana University Northwest, said his brother's relentless style of play molded him into the person he is today. Their competition always remained fierce, with the oldest, Jimmie, winning the contests more often than not.

"What I compare it to is hot and cold," Jimmie Washington said. "I'm kind of the cold, he's kind of the hot, but mixed together they go well together."

When it came down to making a college decision, coming to North Carolina was a no-brainer. After playing as Jordan in the living room, becoming a Tar Heel was a bucket list item for Jalen Washington.

And over the past two years at UNC, it's safe to say that there have been some more bucket list items checked off: beating Duke twice, winning the ACC regular season title and making it to the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament last season.

During the 2023-24 year, Washington recorded four double-digit performances and averaged 2.6 rebounds per game. Even though he was a contributing member on the team, Washington is more

sure of the impact that he will have going into this year, potentially as a starter.

Yet, at the same time, he's not feeling any pressure to produce in the same way Bacot, the all-time double-double and rebound leader at UNC, could.

"He ain't gonna come back," Jalen said. "Nobody else is gonna come in and save us, so I just got to come up and be willing to get better and make a whole lot [of a] bigger jump."

Just ask junior guard Seth Trimble. Trimble said Washington has put in more work than anyone else in the weight room this summer. The forward's biggest goal during the off-season was to get stronger, and Washington said he put on about five pounds.

"He's been criticized for how skinny he may be, he's been criticized for how he can't defend," Trimble said. "I think he's taking that personally. He's been in the weight room more than anybody this summer, he's been conditioning more than anybody this summer. He's really determined."

Trimble, Jalen's former roommate and best friend, said he has known what Washington is capable of over these past two years of playing and living together. Now, he can't wait for Washington to have the opportunity to show it on a national stage.

Although the junior is known for being reserved — head coach Hubert Davis even called him "adorable" — Washington has relentlessly prepared himself to take a step up on the court.

Davis is prepared to see this progression, too.

"I want him to be getting every rebound, running the floor, dunking on everybody," Davis said. "He's put himself in a position to have a chance to be a major contributor this year, and it's because of his hard work and dedication."

X: @aplancaster\_



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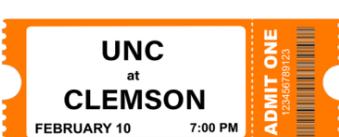
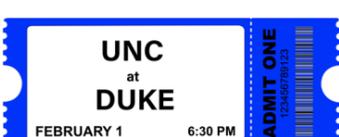
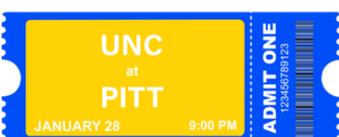
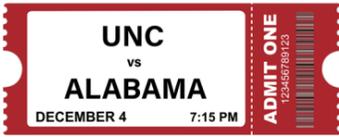
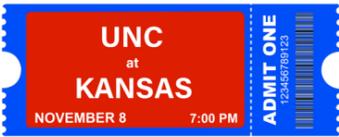
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# MEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE PREVIEW



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## PRINCE OF PITTSBORO

# Local standout remembers his 'why'

First-year Drake Powell aims to make parents, hometown proud

By Emma Moon  
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At 5 a.m. during the work week, a sleep-deprived Cherice Powell exits her driveway in Pittsboro, N.C. and drives over 20 miles to the Northwest Cary YMCA.

By 5:30 a.m., Cherice and her 14-year-old son, Drake, stand in a silent gymnasium. Cherice positions herself beside the basket. Drake begins to shoot.

The pair do this three days a week. Drake likes the quiet. He begged his mom to start taking him, even going as far as to wake her up for the shootaround.

This is the duo's schedule for the next two years.

"[My parents are] really my 'why,'" Powell said. "Really why I just continue to wake up and just continue to work hard."

Four years later and entering his first year at UNC, the 6-foot-6 guard will add dimension to North Carolina's lineup. Ranked as the No. 11 player in the 2024 class, the five-star, McDonald's All-American averaged 17.7 points, 7.9 rebounds and 4.5 assists per game at Northwood High School, located about 30 minutes from Chapel Hill. Both of Drake's parents attended UNC and his dad, Dedric Powell, played on the baseball team.

The Pittsboro native was sold on becoming a Tar Heel after visiting in August 2022. UNC was his final offer.

While eating a burger and fries at Sup Dogs, Drake Powell's collegiate plans were solidified. UNC felt like home.

Growing up, Powell was always taller than everyone else.

With the advantage, coaches often forced him to play in the post.

He worried that he wouldn't be able to develop his ball-handling skills.

After breaking his right wrist, he didn't take time off. Instead, Powell learned how to dribble with his left hand.

By age 11, people started to notice. Northwood men's basketball coach Matt Brown saw Powell play for the first time in 2016.

The young player was already 6-foot-1. He was tall, skinny and fast.

"He was very confident in himself," Brown said. "Very cocky. He knew that he was the best player on the floor, even though he was going against a lot of older guys."

Pittsboro is home to less than 5,000 people.

Even with only 900 students, Northwood's gym was always full. After every single game, Powell often didn't return home for another 25 minutes.

He was busy talking to people who traveled just to see him. He was busy signing autographs for kids.

Powell built a relationship with a community offering him its full support. Brown believes he is the best player to ever come out of Chatham County.

Powell scored 1,744 points and led his team to state championship appearances in 2021 and 2023 at Northwood. Despite the national attention as a top-15 recruit, he stayed all four years.

Brown has a printed picture taped to the wall on the left side of his desk. "Drake Powell - North Carolina" is written across the top with "McDonald's All-American" below.

Powell is posed holding a basketball in his Chargers jersey.

"[He's] the kindest, gentlest person you'll ever meet," Brown said. "Smiling walking down the hallways like he's a normal person. You would never know the kid was going to Chapel Hill or some McDonald's All-American. He never big-timed anybody. Never had an ego about himself."



DTH/GRACE RICHARDS

UNC first-year guard/forward Drake Powell (9) speaks to reporters during the media day on Friday, Oct. 4 at the Dean E. Smith Center.

In his office, Brown pauses and looks at the picture for a moment. "Yeah, he's pretty special."

After being named a McDonald's All-American in January, Powell posted the same picture on his Instagram account.

The caption is simple: "Cherice & Dedric."

That's his why. Following morning drives to the YMCA's silent gym, time spent traveling to rec league games, tournaments and his parents' full investment, Powell wanted to say thanks for it all.

"Drake is the type of kid that just wants to make me and his dad proud," Cherice said. "And we tell him we're proud of him, but that's also one of his goals. He wants us to be proud of him. And so I think that post was just, 'Look what I did with your help. I hope you're proud of me.'"

An hour before the Blue-White Scrimmage begins, Brown is seated in the Dean E. Smith Center's reserved family and friends section.

The head coach noticed that Powell had gotten better just five months removed from Northwood.

Head coach Hubert Davis is beginning to see some of the things Brown saw early.

"For a guy to be as talented as he is," Davis said, "he is equally and probably even more humble."

It's clear that Powell has always possessed a natural talent. Before his first recreational game, he laid out his headband, his shoes and his jersey. Powell struggled to fall asleep.

As Powell embarks on his collegiate career, he's now laying his uniform out at North Carolina. This time he's just 30 minutes away, in front of 20,000 people. But his reasoning is all the same.

He's doing it for the place and the people that shaped him.

"I want to make a story for myself," Powell said. "But at the same time, I want to be able to please them."

X: @emmahmoon

## VERSATILITY

# Transfer brings outside shooting to UNC

Forward Cade Tyson is level-headed despite high expectations

By Harry Crowther  
Senior Writer  
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Make or miss, the result doesn't matter to Cade Tyson.

He takes (and drains) hundreds of shots with assistant coach Jeff Lebo. What is the highest number of shots he's ever made at practice? Tyson doesn't know.

"I like there to be no expectations going in," he said. "Whatever happens, happens. I just put my best foot forward."

While Tyson is clear-minded and level-headed, the expectations are high for the four-star junior transfer. In two seasons at Belmont, he averaged 15 points and 5.3 rebounds per game. He shot 49.2 percent from the floor, 44.6 percent from three and 85.7 percent from the line. Tyson was Missouri Valley Conference Freshman of the Year in 2023 and second-team All-Conference in 2024.

After the loss of guard Cormac Ryan and forward Harrison Ingram, who averaged a combined 23.7 points per game, Tyson brings perimeter shooting and versatility to the Tar Heels.

"The first thing that people think about or see is his ability to shoot the basketball throughout his career," head coach Hubert Davis said. "But with his size at 6-foot-8, he can



DTH/CASSIDY TOY REYNOLDS

UNC junior forward/guard Cade Tyson (5) sets up to defend a free throw during the second half against Johnson C. Smith on Sunday, Oct. 27.

rebound on both ends, he can handle the ball, he can facilitate, he can defend. So it allows us to move him around a number of different spots."

Tyson grew up in a basketball family in Monroe, N.C., just outside of Charlotte. His dad, Jonathan Tyson, played at Wingate. His older brother, Hunter, was an All-ACC star at Clemson and now plays in the NBA for the Denver Nuggets.

Hunter is a role model for Cade. The two played against each other at home when they were younger. The competition occasionally got so fierce that their dad would have to step in.

"There were some days and some weeks that we didn't say a word to each other after some one-on-one games," Cade said.

Hunter was bigger and stronger. He never took it easy on Cade.

"That was really a productive struggle," Jonathan said. "It helped him improve and grow in his game and also helped him to mature into a strong young man."

In high school, Tyson scored over 2,000 points for Carmel Christian School. His senior year, he was named North Carolina Mr. Basketball and dropped 31 points in a state championship win.

But he wasn't highly recruited. His final three schools were Mercer, Coastal Carolina and Belmont.

"I had a chip on my shoulder," Cade said. "Especially seeing my brother go before me and all the attention he got."

After his sophomore season at Belmont, Tyson decided he wanted to play at a higher level. He entered the transfer portal on March 25.

Before visiting UNC, he had never been to Chapel Hill. His family came to see Hunter play against the Tar Heels, but Tyson always had a practice or a game. When he finally came to Chapel Hill, he loved it.

He committed to UNC on Apr. 28.

Tyson feels comfortable playing both the three and the four. He spaces the floor, opens up driving lanes and knocks down perimeter shots.

"He's given us that extra plus on the offensive end that we were looking for," junior guard Seth Trimble said. "If you play off of him, if you play too much in gaps, he'll make you pay."

But Tyson is more than just a lights-out shooter.

He put on weight this summer and feels more comfortable rebounding and playing in the post. He's also quicker and can drive when defenses try to run him off the 3-point line.

"I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get on the floor," Tyson said. "No matter what spot [Coach Davis] wants me at."

Off the court, Tyson is quiet and humble.

Tyson said his humility comes from his faith. It gives him the perspective that basketball is just a game.

So, he doesn't think about the misses or the makes. He exudes a humble confidence. The only thing he's thinking?

"Just let it fly."

X: @dthsports

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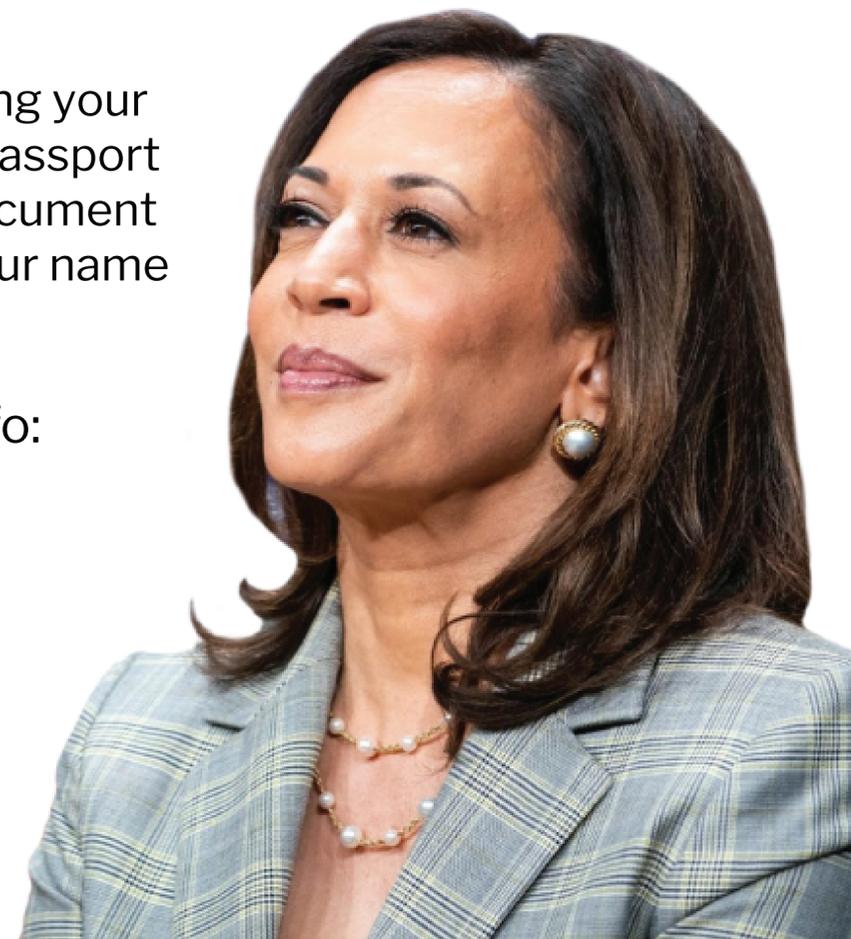
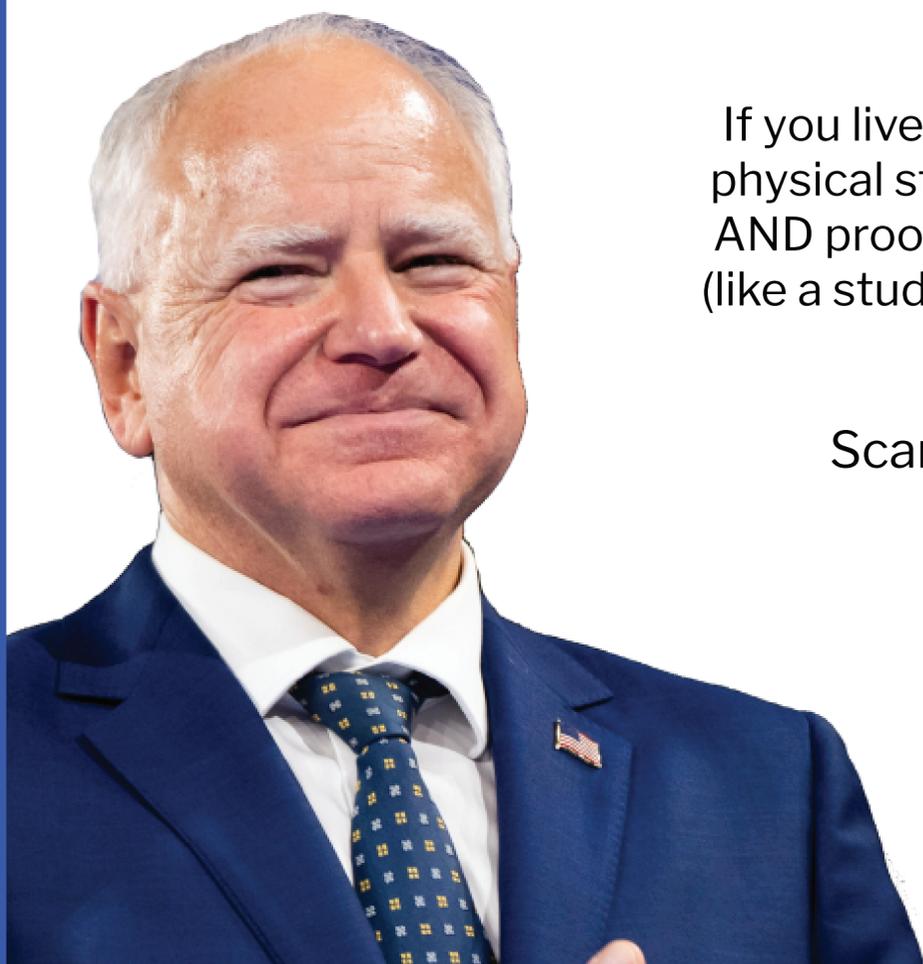
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## NEW PLAYER

# James Brown looks to have an impact by 'doing the little things'

The first-year forward hopes to stand out as a developing big

By Beckett Brantley  
Staff Writer  
sports@dailytarheel.com

James Brown doesn't like contacts. So instead, the first-year forward wears goggles. It's become his signature look.

He's worn them for as long as he can remember.

And since committing to UNC in January 2023, Brown has had a year and a half to envision his life as a Tar Heel. He knows that he is not going to be the go-to-guy this season. But with some uncertainty at the forward position, he has the opportunity to make a difference.

The first-year is no stranger to playing on teams with stars. He started high school at St. Rita in Chicago, where he played with Illinois commit Morez Johnson Jr. and Iowa State commit Nojus Indrusaitis.

Brown transferred to Link Academy in Branson, Mo., for his



DTH/HANNAH ZINN

UNC first-year forward James Brown (2) talks to the press at media day at the Dean E. Smith Center on Friday, Oct. 5.

senior year of high school in order to be more prepared for college basketball. There, he played with three ESPN top-100 players for the class of 2024, including Texas commit Tre Johnson.

Still, his coach at St. Rita, Roshawn Russell, said that Brown found his

place on the team. He expects the forward to do the same at UNC.

"James was a great teammate," Russell said. "And I think [back] to his sophomore year, when he was really blossoming and taking on a role of scoring a lot and he was very productive."

## JV TO VARSITY

# Russell Hawkins walks on to UNC men's basketball team

The sophomore was promoted after summer workout invites

By Lauren Weider  
Staff Writer  
sports@dailytarheel.com

For most players on the UNC men's basketball team, the path to the varsity roster starts long before they arrive in Chapel Hill. But for sophomore Russell Hawkins, that moment came only this summer, following a year on the JV team.

Hawkins spent this summer in Chapel Hill taking classes when he reached out to assistant coach Marcus Paige online who invited him to workout with the UNC's men's basketball team. The invites grew more and more frequent.

Soon, head coach Hubert Davis called Hawkins into his office.

"I didn't know if I'd ever actually have the opportunity to play here, but God is good," Russell said. "I'm here now. I made it."

When UNC announced its roster in early September, Hawkins name was on it. The guard has a full-time spot on the varsity roster. At Mallard Creek high school in Charlotte, Russell averaged 9.1 points, 3.4 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game. In addition to serving as a solid practice player, the sophomore will now get to enjoy all the perks that come with being a Division I varsity player.

Hawkins was introduced to basketball at a young age, but the sport didn't become meaningful for him until later on.

In seventh grade, Russell was one of the last players to be dropped from his middle school team, and it cut deep. Knowing he never wanted his abilities to be in question again, he began to take his training more seriously.

"It was at that point where he really demonstrated that this was something that he felt he wanted to excel at," William Hawkins, Russell's dad, said.

Russell returned in eighth grade to claim his spot on the team as a



DTH/HANNAH ZINN

UNC sophomore guard Russell Hawkins (14) warms up during media day in the Dean E. Smith Center on Friday, Oct. 5.

starter, and his passion for the sport continued into high school.

Though he was recruited by several Division III schools, Russell prioritized academics.

"You really have to grind and work your way out of it," Russell said. "And I would love to bet on myself, but I'm not a gambler. I like to be a little more secure in my future."

"I didn't know if I'd ever actually have the opportunity to play here, but God is good. I'm here now. I made it."

Russell Hawkins  
UNC men's basketball player

Russell's connection to UNC runs deep. His parents are both North Carolina alumni, and his sister graduated from UNC in 2023.

"He was a Carolina fan, but because we had already been there, he wanted something different," Ivori Hawkins, Russell's mom, said.

Although he initially considered breaking away from the North Carolina tradition, the chance to play on the JV team while pursuing a UNC education solidified his decision.

Then came the locker in the Dean E. Smith Center, the free basketball gear and the phone numbers of every single player when he made the move to varsity.

Russell's transition to varsity's full-time schedule has been an

adjustment. The JV game schedule and practices were more relaxed, but varsity demands intense practices, weight training and a challenging game schedule.

His teammates have already noticed the impact Hawkins brings to the team. Known for his speed, energy and ability to push the ball up the court, he's become essential to the fast-pace environment

UNC is working to establish this season.

"He's always helping guys out, being able to get downhill and make good runs out of the pick and roll," first-year forward James Brown said.

He steps into this upcoming season with two goals. First, he wants to take advantage of the resources the UNC basketball program has to offer in order to set a strong baseline for himself.

Second, he plans on soaking in every moment of this experience.

"I'm most looking forward to traveling and seeing all the incredible arenas and getting to play all these fantastic, competitive teams," Russell said. "I'm ready to be in the environment."

X: @laurenweider

## LEGACY

# 'Coach's son' Elijah Davis now dons Tar Heel uniform

University of Lynchburg transfer comes home to Chapel Hill

By Megan Smith  
Staff Writer  
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All his life, Elijah Davis has been surrounded by UNC basketball.

His great uncle, Walter Davis, a member of the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame, led the Tar Heels to an ACC title and NCAA championship appearance in 1977. And Hubert Davis, Elijah's dad, is pretty accomplished, too. Hubert was named UNC's head coach in 2021, earned ACC Coach of the Year in 2024 and still holds the North Carolina record for career 3-point percentage that he set between 1988-92.

And now, as a walk-on, it's Elijah's time to don the Tar Heel uniform.

"It's not really about the name on the back," Elijah said. "It's more about the name on the front."

The 6-foot-3 guard competed at the Division III level for the University of Lynchburg the past three seasons. However, he returned home to Chapel Hill to play under his father for his final two years, including a redshirt senior season this upcoming winter.

Although the plan was never to play for UNC, junior year injuries coupled with careful consideration of his future paved a roadmap back to his roots.

"Coming out of high school, I knew it wasn't the right moment for me to come to Carolina," Elijah said. "I knew I needed to be somewhere else away from Chapel Hill to really grow as a person and as a player."

Now, they have a unique opportunity to team up on the sidelines much later in each of their careers.

"Elijah could see very clearly that his playing career was coming to an end and he'd be transitioning into some other way of keeping basketball in his life," Leslie Davis, Elijah's mother and Hubert's wife, said. "I think that helped him make the decision that it would be a really great way to end that, to be back here with his dad."

Elijah started conversations about transferring after UNC's season ended in 2023. Hubert told his son how much he would treasure coaching him.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DAVIS FAMILY

Young Elijah Davis poses with his dad, Hubert Davis, for a portrait.

After a month of contemplation, Elijah called his dad in his car after class outside a Lynchburg dining hall.

"I was like, 'There's nothing I want more than to come here and play for you,'" Elijah said.

They no longer have to make plans to meet for dinner at Lynchburg. Elijah and Hubert spend more time at their longtime favorite local restaurant, Four Corners.

Whether in Virginia or North Carolina, one constant is keeping basketball out of dinner conversation. On the court, there's separation, too.

"In between those lines, I don't call him 'dad,'" Davis said. "I call him 'coach.'"

This new step in Hubert and Elijah's relationship has brought them closer and given them the opportunity to learn more about each other in a different setting. For instance, Elijah said Hubert now sees that his son welcomes criticism on the court.

On the flip side, Elijah is learning just how passionate and "crazy" his dad is.

"I remember the first time I missed a box out," Elijah said. "He ripped a new one into me. That was different."

The head coach may be Elijah's father, and the late UNC great Walter Davis may be the reason Elijah wears No. 6 (which Walter wore for the Phoenix Suns), but it's about the team name on the jersey — not the "Davis" on the other side.

"There's no teasing or anything about 'the coach's son,'" Elijah said. "I'm just another player."

X: @dthsports

JOURNEYMAN

# Ven-Allen Lubin's path to North Carolina

Vanderbilt transfer's versatility fills integral gap in UNC's roster

By Cade Shoemaker  
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1,143 miles span between South Bend, Ind., Nashville, Tenn., and Chapel Hill, N.C. Each mile was a point in the college career of transfer forward Ven-Allen Lubin, molding him into a versatile big man out of the transfer portal this summer.

Head coach Hubert Davis sought out the 6-foot-8 forward to add depth to a UNC lineup lacking in stature. And with former Notre Dame head coach Mike Brey describing Lubin as a positionless player, he's now a tool North Carolina can use while Davis tinkers with his lineup.

"He can guard the post, he can guard guards out on the perimeter," Davis said. "His versatility on the offensive end — getting to the offensive glass, running in transition, his ability to shoot the ball from the outside, but also handle and make plays from the perimeter."

While at Vanderbilt, Lubin played for one of UNC's most dominant big men in program history, Jerry Stackhouse. There, Lubin averaged 12.3 points and 6.3 rebounds per game, while leading the Commodores in field goal percentage of 50 percent. Prior to Vanderbilt, he played at Notre Dame for one season and recorded the most blocks on the Fighting Irish's team. Lubin ranked



DTH/GRACE RICHARDS

UNC junior forward Ven-Allen Lubin (22) dunks during media day on Friday, Oct. 4 at the Dean E. Smith Center.

No. 112 in the transfer portal, according to 247 Sports.

But when Stackhouse was fired after a 9-23 season in 2023, Lubin put his name back in the portal. He said that playing for the Tar Heel legend was an important factor in eventually coming to Chapel Hill. His connection with Stackhouse — someone who knows the atmosphere, coaching staff and standard at UNC — made the decision a lot easier.

"[Hubert] said for me during my visit that he doesn't recruit guys unless he wants and needs them," Lubin said.

**"He can guard the post, he can guard guards out on the perimeter."**

**Hubert Davis**  
Head coach, UNC men's basketball

"He knows that he sees a great thing in me, and he's always been emphasizing that ever since I visited here."

Lubin's relationship with first-year guard Ian Jackson also

added an extra layer of familiarity to the transition.

The two played together in Hungary for Team USA at the U19 FIBA World Cup in 2023.

"I learned a lot from Ven," Jackson said. "Ven is my dog. I have a huge relationship with [him]."

Jackson noted how active Lubin is on the court in pursuit of the glass. Fellow forwards, graduate Jae'Lyn Withers and junior Jalen

Washington, were also amazed by his athleticism over the summer.

Withers said Lubin's explosiveness caught him off guard, describing a story from a preseason pickup session. On three consecutive possessions, Withers remembered Lubin calling game with a trio of put-back dunks.

"It's kind of funny coming from him because he's been the most athletic big that I've seen so far," Lubin said.

Things like competitiveness, skill and strength were all attributes that make him tough to guard. It's something Washington loves. Not only because Lubin is his teammate, but also since guarding him in practice makes all the bigs better — a position the Tar Heels need to develop after former center Armando Bacot graduated.

"I feel like us playing against each other every day, iron sharpens iron," Washington said, "We can only get better."

Regardless of how Davis decides to use Lubin, or to what degree he fits into the rotation, it won't seem to bother the Orlando, Fla., native. Instead, Lubin is grounded in something that transcends the scope of basketball altogether.

Lubin's faith has given him peace to trust in a greater plan, regardless of where he's played over the last three seasons.

"The Lord has great plans for me and he has never failed me," Lubin said, before later adding, "I believe that he is the one that can put me in a position to be great and a position where I can be me. That's my whole journey in life."

X: @cadeshoemaker23

SEASON PREVIEW

## No. 9 men's basketball prepares for difficult non-conference schedule

Ranked matchups against Kansas and Alabama headline this year's slate

By Dylan Stalter  
Staff Writer  
sports@dailytarheel.com

As losses continue to pile up for UNC football, fans have turned their attention toward Chapel Hill's Blue Blood program, counting down the days until the first tip-off for the North Carolina men's basketball team.

The preseason No. 9 Tar Heels have kept their expectations as high as ever. Hungry for a national championship after last season's devastating 89-87 defeat in the Sweet 16, UNC has brought a mix of experience and young talent to this year's roster.

The Tar Heels will embark on one of their biggest challenges of the year in the second game of the season: a visit to Allen Fieldhouse to take on preseason No. 1 Kansas on Nov. 8.

The top-10 matchup will be the first major test for the UNC front court, which will no longer feature center Armando Bacot. Kansas center Hunter Dickinson was recently named to the preseason All-American First Team, averaging just under 18 points and 10.8 rebounds last season. Dickinson will bring a daunting early-season matchup for junior forward Jalen Washington and graduate forward Jae'Lyn Withers.

Following a matchup in Manoa, the Tar Heels will stay in Hawaii for the Maui Invitational on Nov. 25-27. Opening play against Dayton, a challenging second round awaits with either No. 5 Iowa State or No. 11 Auburn. With both teams ranked in the top five of KenPom's preseason adjusted defensive efficiency, this will be a test of UNC's early offensive identity.

Potential third round matchups include Colorado, Memphis, Michigan State and defending national champions No. 3 UConn.

On Dec. 4, the Tar Heels will face a familiar foe.

After last year's Sweet 16 matchup with

the Crimson Tide, UNC is ready for a shot at revenge. North Carolina will host No. 2 Alabama in the ACC/SEC Challenge, showcasing two of the nation's best guards in graduate R.J. Davis and Alabama's Mark Sears.

The Crimson Tide has reloaded its talent, becoming the nation's top-ranked team in KenPom's preseason adjusted offensive efficiency. Head coach Nate Oats' team also recruited a slew of talented transfers and possesses the seventh-best transfer class in the nation. The lineup boasts guard Chris Youngblood and center Cliff Omoruyi, and four of the nation's top-50 incoming first-years.

After, North Carolina will compete in a pair of neutral-site games before conference play gets into full swing.

The Tar Heels will take on No. 21 Florida on Dec. 17 in Charlotte. After making a run to the SEC tournament finals and an appearance in the NCAA tournament, the Gators are looking to make a splash in their revamped, competitive conference. Guard Walter Clayton Jr. is returning for his senior season, along with his high-octane offensive arsenal that produced 17.6 points per game last season.

UNC will then travel to New York on Dec. 21 for a bout with No. 22 UCLA at Madison Square Garden in the CBS Sports Classic. The Bruins returned three of their top four scorers from last season, while adding more depth with guards Kobe Johnson and Skyy Clark through the transfer portal.

Just before the new year, the Tar Heels will start conference play where they are predicted to finish second in the ACC.

With conference realignment shaking up the landscape of college athletics, UNC avoided the long flights to California and instead will host all three new ACC members — California, SMU and Stanford — at the Dean E. Smith Center in January. SMU stands out as a dark horse in its new conference, with a roster that's seen over 18,000 combined career minutes, the second most in the ACC.

X: @dylanstalterr

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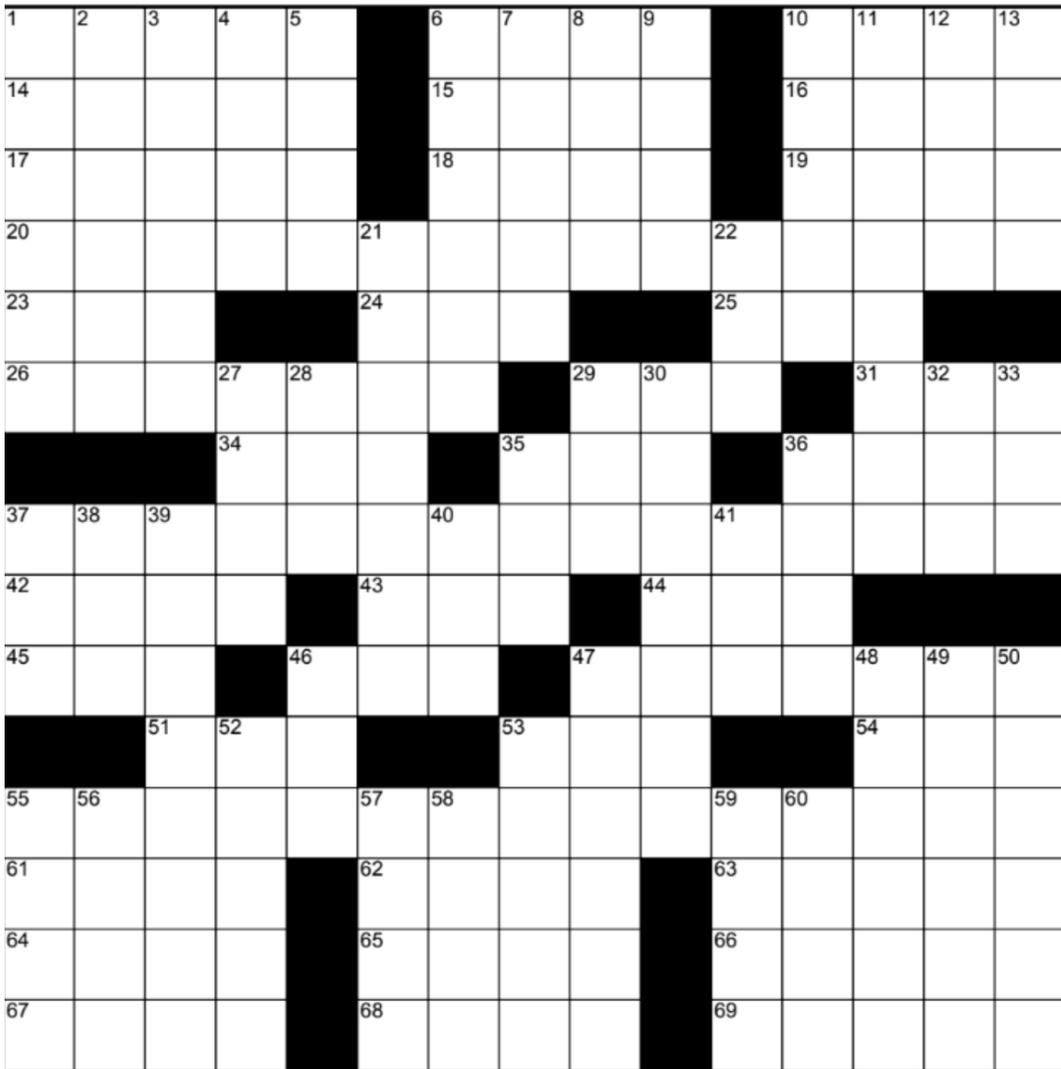
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“Deathly Hollow’ed”

This week’s crossword was created by Liam Furlong. Liam is a UNC senior studying literature and Hispanic cultures. He is from Wilmington, Del.

Across

- 1 Answered on “Wheel of Fortune?”
- 6 “Stop moving!”
- 10 “Already doing that!”
- 14 The City of Lights
- 15 The Beehive State
- 16 Insignificant, minor
- 17 At rigid attention, say
- 18 da Vinci’s Lisa
- 19 Old Greek competition
- 20 Links fingers with significant other on the road
- 23 Norton, Sheeran, and Sullivan
- 24 Only repeated number in Fibonacci’s Sequence
- 25 Lunch at The Leaky Cauldron, say
- 26 Becomes more complex, like the plot
- 29 Choose to do
- 31 “It \_\_\_: yours truly!”
- 34 ‘Meth’ and ‘prop’ suffix
- 35 Actress Mowry, to her nephew in Mexico?

- 36 Like a Quidditch match after catching the snitch
- 37 “The fog’s soon to part”
- 42 UNC’s Student Org. for Undergraduate Literature
- 43 Top that’s easy to crop
- 44 Historian’s period
- 45 Little tyke
- 46 Marbled bread type
- 47 Syllables sung while skipping
- 51 43-across, for the Greeks
- 53 Quarterback and UNC alumnus Howell
- 54 Merritt’s mascot and meat source
- 55 Doesn’t break eye contact with a person
- 61 Instagram validation
- 62 “Oh well...”
- 63 Basketball legend Iverson
- 64 Just a thought
- 65 I’ll see this North Carolina gem of a floating landmass?
- 66 Low-calorie lunch
- 67 Untidy dining room for the officers?

- 68 Barbie or Ken
- 69 Marvel’s original Enchantress

Down

- 1 Vomited outward
- 2 Common Pride display
- 3 Tag line to many threats
- 4 A joy of a soccer move?
- 5 Non-exact figs.
- 6 You and me, for two
- 7 Repent for
- 8 Come down to earth?
- 9 Like Bangkok cuisine
- 10 \_\_\_ Steaks (beef brand)
- 11 “No can do, Captain”
- 12 \_\_\_ Man (Marvel’s man of steel?)
- 13 With ‘to’, manage the garden
- 21 In truth? A great Billy Joel song
- 22 Overall sum of fishing snares?
- 27 Rudd or Simon
- 28 Wrap up
- 29 Texas tea, say
- 30 Sicily’s cultural capital
- 32 Sicily’s Tyrrhenian
- 33 Annoy
- 35 Punny result of a “Best Neck Wear” contest
- 36 Like some presentations
- 37 Alabama’s time zone, abbr.
- 38 British bathroom
- 39 Bonus footage
- 40 Something to take in 38-down?
- 41 Support when something’s on your chest?
- 46 Deeply regret
- 47 Pillow decoration
- 48 Greek god of archery
- 49 Line art up single-file?
- 50 Secret motive
- 52 General locales
- 53 Buy time in 38-down?
- 55 Skinny fellow Jim Croce doesn’t mess around with?
- 56 Ocean’s moving force
- 57 Common dialogue tag
- 58 Additionally
- 59 Maize dough from ground corn
- 60 Ancient near-Iran kingdom

Answers to “Queen’s UNC Homecoming Games”

P	R	O	F	S	T	I	N	G	R	I	P
C	U	B	E	A	R	M	O	R	A	G	E
S	T	O	L	E	G	U	A	V	A	I	N
H	E	L	E	N	E	M	A	D	I	S	O
A	R	E							E	V	E
A	P	T		T	U	L	S	A	A	D	E
D	R	O	P	S		N	O	T	I	O	N
S	O	P	H	I	A	C	H	A	R	L	O
			O	C	U	L	A	R	A	V	A
			M	O	B		S	E	N	S	E
S	O	L	I	D				N	E	O	
T	A	M	A	R	O	F	G	E	O	R	G
O	N	E		A	V	O	I	D		I	R
R	E	C		M	A	U	V	E		N	E
E	D	S		A	L	L	E	N		S	A

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**HEALING IN THE IMAGINAL REALM:** Jungian Psychoanalyst Erica Lorentz  
 Friday, Nov. 2, 7:30pm, Lecture \$10;  
 Saturday Dream Workshop 10am-4pm \$60;  
 Church of Reconciliation. [JUNGNC.org](http://JUNGNC.org) for more information please go to our website <https://nwrliving.com/careers/> or send resume to [holly.barnwell@nwrvavin.com](mailto:holly.barnwell@nwrvavin.com)

SUDOKU

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		3						
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6				2	3		9	
			8			1		
		9				2		
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7	9	6	2	8	3	1	5	4
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3	8	9	7	4	2	5	6	1
4	6	1	8	5	9	2	3	7
2	7	5	3	6	1	4	8	9
6	5	2	4	9	7	8	1	3
9	1	4	5	3	8	6	7	2
8	3	7	1	2	6	9	4	5

Read Lifestyle writer Becca Savidge’s article about Liam Furlong, the DTH crossword maker:



POST PLAYER

# Blanca Thomas brings scoring and physicality

The first-year center uses her height to her advantage

By Megan Smith  
Staff Writer  
sports@dailytarheel.com

As a 6-foot-3 middle schooler towering above kids in their awkward growing phases, Blanca Thomas always stood out.

Forced to squat in pictures for most of her life, Thomas struggled with confidence. Then, she found basketball. What used to make her feel insecure led to more opportunities, eventually leading to UNC.

Now, listed at 6-foot-5, the first-year center actually stands closer to 6-foot-6, head coach Courtney Banghart said. She still stands out, but it's an asset she's embraced.

"I'm trying to be the best I can in empowering [taller girls] and showing them there's nothing to be embarrassed of," Thomas said.

North Carolina's best recruit in the first-year class may be tall and consider herself a true center, but her game isn't limited to classic bully ball and layups in the low post. Thomas, a versatile scorer, will bring both height and physicality to the North Carolina offense.

Banghart describes Thomas as a shot-blocker, a two-hand rebounder and a floor-stretcher. The part of her game that Thomas actually prides herself on the most, though, is her face-up play.

"I like to face up, and I can score off the dribble, and I can shoot it pretty well," Thomas said. "Which is nice to find a big that can do that as well as running the floor and being mobile on your feet."

And the Charlotte native's favorite move? Not a drop step. Not a hook shot. Nope, Thomas loves the fadeaway.

ESPN's No. 32 recruit in the class of 2024 also isn't afraid to step out even further past the paint. As long as it's not heavily



DTH/AVA SHARON

UNC first-year center Blanca Thomas (34) speaks to the press during media day on Friday, Oct. 25.

contested, Thomas has the green light to shoot from downtown. It was late in her high school career that she expanded her midrange and 3-point shot.

"By her senior year, she was draining threes," Kristal Mainsah, who coached Thomas at Charlotte Catholic High School, said. "She had established that outside presence, so she was a triple-level scorer."

Since settling into Chapel Hill this summer — a place she said hasn't changed since her first visit at 14 years old — Thomas has been forced to make adjustments with her new team. For instance, no more getting away with jogging down the court like in high school.

Her "welcome to college" moment occurred during the first workout when she was so exhausted she could hardly breathe.

"Everyone was like, 'Blanca, are you crying?'" a laughing Thomas said. "I was like, 'No, I'm not crying, I swear. This is great.'"

She's also realized that her frame can only take her so far. It was a cakewalk for Thomas to finish over defenders prior to playing at UNC. She rarely matched up with anyone close to her size.

Now, the center is having to learn to be physical.

According to Thomas, the best method to learn how to use her strength in the post so far has come from competing with the likes of fellow bigs on the team, including redshirt first-years Ciera Toomey and Laila Hull and graduate Alyssa Ustby. But no teammate has been more challenging or rewarding for Thomas than the other true center, senior Maria Gakdeng, who is also reaping the benefits.

"You have to be pretty big or skilled to score over Blanca," Banghart said. "I mean, she's gotten Maria better, too. She takes away her left shoulder, and Maria's gotten a lot better not being able to go to that move."

Gakdeng and Thomas are partners in the "buddy system," the women's basketball team boasts. With three years of experience, Gakdeng often gives Thomas pointers to help prepare her for collegiate basketball. And as the only centers, they are always on opposing squads.

"Her being more physical is something that she has to work on," Gakdeng said. "But that face-up game is really something that's going to set her apart, especially in the coming years as she continues to play for us."

As Thomas learns to use her stature to bump, bully and bury other bigs, her personality, on the other hand, stays light as a feather, and her confidence stays high as ever.

"She's the opposite of intimidating," Banghart said. "She is the nicest, most fun [person]. She's very joyful — that's her superpower."

X: @meganosmithh

RELATIONSHIPS

## What's it like to be recruited to play basketball at UNC?

Teams focus on building rapport with potential players

By Beckett Brantley  
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In 2022, former UNC basketball center Armando Bacot tweeted, "If you don't want to commit to UNC, don't visit because if you do, you will."

When first-year center Blanca Thomas visited Chapel Hill as a recruit, she felt that something was pulling her to be there.

It was the same for first-year men's basketball forward James Brown.

That invisible force pulling recruits to UNC has always been there.

For some time after his North Carolina career, Michael Jordan's legacy alone was perhaps enough to convince young players to wear UNC's iconic blue and white jerseys.

But now, it's UNC's emphasis on building relationships that attracts young players. The process of first-year recruitment starts about two years before a player graduates from high school. Five out of the six first-year basketball players this year received an offer in the summer before or early in their junior year of high school.

Brown received an offer in June 2022, and came for an official visit in October. He committed three months after his visit.

"We went to dinner, watched practice, took a lot of pictures, kind

of just saw the campus," Brown said. "They kind of sat me down and showed me kind of what they envisioned for me being here, what my role could be."

But sometimes, unofficial visits are just as important.

Spending time with the team, the coaches and building relationships is what drew Thomas to North Carolina.

"After I had been here, I would say maybe about three times is about all I needed to be like, 'OK, yeah, this is where I need to be,'" Thomas said.

But like the Jordan effect, recruitment takes more heavy lifting than flaunting Chapel Hill's historic campus and basketball facilities.

During Brown's recruitment process, head coach Hubert Davis and assistant coach Sean May talked with him on the phone several times a week and visited the forward and his family in Illinois. Brown's coach at St. Rita High School in Chicago, Roshawn Russell, was with him through his recruitment process.

"I'll say that they really were focused on building a relationship with James," Russell said. "So, while we had some conversations, they definitely focused more on James and his family and building that relationship."

The common denominator for these recent recruits was UNC's emphasis on family.

The men's basketball team has received some criticism for its inability to secure high-profile recruits, like Durham native Jonas Aidoo, who scheduled an official visit to UNC but committed to Arkansas before his trip



DTH DESIGN/AUBREY WORD

Photos courtesy of The Daily Tar Heel archives, Heather Diehl and Grace Richards.

to Chapel Hill. Ultimately, Davis says he prioritizes recruits' dedication to North Carolina.

"This is a 'we' program, it's not about just the 'me,' it's about the 'we,'" Davis said. "Those are the types of conversations I have with recruits, whether it's from the transfer portal or high school."

Women's basketball coach Courtney Banghart begins her recruitment process by considering the needs of the team and how to build around the established players. In the transfer portal, when the right players become available, it's all about them. This year, those players were graduate guard Grace Townsend and junior guard Trayanna Crisp.

"We made sure that we were their only visit and made that happen," Banghart said.

And, according to graduate guard Lexi Donarski, Banghart is the same person when she's recruiting players and after they've arrived on campus.

"She's very intense," Donarski said. "She cares really hard about the team and about you personally, and she's willing to push you to be the best you can be on and off the court."

And while UNC certainly doesn't succeed in nabbing every player, its family-oriented recruiting earned the men's and women's teams the No. 8 and No. 15 ranked recruiting classes in 2024, respectively.

X: @beckettbrant

# WOMEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE PREVIEW

UNC vs CHARLESTON SOUTHERN  
NOVEMBER 4 11:00 AM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs UCONN  
NOVEMBER 15 6:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC at BATTLE 4 ATLANTIS  
NOVEMBER 23  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs KENTUCKY  
DECEMBER 5 5:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs GEORGIA TECH  
DECEMBER 15 2:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs FLORIDA  
DECEMBER 18 6:30 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC at UMIAMI  
DECEMBER 29 4:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs NOTRE DAME  
JANUARY 5 1:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs DUKE  
JANUARY 9 7:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs FSU  
JANUARY 26 12:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC at STANFORD  
FEBRUARY 2 3:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs VIRGINIA TECH  
FEBRUARY 13 7:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs NC STATE  
FEBRUARY 16 2:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC at LOUISVILLE  
FEBRUARY 23 2:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC at DUKE  
FEBRUARY 27 7:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

UNC vs UVA  
MARCH 2 2:00 PM  
ADMIT ONE

DTH DESIGN/SHANNON MCMANUS

## ADJUSTMENT

# Tar Heels look to improve shot selection and on-court spacing

## Head coach Courtney Banghart makes offensive changes

By Brian D'Aguanno  
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During the 47-point loss in the second round of the NCAA Tournament to the eventual national champion South Carolina, UNC shot just over 16 percent from three.

Throughout last season, the Tar Heels averaged just 67.8 points per game.

And because of that, the preseason No. 15 UNC women's basketball team is looking to bounce back this season with increased offensive production. Offseason changes made by head coach Courtney Banghart include installing a faster paced offense focused on high scoring and increasing spacing to create better shot selection. The Tar Heels added key pieces in the portal while developing returning players.

The first notable difference is the absence of guard Deja Kelly,

who transferred to Oregon in May. Kelly averaged 16.3 points, 3.2 assists and 3.9 rebounds per game last season, starting every game. She led North Carolina in scoring.

UNC's returning starters, including graduate forward Alyssa Ustby, graduate guard Lexi Donarski and senior center Maria Gakdeng, will have to fill the offensive void left in Kelly's absence.

Ustby was a do-it-all forward for the Tar Heels last season, averaging the second most points and the most assists on the team. She will look to lead North Carolina's offense in an increased role this season. Ustby made her outside shot a point of emphasis during offseason training.

After averaging career lows in both 3-point attempts and percentage last season, Ustby's efforts to improve in that area is a microcosm of the team's offensive mentality heading into the season.

"We have a lot more 3-point threats this year, and that's something that's super exciting because that spaces out the floor," Ustby said. "And our team, we like to play in space."

Last season the Tar Heels ranked 230th in the country

in 3-point attempts per game, averaging 17.3. However, they did not shoot the ball efficiently on those attempts, converting on just 30.2 percent of them from beyond the arc, 205th in the country.

This offseason has been tailored around improving spacing and ball movement while becoming a more perimeter-oriented team.

"I know I can get certain people a shot in a certain spot now," Banghart said.

Redshirt first-year forward Ciera Toomey, who was the fourth overall recruit in the 2023 class, will make an immediate offensive impact, helping the Tar Heels improve floor spacing and outside shot making.

"One thing that I think will definitely help is probably my ability to shoot the three," Toomey said.

North Carolina also adds junior transfer guard Trayanna Crisp, who shot 33.3 percent from 3-point range on just over four attempts per game last season with Arizona State.

The playmaking and ball handling void that Kelly's departure left was filled when the Tar Heels landed Richmond graduate transfer Grace Townsend. Townsend averaged 5.2



DTH DESIGN/CARLY EVANS

Photos courtesy of Emma Plumly, Heather Diehl, Lara Crochik, Viyada Soukthavone and Olivia Paul.

assists per game last season for the Spiders, which was second most in the Atlantic 10 conference.

"I'm able to bring the same things I brought to Richmond, I'm able to play-make for others," Townsend said.

Expect the Tar Heels to utilize the 3-ball more consistently and efficiently this year as players

become increasingly comfortable with the new offense.

"We have so many options in such a good way," Banghart said. "We have a lot of guys that can shoot it. We have a lot of guys that can handle and facilitate."

X: @dthsports

## BONDING

# Women's team uses TikTok to grow chemistry

## Players use the platform to showcase their humor

By Marvin Lee  
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sports@dailytarheel.com

The UNC women's basketball players have found a new way to have fun, and they're doing it on one of the most popular apps: TikTok.

Between their various accounts, the Tar Heels have amassed millions of likes and hundreds of thousands of followers, with viral videos ranging from graduate forward Alyssa Ustby's "training with a fellow UNC athlete" series to players picking hypothetical picnic baskets.

For a team constantly in the spotlight, TikTok fame might seem unimportant, but for the team, it both builds chemistry and serves as an outlet to express their personalities to the people watching.

Since current TCU player Sedona Prince's viral TikTok that exposed the severe inequity between the men's and women's NCAA tournaments in 2021, players have come to know the power of the platform. Ustby started posting content her sophomore year in 2022, and has become an influencer herself, boasting more than 122,000 followers.

"It's cool to post and show vulnerability through what your days look like as a college athlete," Ustby said.

Graduating UNC with a degree in advertising and PR, growing a following is something Alyssa has studied, and her storytelling skills have impressed brands like Uber. Whether it's training with the Swim & Dive team or dancing around campus, Ustby said social media helps remind people that she's more than just a basketball player.

For redshirt first-year forward Ciera Toomey, TikTok is a way to have fun with her teammates and show fans what life is like as a college athlete.

Toomey and a couple of other players created an account in September named "blueballers1." The account is shared by Toomey and her roommates — junior Indya



DTH DESIGN/EASTON INMAN

Photo courtesy of Nate Skvoretz.

Nivar, redshirt first-year Laila Hull and sophomore Sydney Barker — along with her friends, first-years Jordan Zubich and Blanca Thomas.

Food reviews, dancing videos and the aforementioned picnic baskets have together amassed over two million views. The inspiration behind the account?

"We feel like we were funny on our own, so let's all do it together," Toomey said.

For Nivar, the account provides a way to show off a side that fans don't see on the court. Most importantly, the group can show off their humor to the world.

The account has quickly turned into a source of entertainment for the group. But having a big presence comes with some fear at first.

"We were nervous to be an influencer kinda vibe," Thomas said, before later adding, "But we've found such a joy in it."

As North Carolina heads into the season, the Tar Heels are planning on posting more behind the scenes content and food reviews.

Toomey wants to make videos while traveling, on away trips or to showcase what a game day looks like.

Senior forward Maria Gakdeng, using an iPad to record, has started making vlogs on TikTok every chance she gets. Gakdeng started recording and posting for a specific reason: to preserve memories, especially as she approaches graduation.

With her "day in the life" series, UNC gear hauls and countless dancing videos, Gakdeng has racked up over 337,000 likes.

She is one of the more prolific posters on the team, with a new video hitting her TikTok nearly every day.

They form a digital diary, showing Gakdeng around campus with her teammates, attending one of Vice President's Kamala Harris' rallies and documenting her ever-changing hairstyles.

The "insane" team chemistry, as sophomore guard Kayla McPherson described it, is one of the biggest reasons why the energy around the program is so high.

Creating content together is a factor behind that chemistry, and in a media climate increasingly dominated by short-form content, TikTok provides a unique opportunity to reach fans where they are.

On the heels of the most-watched women's basketball NCAA championship in history between Iowa-South Carolina, every like, view and comment grows the women's game to unprecedented heights.

And the Tar Heels are now a part of that.

X: @marvinmlee\_

## SCHEDULE

# Women's basketball prepares for challenging matchups

## The UNC team anticipates high-profile opponents

By Kendall Allen  
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Coming off an 88-41 loss to South Carolina in the second round of the NCAA Tournament last season, the preseason No. 15 North Carolina women's basketball schedule is filled with ranked matchups and new pit stops that will help prepare the Tar Heels for postseason play.

The season tips off with a home game against Charleston Southern on Nov. 4. The Buccaneers haven't had a winning record since the 2016-17 season, but despite their struggles, the opener is essential for getting off on the right foot.

UNC's first major test comes against preseason No. 2 UConn on Nov. 15 in Greensboro, N.C. Coming off an Elite Eight tournament run, the Huskies are looking to build on an impressive season with guard Paige Bueckers returning to lead the pack. Bueckers — who averaged just under 22 points per game last season — is one of the nation's premier guards.

This becomes especially dangerous when Bueckers is working out of the pick and roll. Thus, North Carolina will have to utilize graduate forward Alyssa Ustby, combined with sound guard play in order to stop Bueckers and earn a resume building win.

The next key matchup is against No. 22 Kentucky on Dec. 5. After hiring former Virginia Tech head coach Kenny Brooks, the Wildcats are looking to revitalize the program after two back-to-back losing seasons. Brooks brings point guard Georgia Amoore with him, who the Tar Heels are familiar with.

In bouts against Brooks' Virginia Tech teams over the past three seasons, North Carolina has just one win. In order to earn a second ranked win (should UNC beat UConn), the Tar Heels will have to limit Amoore's offensive production.

North Carolina starts its ACC campaign at Carmichael Arena against Georgia Tech on Dec. 15. Despite being unranked, the

Yellow Jackets had a scoring margin of just under one point last season. With Georgia Tech able to keep games close, the ACC season opener will serve as an early conference test for head coach Courtney Banghart's squad. January will be the most challenging part of the season for UNC. The Tar Heels play No. 6 Notre Dame and No. 11 Duke in consecutive games, both at home.

Notre Dame is led by guard Hannah Hidalgo, the reigning ACC Rookie of the Year and ACC Defensive Player of the Year, who is coming off a very impressive first season, averaging 22.6 points, 6.2 rebounds and 5.5 assists per game. In combination with forward Maddy Westbeld and guard Sonia Citron, the Fighting Irish are set to have a high-scoring season. With North Carolina's new look offense that emphasizes a fast pace and high scoring, Notre Dame will serve as a litmus test of its effectiveness.

No. 11 Duke has a young core and has often struggled early in the season against more experienced rosters. On average, the Blue Devils lead their opposition in field goal percentage and points per scoring attempt. When going up against Duke, North Carolina will have to boast an efficient offensive game.

Midway through January, the Tar Heels travel to Dallas to take on now-conference foe Southern Methodist University. Last season, the Mustangs finished with a 14-16 record and eleventh in the American Athletic Conference. North Carolina has never faced off against SMU in program history.

At the end of the month, UNC will make its first trip to the West to take on both California and Stanford on Jan. 30 and Feb. 2, respectively. With conference realignment in its first season, the Tar Heels will have to adjust quickly to the time change and lengthy travel in order to leave California undefeated.

UNC will not take on Duke in the final regular season game like normal. Instead, the Tar Heels will take on Virginia on March 2 to close out the regular season slate.

X: @dthsports

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## LEGACY

# Alyssa Ustby leads team in final year

Graduate student transforms shot for her fifth season

By Anna Page Lancaster

Senior Writer  
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Graduate forward Alyssa Ustby is used to the grandma jokes.

“What are you baking us?” her teammates often ask.

But Ustby enjoys the teasing. The moniker originated during a team meal.

“Lyss kind of gives ‘Meemaw,’” first-year guard Jordan Zubich said.

A “Meemaw” in basketball-years at the age of 22 — turning 23 in March — Ustby has undoubtedly achieved veteran status. In April, Ustby announced that she would be returning to North Carolina to play her fifth and final year with the Tar Heels. She served as a captain last season, averaging 12.5 points and 9.5 rebounds per game.

The graduate was also named Preseason All-ACC in October and will return as a captain during the 2024-25 year.

As the UNC player with the most experience, Ustby will serve as a leader both in the locker room and on the court.

Even as a top-three scorer on the team for the last three consecutive years, Ustby thinks there is still work to be done.

After North Carolina’s exit from the NCAA tournament in March following a 88-41 loss to eventual national champion South Carolina, Ustby was in no rush to decide whether to come back for a fifth year or not.

Head Coach Courtney Banghart was the first person she decided to tell, and the coach was not surprised.

“Well, Alyssa was never going to leave,” Banghart said. “We knew that.”

After the initial excitement, Banghart suggested that Ustby “get back to work.”

So, she did.

Ustby wanted to completely restructure her 3-point shot. Banghart developed a plan to make this come to fruition.

“My goal [was] to piss her off,” Banghart said.

They broke everything down, starting inside the key and moving out to long-range shots beyond the arc. Ustby didn’t even leave the paint for the first few weeks. From Banghart’s perspective, Ustby never learned how to properly shoot, and they had to change that.

Even if Ustby felt ready to shoot from a new position, Banghart wouldn’t let her move to another spot on the court until she also agreed. Banghart wanted to go as slow as possible.

In total, Ustby attempted over 10,000 shots a week according to Banghart. During the four hours that NCAA athletes are allowed to practice a week, the forward only focused on shooting. Ustby did not attend a single team workout until late-June. She remained to the side, putting up shots individually.

Ustby never questioned her coach’s methods and eventually, the work paid off. She is now confident in her 3-point shot, which adds a whole new level to her game. Ustby only made three 3-pointers out of 12 total attempts last season.

“It’s hard, as an athlete, to not focus on the things that you lack



DTH FILE/LARA CROCHIK

UNC graduate guard/forward Alyssa Ustby (1) shoots the ball during the game against South Carolina on Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023.

and you have to remember the things that you’re good at,” Ustby said. “Because I worked so hard to develop my shot, I finally feel like a weight’s been lifted off of me.”

In addition to restructuring her shot, there’s another thing weighing on Ustby’s mind: her legacy.

“She cares so much about the ‘Carolina’ across her chest,” Banghart said. “She’s not from North Carolina, but she’ll call this place home now. She’s selfless, but she’s tough.”

Ustby wants to leave behind a certain kind of culture — one of

passion, competition, connection and determination to be better.

This year’s team is making strides to connect with each other. The players often gather for movie nights and to watch “Love Island.” But the connection is not forced. Ustby said this is the most natural chemistry that she has ever felt with a team, and she’s worked to create it.

“That’s all I can ask for,” Ustby said.

And even when she’s no longer making plays with teammates who call her “Meemaw,” there’s a certain UNC she wants to return to. One

that she’s crafted over time at UNC and will continue to cultivate.

“When I come back in a couple years, or five years, 10 years, whatever it may be, I [want to] come back and I still can see it, and I can feel it,” Ustby said. “I might not know all the girls personally by name, when I come back to check out any new updates in the facilities or stuff like that, or get to say, ‘Hi’ to the team, but I’ll be able to tell.”

X: @aplancaster\_

## RECOVERY

# After injuries, Ciera Toomey finds new love for basketball

Redshirt first-year returns to play following rehab

By Cade Shoemaker

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The North Carolina women’s basketball team installed a new rule ahead of the 2024-25 season: no player is allowed to ride an electric scooter around campus.

The order came after an accident sidelined UNC’s five-star recruit, Ciera Toomey, for the entirety of her first-year season. Before Live Action at the Dean E. Smith Center last year, she fell off her scooter and tore ligaments in her right wrist. The injury required surgery, and Toomey was forced to take a medical redshirt year.

“Scooters are made for people that are my size,” head coach Courtney Banghart said. “They don’t understand that they are so much bigger than the average scooter driver. So we don’t ride those anymore.”

Now, a year removed from the incident, Toomey is healthy and ready to place her mark on UNC basketball. The stretch big is learning from preseason All-ACC forward Alyssa Ustby with a renewed mindset to never take the game of basketball for granted — one of many takeaways from her time in rehab.

Toomey’s almost 600-day absence since her last competitive game — between a lingering knee injury from high school and then her wrist injury — gave her a unique perspective on basketball



DTH/VIYADA SOUKTHAVONE

UNC first-year forward Ciera Toomey (21) answers questions during media day on Friday, Oct. 25.

she didn’t have before. The Pennsylvania native admitted it restored a love for the game that she had lost touch with.

“Until you experience something like that, you don’t really understand how much you love the sport until it’s gone,” Toomey said. “It’s like anything, you don’t know you love it till you lose it.”

Luckily, Toomey was not alone in her rehab. Fellow redshirt first-year Laila Hull also sat out the entirety of last season with a knee injury. The two bonded over their shared trials

in recovery while spending time together as roommates.

For each of them, the importance of sharing the same emotional, physical and mental challenges that come from long-term rehab was a blessing. Hull mentioned how sound and level-headed Toomey remained throughout the whole process.

“Not many people have somebody in their corner like that, that can help them through [rehab] and know exactly what you’re going through,” Hull said. “I’m very, very grateful to Ciera.”

In her return, Toomey has taken full advantage of her matchup with Ustby each day in practice. Not only does guarding one of the nation’s best forwards make Toomey better, but during practice, Ustby is always providing advice to improve the budding redshirt first-year’s game.

So much so that Banghart told Toomey she should buy the graduate forward dinner every night to repay her for the priceless advice she gives.

“My goal is to basically dump all my knowledge that I’ve gained

throughout the last four years from playing in this conference and in NCAA tournaments, and give that all to her so she can have an incredible career,” Ustby said.

In her final season for UNC, Ustby also revealed how she sees Toomey to be her potential successor. And it’s a role Toomey hasn’t taken lightly.

“All the knowledge she’s passing on to me, I hope that just peeks through and I’m able to become as good, or even as half as good a player that she is,” Toomey said.

If Toomey truly is Ustby’s successor, then the Tar Heels want to focus on a gradual buildup that puts her on the most successful path for herself and the future of UNC basketball.

As for what Banghart expects from her, the head coach sees Toomey as an impact player, offering versatility in the frontcourt. At media day, Banghart was quick to mention Toomey’s greatest asset: being a true, three-level scorer with good passing that stretches the floor as a forward.

However, North Carolina’s coaching staff doesn’t expect her to shine right away. Taking into account her absence from competitive basketball, Banghart reiterated an analogy: Toomey should first hit singles before the home run ball.

“We are not hitting a home run right away,” Banghart said. “Our job is to get her really, really good, game by game, year by year. So I know that I’ve been waiting a long time too, but I’ve got to be disciplined with that as well.”

X: @cadeshoemaker23

## TRANSITION

## Jordan Zubich moves from small town to DI basketball

Four-star guard wears No. 3 to honor Minnesota hometown

By Shannen Horan  
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Jordan Zubich is wearing something different entering her first season at UNC.

After sporting No. 4 for four years, the first-year guard decided to wear No. 3 since redshirt first-year Laila Hull claimed Zubich's former number.

But her reasoning behind the decision goes beyond the number being leftover. Zubich decided to wear No. 3 to honor her childhood best friend, Hali Savela, who donned the number in high school.

"That's so special," Savela said, tearing up. "It was quite something."

Zubich is a four-star guard from Mountain Iron, Minn. She was ranked No. 69 in the class of 2024 and is the all-time leading scorer at Mountain Iron-Buhl High School with over 3,000 points. Zubich narrowed her college options down to six offers — Utah, Ohio State, Minnesota, Nebraska, UNC and

Creighton — before committing to North Carolina in February 2023.

"I think the story really makes it special, like my middle name being Carolina," Zubich said. "But obviously you're here for four years, so it has to be a lot more than what your name is. But I remember stepping on campus and just feeling like I was really at home. I think coach Banghart does an amazing job recruiting good humans and not just good basketball players, which makes a world of difference."

The reason behind the number dates back to elementary school.

Zubich and Savela met in kindergarten and were placed on the same basketball team. They played together all throughout high school, creating a special bond both on and off the court in the process. Their high school head coach Jeffrey Buffetta, who has been the coach for 25 years, said the two were always tied together.

Zubich said that No. 3 fits her. She likes to shoot a lot of threes, it reminds her of her home state and it represents Savela.

Mountain Iron-Buhl High School is not a school that is known for producing basketball talent.

In a graduating class of just 41 people, Zubich made a name for



UNC first-year guard Jordan Zubich (3) answers questions during the media day in the practice gym at Carmichael Arena on Friday, Oct. 25.

herself and the school as one of the premier players in Minnesota.

"We haven't had people be recruited [Division] I here as long as I've been here," Buffetta said. "So it was fun to see coaches come around and watch open gyms and get some phone calls from them. Jordan was a very easy person to talk about when they called."

Zubich gained national recognition by playing AAU at the Minnesota Fury,

the same program graduate forward Alyssa Ustby played for. Zubich had to drive three hours to attend practice for the Fury, but her parents didn't mind. Her family knew it was a dream of hers to play collegiately.

With that goal in mind, Zubich was always in the gym working on her game. She woke up early for practice. Then, she'd go to school, followed by another practice. And after the final

practice wrapped up, she attended shoot around with the boy's team in the evenings. Savela said she grinds like nobody else. Any free moment Zubich had was spent bettering herself mentally or physically.

"She's one of those kids that never missed an open gym," Buffetta said. "Always shot on her own. Always put in the extra time that was needed to be successful."

This led her to shoot over 50 percent from the 3-point line over her high school and club career — a statistic that head coach Courtney Banghart said was "money."

Zubich was recruited for her shooting talent but has been working on playing outside of her comfort zone. Banghart stops practice if Zubich doesn't shoot the ball when she's open.

The first-year has adjusted to the learning curve of collegiate play with the help of her new teammates. They've made it easy to go from a small high school to a top-25 Division I program.

"I feel like I've definitely grown a lot," Zubich said. "I still have a lot more growing to do. But just having great teammates and great coaches, they've made the transition a lot easier than I thought it was going to be."

X: @dthsports

## COMEBACK

## Redshirt first-year hopes to bounce back from previous injury

Laila Hull returns after labrum surgery on right shoulder

By Alexandra Jones  
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During an individual summer workout in 2023, redshirt first-year Laila Hull was going through the motions of dribbling when she suddenly felt a pop in her right shoulder. She then went to visit the UNC team trainer, Jodi Schneider, who advised her to get a MRI.

While on a beach trip with the team, Hull received a crushing phone call.

The MRI revealed a torn labrum in her right shoulder, which would require surgery and a recovery time of six to seven months.

Hull calculated her recovery timeline — landing her tentative return in the middle of ACC play and setting her back compared to her teammates. She was devastated when it dawned on her that she would not be able to play her first season at UNC.

"It was really hard to cope with, just cause you're a senior in high school, you're an incoming freshman, you have all these big hopes and dreams about what your freshman season is going to be like, and then you just ended up not having one," Hull said.

Hull, a versatile guard hailing from Zionsville, Indiana, looks to use her 6-foot-1 frame to bolster UNC's defensive rebounding numbers and post up smaller guards — as well as contribute efficiency from the beyond the arc. And after watching from the sidelines last year, Hull is eager to return to the court and have an immediate impact.

The 2023 Indiana Miss Basketball averaged 22.4 points and 8.3 rebounds in her senior season at Zionsville High School. However, these impressive numbers don't show that Hull's struggle with her shoulder started during her senior year.

"I never really thought it was that serious at first," Hull said. "I thought it would be something



UNC redshirt first-year guard Laila Hull (4) comes onto the court at the 'Live Action with Carolina Basketball' event on Oct. 13, 2023.

I had to play through because I had been doing it for months."

With the support of the UNC staff and her family, Hull determined that the best decision was for her to redshirt and focus on her health.

Luckily, Hull did not have to face this reality alone. Her roommate and fellow first-year, Ciera Toomey, sat right beside her with a wrist injury.

"We've shared a lot together and kind of a lot of the same experiences," Hull said. "Just like the ups and downs of being injured and having to navigate through that mentally and physically."

The coaching staff saw potential for Hull to grow and adapt to the college game over her redshirt year. She learned how to take care of her body. Once she was cleared mid-season, she still practiced with the team.

But, because it was her dominant shoulder, she had to relearn how to dribble and shoot.

This year, she guards graduate forward Alyssa Ustby in practice. She still focuses on her ball-handling and shooting.

Head coach Courtney Banghart knows Hull's transition and on-court development will be an important factor for UNC this season.

"I know she's itching to finally get a chance to play somebody else besides us, which she's been doing for a while now," Banghart said. "But

she's gotten her body stronger. Again, all that time off helps because now she's stronger and more physical."

And Hull is no stranger to growth. Her journey began when she was forced to grow up fast — being placed on a 17U AAU team as a rising eighth grader.

Danny Riego, Hull's former AAU coach, said he knew she was going to be special as soon as he extended this invitation.

"Everything was effectiveness with her," Riego said. "She was effective at Zionsville. She was effective when she played on our basketball team. When she played at other AAU programs, she was effective. She just needed the opportunity to be able to do it at very high levels against really good players."

Hull said that her year on the sidelines allowed her to enter this upcoming season more "mentally sound" than she has been in a while. During the entirety of last season, Hull noted how she developed a better teammate mindset — mindfully shifting her perspective outwards to focus on others.

"Being strictly a teammate, strictly somebody who was cheering other people on — it was very, very eye-opening," Hull said.

X: @alexjdjones\_

## ENCOURAGEMENT

## Former walk-on develops voice

Sydney Barker received a scholarship in February

By Connor Gould  
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When Sydney Barker found out she had earned a scholarship on the UNC women's basketball team, a range of emotions went through her mind.

Disbelief. Gratitude. It was all surreal. Even now, she can't put it into words.

Barker, originally a walk-on, earned an opportunity that few ever experience.

In February, head coach Courtney Banghart shared the news to the now-sophomore guard in the locker room. When they heard, her teammates went crazy.

"Sydney had the opportunity to go to a lot of other schools and be a star at other schools," redshirt junior guard Kayla McPherson said. "But she followed her dream, and she's here now, and she's helped us out a lot. I've really appreciated having her here."

Barker, a long-time Tar Heel supporter and attendee of North Carolina basketball camps growing up, is reaping the rewards of her hard work and commitment. And now in her second year, she's looking to impact the team in whatever way possible. The trust that has been bestowed in her has sparked a flame in Barker to continue to grow as an individual player and as a teammate.

"I just felt like the coaches believed in me to give me that [scholarship]," Barker said. "So I feel like that motivates me to work even harder."

In the offseason, Barker focused on getting stronger, improving ball handling under pressure and speeding up her shot.

In her first season as a Tar Heel, the 5-foot-7 guard clocked a total of 44 minutes, shooting 50 percent from the field on eight

attempts. A highlight moment of the 2023-24 season was her knockdown 3-pointer late in the third quarter against Duke in a 63-59 win.

Barker's love for the game is recognized by coaches and players alike — it shines through in moments of high energy, especially when she can be a vocal leader.

"You always hear her voice, as small as she is," senior center Maria Gakdeng said.

The sophomore guard's focus for the upcoming season is to be the best version of herself so that her teammates can be the best versions of themselves.

"I think my role is just gonna be showing up every day and being the best teammate I can be and just add in whatever I can add to that day," Barker said.

To Barker, being the best teammate possible requires a balance. It can vary between encouragement, being loud or knowing each teammate on a personal level.

Off the court, she strives to be close friends with all her teammates.

Barker lives in Ram Village with the first-year players and makes sure that nobody is left out of an activity, whether that's watching a movie, going to the N.C. State Fair or getting dinner.

"Whenever there's something going on she'll bring them with us," Gakdeng said.

Barker and the rest of the women's team will adjust as bumps in the road happen, but with better dribbling, ball control and a quicker shot, Barker is using her growth on and off the court to be the versatile leader that UNC needs.

"She's an everything kid," Banghart said. "She brings energy the right way, every single day. She lifts each kid up individually, she's grateful for everything you ever do for her."

X: @c\_gouldielocks

## STANDOUT

# 17-year-old guard Lanie Grant adjusts to college after reclassifying

Five-star recruit joins team a year earlier than expected

By Dylan Stalter

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Courtney Banghart made the trip from Greensboro to Richmond's Siegel Center following an early elimination at the ACC tournament in March.

The UNC women's basketball head coach went to watch James River High School play in the Virginia state championship, led by then-junior North Carolina commit Lanie Grant.

Grant left her heart on the court. The 5-foot-9 guard dropped 40 points in what was a losing effort for James River, falling to Princess Anne High School. Banghart knew she had something special on her hands.

"I literally texted her mom and said, 'Your kid can help us right now,'" Banghart said. "That's all I said."

That's all that needed to be said. 48 hours later, Grant reclassified to join the Tar Heels.

The Virginia native was counting down the days until she could put on her Carolina Blue uniform. Considering she committed to North Carolina at 14 years old, before she even checked in to a high school basketball game, those days had piled up. Coming from a family of longtime UNC fans, the choice was easy for the five-star recruit.



DTH/VIVADA SOUKTHAVONE

UNC first-year guard Lanie Grant (0) answers questions during media day at Carmichael Arena on Friday, Oct. 25.

"I wanted to be a part of this particular team because I believe we can do some really special things," Grant said.

With its staff and cast of teammates, the legacy of UNC hoops and its competitive program made Chapel Hill the perfect spot for the young star. "I'm telling you, the kid — all she cares about is competing,"

Banghart said, "and so she knew that this would be a place where she could really compete."

Grant received an invite to Stephen Curry's elite "Curry Camp," where she built a connection with the ten-time NBA All-Star. She picked his brain on shooting and confidence. Off the court, Curry also gave Grant some pointers on her golf swing.

The guard continued to learn from the best, attending the NBA All-Star weekend with all-access. She also competed on both the U16 and U17 USA basketball rosters, earning the coveted gold medal twice.

Although she has excelled at being able to put her head down and attack the rim, she is now looking to mold her playing style to the next level. While the

process is more of a marathon than a sprint, the guard is taking it day by day.

"It's been hard in all the right ways," Grant said. "I'm being challenged on the court, but there's been so much support and so much love."

Taking on the challenge of the college transition a year early is an admirable feat, and the 17-year-old has continued to impress.

"She's a hard worker, I think that's the first thing that pops into my mind," sophomore guard Reniya Kelly said. "I think she goes hard on and off the court. I think she's very determined, ambitious, and she knows what she wants."

A major part of this journey is finding her role. Grant grew up as the star of every court she played on, but now she finds herself immersed in a roster full of talent.

With that being a huge factor in her decision, Grant knows what's in store for her and is ready to face it head on.

"She felt like she was ready for the next challenge," Banghart said, before later adding, "She felt that one more year of high school wouldn't have gotten her more ready."

Handling this process requires maturity — the type of maturity that the head coach admires from her team's youngest player.

"She should've come two years ago," Banghart joked. "She's more mature than I am."

X: @dylanstalterr

## TRANSFER

## Grace Townsend finds perfect fit at UNC

Graduate guard brings experience in final collegiate year

By Tess Alongi

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Four years ago, Grace Townsend was a 5-foot-5 walk-on for the University of Richmond. By March 2024, she was one of two players head coach Courtney Banghart targeted out of the portal.

Following a 469-point season that earned Townsend Atlantic 10 All Championship Team and All-Conference First Team honors last year, the graduate guard's entrance into the transfer portal caught the attention of many elite programs. But Banghart's unique approach to recruiting stood out to Townsend while searching for the perfect fit in her final year of collegiate basketball.

"When I went in [the transfer portal], I talked to Coach Banghart the entire time," Townsend said. "Most of the time when you go in the portal you talk to assistant coaches."

Unlike typical portal discussions focused on serving a role for the team, Townsend's first conversation with Banghart was different. During her first call with Banghart, the two didn't discuss basketball once.

Instead, Banghart worked to know Townsend on a personal level. The two talked almost everyday after Townsend's entrance into the transfer portal. So, when the guard came to Chapel Hill, she felt at home. "When we got on campus, it becomes, now we know each other, let's talk about basketball," Townsend said.

Although Townsend considers herself an introvert, immediately after talking to the rest of the team during her official visit, she said she felt so comfortable.

Two days later, she canceled her other scheduled visits to Michigan State and Maryland. On the way back

home, her mom, Michelle, became emotional at what UNC meant for Townsend as her final step.

"As soon as I left, me and my parents both knew this was it," Townsend said.

Now, it has been over five months since she announced her decision to become a Tar Heel. Even with four years of collegiate experience, Townsend is learning to adapt to the North Carolina system.

The guard said she almost felt like a first-year all over again, molding to her new team. But Banghart continues to support her during her adjustment.

"She's encouraged me to be more vocal, to [get] comfortable [and] play the way I know how to play," Townsend said.

And Townsend knows how to play at a high level. Last year, Townsend helped lead her team to an Atlantic 10 Tournament Championship win, as well as a regular season title.

Graduate forward Alyssa Ustby said Townsend has the experience and knowledge that teams want in players.

"Especially since we lost so many girls [from last season], it's really important to have other girls that can come in and contribute at the volume that Grace can, with that tournament experience," Ustby said.

On the court, Banghart said Townsend is probably the fastest kid she's seen. Townsend recorded the quickest times in the team mile and the team sprints. Her ability to play fast allows her to push to the floor as a point guard.

Outside of her basketball skills, Banghart expressed high admiration for Townsend's personality, pointing to her coachability and the joy she brings to the team.

"She's just what we needed," Banghart said.

As she prepares to enter her final year of eligibility, Townsend is determined to make every moment count.

"This is my last year," Townsend said. "I want to go as far as I can and compete as hard as I can."

X: @dthsports

## TEAM DYNAMIC

## Trayanna Crisp looks to return to winning tradition with the Tar Heels

The junior guard brings her 'Tray Speed' to the backcourt

By Sarah Stephens

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After two tough seasons at Arizona State, Trayanna Crisp was ready for a change of scenery. From the desert to the greenery of Chapel Hill. From losing to being back at a program that wins.

Now in Carolina Blue, the junior guard is set to bring her strength, power and iconic "Tray Speed" to the UNC's backcourt.

"We're here to win," Crisp said.

After facing 40 losses at ASU, Crisp is embracing a fresh start at North Carolina, where she'll add depth and versatility to an elite roster with championship aspirations. Her journey to North Carolina marks a pivotal moment for both Crisp and the team, as they look to capitalize on her talent in the highly competitive ACC, which features six teams in the top 25. At 20 years old, Crisp led Arizona State in 3-pointers per game last season, while finishing second on the team in scoring, averaging 12.1 points. She also contributed 2.1 assists and 1.3 steals per game.

"She's like an old school Sherman Douglas and like a Magic Johnson," head coach Courtney Banghart said. "She can really get into bodies. She's very physical. She's an excellent facilitator. She can really shoot it."

The combo guard from Goodyear, Arizona dominated on the high school court. The Millennium Tigers made high school history in Arizona as the fifth girls basketball program to secure four consecutive state championships, and the first to achieve this feat in one of the state's top three conferences.

But only one player from the original title-winning 2019 team remained on the court during that time: Crisp.



DTH/AVA SHARON

UNC junior guard Trayanna Crisp (14) speaks to the press during the media day on Friday, Oct. 25 at Carmichael Arena.

To Millennium High School basketball coach Danny Soliman, the guard has always possessed a "star" quality game.

"There's a different kind of switch she has when it's time to compete so good luck if you're on the other side of the ball," Soliman said in an email. "Winning is a skill so whether it's in the weight room, a drill in practice or game time, she competes like a winner."

The level of losses in both Crisp's seasons at ASU is what ultimately led her to enter the transfer portal.

"It's more intense here," Crisp said. "There's a purpose behind everything."

The challenges she faced at Arizona State have equipped Crisp with a resilient mindset.

When she first came to UNC, Crisp struggled to finish one of the team's conditioning drills. Now, according to Banghart, she has risen to the challenge of the program's expectations.

Senior forward Maria Gakdeng said that Crisp has been the most surprising player to watch, and her teammates share similar sentiments.

"Tray has done a great job with her growth over the summer," graduate

forward Alyssa Ustby said. "She's connected with all the girls, and she's a really big part of our offense."

Banghart only had positive things to say about the team's chemistry with one another. Although it's not a word she throws around lightly, Banghart said this team is "really connected."

According to Ustby, the group's unique bond stems from their genuine enjoyment of each other's company. She said the returning players have been wonderful in helping the new transfers feel welcome, adding that Crisp "feels at home here" as a member of the Tar Heels.

"The best thing is the teammate environment, the coaches have welcomed me in," Crisp said. "I just feel like I fit so well here."

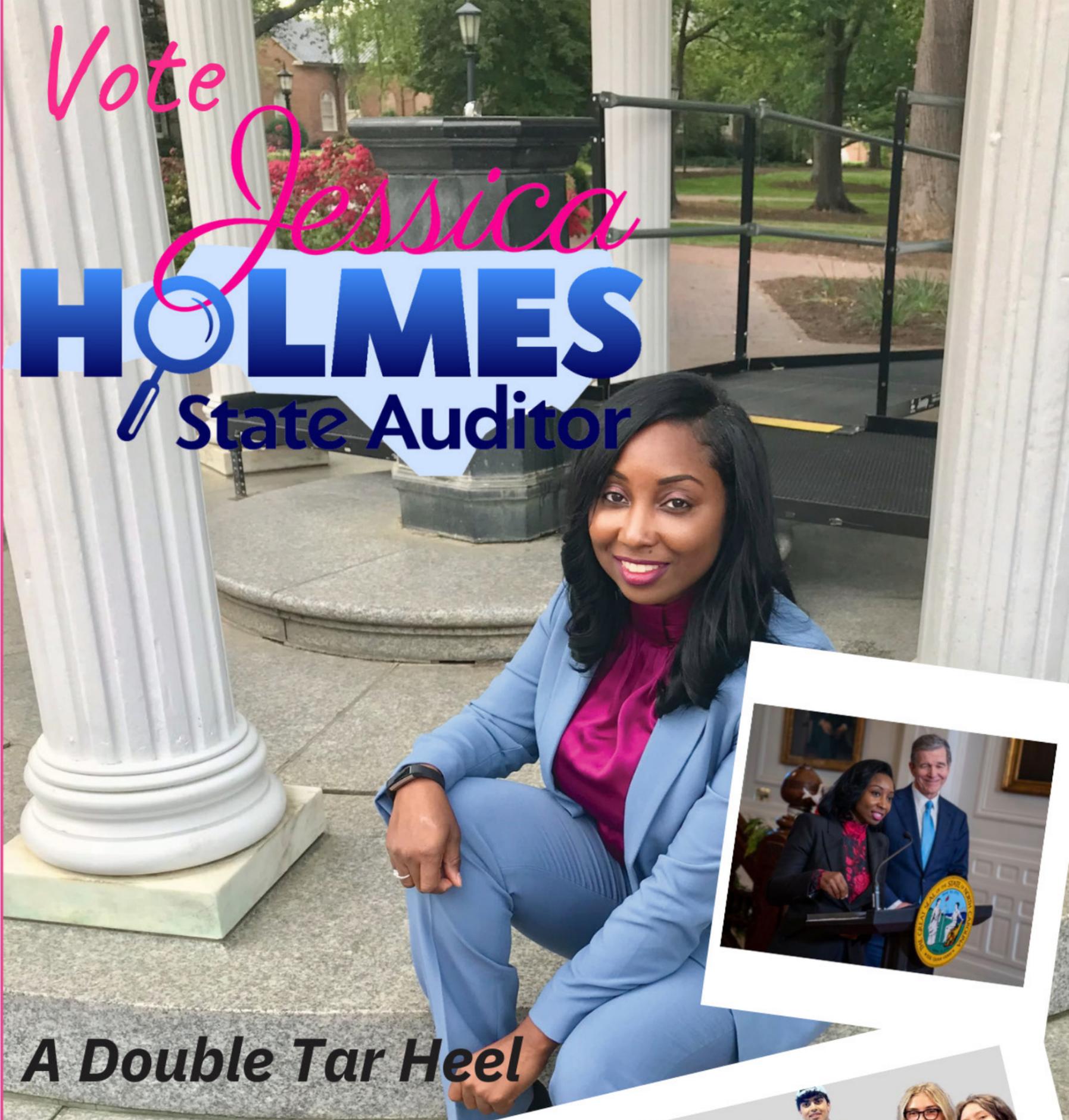
Now back at a program that resembles the winning tradition she became familiar with in high school, Crisp is ready to have an impact on a group that she's become so close with.

And even while she might have struggled at first, Banghart believes Crisp will play a pivotal role.

"She'll be a lot of people's favorite in Carmichael."

X: @dthsports

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