BALTIMORE, Md. — Four All-Americans. Four positions. After the North Carolina women's lacrosse team was eliminated by Boston College in the Final Four a year ago, head coach Jenny Levy met individually with each of her then-seniors to discuss their future with the program.

Goalkeeper Taylor Moreno, midfielder Ally Mastroianni, defender Emma Trenchard and attacker Jamie Ortega all took no more than 30 seconds to confirm their return to Chapel Hill.

"It was probably the best decision of my life," Mastroianni said. "The people and the place, it was just too good to leave."

Now, the Tar Heels stand at the pinnacle of college lacrosse after defeating the Eagles, 12-11, in the national championship.

Perhaps no group of Tar Heels feels greater satisfaction than Levy's veterans, who have anchored the program since 2018. After enduring postseason heartbreak year after year, the seasoned squad finally earned its redemption.

"I just cried tears of gratitude," Ortega said. "It wasn't of sadness this time."

Each player thrived in their role throughout the title run. It started with Moreno, North Carolina's cage protector, and rightfully so — no Tar Heel on the active roster had been under Levy's tutelage longer. As a special reminder of Moreno's seniority, the team even has a nickname for its star goalkeeper.

"We call her 'Grandpa,'" Levy said. "Because she's in her sixth year."

"So perhaps it's only fitting that Moreno's job entailed minimal movement for most of the game. But her 11 saves, including a late stop against the country's best player, Charlotte North, demonstrated elite reflexes and instincts that were anything but ancient."

"I knew going into this game that I was going to need to have my teammates' backs," Moreno said.

Then there was the mobile Mastroianni, who never seemed to tire out as she dashed all over Homewood Field. On offense, she'd attack the cage aggressively while being hacked by the Eagle back line. In the midfield, Mastroianni would go against North on draw controls. On defense, the ACC Midfielder of the Year would disrupt clear attempts by sneaking behind maroon jerseys and checking opposing sticks to force turnovers.

When asked if she felt the game highlighted the importance of two-way midfielders, the exhausted Mastroianni could only laugh.

"Ask my legs," she joked. "They say yes."

Meanwhile, the nimble 5-foot-4 Trenchard, ACC Defender of the Year, was tasked with tailing North all game — matching the scoring machine's explosive first step, weaving around Eagle picks and minimizing fouls.

"(Emma) and Charlotte are going to be happy to be on the same U.S. team this summer," Levy said. "They won't have to battle against each other."

Thanks to Trenchard's work, North was held scoreless in the final 17 minutes of the game, diminishing the chances of a Boston College comeback.

And finally, Ortega, North Carolina's all-time leading scorer, whose game kept the attacking unit focused during tight stretches of the championship game. The fifth-year had been double teamed or face guarded for most of the afternoon, but still found ways to contribute.

With 12:21 left in the game, a forced turnover by Mastroianni led to a heave downfield to Ortega, who caught the pass in stride. For once, all that stood between the two-time ACC Attacker of the Year and the net was Eagle goalkeeper Rachel Hall.

Ortega patiently pump faked once, causing Hall to waver for a split second. Then, she buried the shot into the top right corner of the cage, converting the fast break opportunity to keep her team in the game at 9-9.

"(It) doesn't really matter how many points I have," she said. "It depends what the end result is. If that means setting picks or just bringing that spark, then I'm fine with that."

Ortega, Trenchard, Mastroianni and Moreno. Four players, four seasons of denial. Four decisions to run it back one last year with a final shot at winning it all.

And as of Sunday, four national champions.
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WEEKEND RECAP

UNC pulls off comeback in semifinal

By Evan Rogers
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BALTIMORE, Md. — All seemed lost with just under eleven minutes remaining in North Carolina's Final Four bout against No. 4 Northwestern, as the Tar Heels found themselves trailing by seven goals.

As the Northwestern fans erupted, head coach Jenny Levy shook her head. “They came out and punched us in the mouth,” Levy said. “For me, I was putting it all in for (my teammates).”

After a quick two-goal run from the Tar Heels made the score 14-9, a key woman-up opportunity for North Carolina was killed by Northwestern, terminating the momentum generated by UNC as the Northwesterners erupted. Geiersbach sprang to life.

“Geiersbach simply could not be stopped,” said Maddie Hoffer, made the decision attacker who, thanks to a FaceTime call to the now-legendary Geiersbach — that ended up paying off season-end and earn the program’s first national title appearance in six years.

Graduate student attacker Sam Geiersbach (36) celebrates with graduate student attacker Andie Aldave (31) after scoring the tying goal.

“Sam Geiersbach scored four unanswered goals to seal ‘Tar Heels’ victory,” Levy said. “I didn’t have the team ready to roll.”

Punch is an understatement. Within the first period, the Wildcats engineered a quick 6-0 lead and had the top-ranked Tar Heels facing their largest deficit of the season. Midway through the fourth quarter, the margin had increased to seven.

After a quick two-goal run from the Tar Heels made the score 14-9, a key woman-up opportunity for North Carolina was killed by Northwestern, terminating the momentum generated by UNC as the Northwesterners erupted. Geiersbach sprang to life.

“‘As time was dwindling down, I realized this might be my last go at it,’ she said. ‘For me, I was putting it all in for (my teammates).’”

Frothing behind the cage, Geiersbach peered around the right side, spun by her defender and swirled a desperation shot inside the left post to cut the lead to four with just over five minutes remaining. Twenty-seven seconds later, Growney put the ball in the net. Not even 30 seconds after that, Geiersbach delivered again.

“After every goal, we would look each other in the eyes and say, ‘I believe in you, you got this,’” Moreno said. “Thank god we saving dividends in May.”

As the season looked to be all but lost, it was that preseason FaceTime the team pointed to — that call to the now-legendary Geiersbach — that ended up paying off season-saving dividends in May.

“‘I think that FaceTime did pretty well,’ Moreno said. ‘Thank god we did (convince Sam).’”
Scottie Rose Growney

Growney grew into a consistent offensive threat in five seasons at UNC, becoming a key part of the Tar Heels’ attacking unit. She flexed her versatility early on, making plays on both ends as a reserve in the midfield. As a sophomore, Growney had a breakout performance in the NCAA Tournament, scoring 10 goals in three games as UNC made a run to the Final Four. As a junior, Growney was named a First-Team All-American by Inside Lacrosse. She was second on the team in scoring that past season with 16 goals.

Growney had multiple memorable performances over the course of her long career in Carolina Blue. In 2020, Growney scored a career-high six goals in a victory over No. 3 Maryland, and on her senior night in April she notched five goals and two assists.

Ally Mastroianni

The two-time ACC Midfielder of the Year can truly do it all — she’s a master of the draw and is relentless on offense, able to get to the net with agile footwork and tricky shot fakes. The midfielder can also force turnovers and disrupt plays on the other side of the field, making her a serious problem for opposing offenses.

As a senior, Mastroianni led the team in draw controls with 112, scored 31 goals and caused nine turnovers on her way to being named a unanimous First-Team All-American.

Mastroianni returned to UNC as a graduate player this past season, recording career highs in nearly every category. She was named a finalist for the Tewaaraton Award, given to the nation’s best college lacrosse player.

Emma Trenchard

Few college athletes can claim the durability that Trenchard has shown over her five-year career as a Tar Heel. She was named a starter in her very first season with the program and has started all 88 games that she has played at UNC.

The two-time ACC Defender of the Year and four-time All-American is revered as one of the best one-on-one defenders in the country. Trenchard’s ability to scoop up ground balls and use her speed to start the fast break helps the team turn defense into offense.

In her final season at UNC, Trenchard caused 12 turnovers and picked up 23 ground balls. She led a defensive unit that was top-five in the country for scoring defense. In the fourth quarter of the championship game, Trenchard held Charlotte North scoreless.

Taylor Moreno

Moreno has been around longer than any other player on this UNC team, redshirting in 2017 and playing five seasons for the Tar Heels. Over that time, the goalkeeper has served as the anchor for the defense, and her 70 career wins inside the cage are the most in program history.

As a redshirt first-year, Moreno was named the ACC Tournament MVP after tallying 11 saves in a championship win over previously undefeated Boston College. During her senior season, she was awarded ACC Defender of the Year and was a Tewaaraton Award finalist.

Moreno continued her dominance in goal during her graduate season. During the 2022 championship run, Moreno recorded 10 saves against Stony Brook and 11 saves in the championship bout against Boston College.

Growney scores key goal in emotional victory

By Evan Rogers

Tar Heel ran. Almost every UNC player ambushed the far-side cage where graduate goalkeeper Taylor Moreno wanted to celebrate their perfect season, capped with a 12-11 win over No. 3 Boston College in the national championship game.

Almost everyone ran. Everyone except three figures. Fifth-year Jamie Ortega and sophomores Caitlyn Wurzburger lagged behind.

The pair helped clinch the title with a game-winning goal.

As time expired and their teammates began to flood onto the field, Ortega said, I was like, ’Oh my God, we did this.’

As Wurzburger guided UNC’s all-time leading scorer towards the jumble of their teammates, one player stayed far behind the rest — Scottie Rose Growney.

The fifth-year attacker had struggled for the majority of the afternoon. Forcing wayward shots near the eight-meter line and coming up empty-handed on a point-blank opportunity, the typically efficient Growney had misfired on all three of her shot attempts. The struggles from Growney, and other members of North Carolina’s offense, resulted in an early fourth-quarter deficit. A deficit that stunted a last-ditching fury from the Tar Heels, who fell to Boston College in the 2021 NCAA semifinals. Still, UNC’s confidence never wavered.

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And midway through the final quarter, this resulted in a transition offense that netted two goals just a minute apart, propelling UNC to a 10-9 lead.

Now, all North Carolina needed was an insurance point. After a scramble for a goal ball wound up in the stick of graduate attacker Sam Geiersbach, the ball zipped across the turf to Growney. With Ortega and Wurzburger lined up on her left, an immediate pass by Growney to one of her teammates was expected.

Instead, the two Tar Heels cleared out. Darting across the field, the sea parted ways for Growney to operate in a one-on-one situation.

When an Eagle stick blocked early entry, Growney flipped directions and shuffled to her weak side. Here, an opening presented itself as the fifth-year fired a missile just three steps inside the eight-meter crease. The ball launched out of her pocket and nestled inside the top-right corner of the cage.

Cheers erupted as Growney back-peddled and threw her stick up in celebration. The late goal proved to be the difference in Sunday’s game and secured the program’s first undefeated season.

“We’ve lost a lot of one-goal games over the last couple of years,” head coach Jenny Levy said. “It was really neat to be in the other side of it.”

As the parade of North Carolina players ran across the field, themoire of their lives as national champions from the University of North Carolina,” she said.

“Thank you to everyone who followed us this season,” head coach Jenny Levy said. “We couldn’t have done it without you.”

Jamie Ortega

UNC’s all-time points leader has been a staple of the offense since she first arrived in Chapel Hill. In 2018, Ortega set the record for goals and points scored by a first-year and was named ACC Freshman of the Year.

After being named a First-Team All-American as a sophomore and Inside Lacrosse’s Co-National Player of the Year in a shortened junior campaign, Ortega began to solidify herself as an all-time great player. The crafty attacker is well-known for scoring in bunches. Her 3.67 career goals-per-game average is the highest in program history.

As a senior, Ortega broke UNC’s career goals record of 198. She ended her five-year career with 334 career goals, third-all-time in NCAA Division I history.
On Sunday, as the UNC women’s lacrosse team stormed Homewood Field to hoist a national championship trophy in the air, head coach Jenny Levy took a second to soak it all in. In just 10 years, Levy has been front row to this spectacle three separate times. In 2013, 2016 and now 2022, she’s led her program to the mountaintop and come out victorious in the final game of the season. The blue and white confetti, Powerade showers and commemorative T-shirts are nothing new to her. It’s not a shock to UNC fans either, a group that’s become accustomed to this level of athletic excellence after cheering on 57 national championship teams over the years. However, Levy’s third NCAA Championship, which was won 50 years after Title IX became law, symbolizes much more than just an outstanding 2022 season.

It was a win for that rag-tag team of recruits, transfers, club players and multi-sport athletes who first climbed their way to the Final Four in the team’s second and third years of existence. It’s a testament to the skill of Levy, the former All-American player who had only coached for a year before she was tasked with starting up the UNC women’s lacrosse program back in 1994. It’s a breath of fresh air for the Hall of Fame coach finally able to gift one of her most talented rosters a moment they’ll never forget.

It was a win for the scores of little girls at home watching the game — the first NCAA Women’s Lacrosse Championship to be aired on ESPN — who witnessed the stars of the sport playing at the highest level. Sunday’s title game marked a day where young women were astounded by the aggression of NCAA all-time leading scorer Charlotte North, and marveled at the poise of ACC Attacker of the Year Jamie Ortega. The championship game was a spectacle headlined by All-Americans Ally Mastroianni and Emma Trenchard, who alongside North and Ortega will train on an all-star national team this summer under USA Lacrosse head coach Levy. It was a win on Johns Hopkins University’s Homewood Field, a location synonymous with a rich lacrosse history traditionally centered in the Northeast. Thanks to Levy, it’s a stage that girls from the South may dream to play on one day.

Though oftentimes not encouraged to participate in sports from an early age, Levy handed countless young girls a stick and a new opportunity through field days with the Carolina Kids Club. At the high school level, she’s been outspoken about the NCHSAA’s scheduling of girls’ soccer and lacrosse in the same season, hoping to provide an opening for future athletes like Julia Dorsey who excel in both sports. The premier North Carolina women’s lacrosse club program that Levy established in 2005, Carolina Fever, has provided countless young phenoms the chance to display their talents at the national level.

While this year’s championship game will be commemorated for the culmination of a perfect season and a redemption run for the UNC’s lacrosse team, the legacy of its coach may be the most fitting way to remember this moment.

On Sunday, an all-time women’s coach reached the pinnacle of her sport for the third time with a women’s program she built from scratch. Thanks to Levy, UNC will celebrate 50 years of women’s athletics with a 41st national championship trophy placed in its case by a women’s team. And thanks to Levy’s inspiration of a future generation of female athletes, it surely won’t be the last.