

North Carolina beats Tulsa, 59-55

by Robyn Norwood
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Los Angeles Times

AUSTIN, Texas — The name is Joseph, not Joe.

Think Michael, not Mike. North Carolina is improbably, illogically, incomprehensibly back in the Final Four, and the Tar Heels did it with an echo of another era.

Freshman Joseph Forte scored 28 points Sunday as North Carolina won a 59-55 tussle with Tulsa in the NCAA South Regional final before 16,731 at the Erwin Center.

Now hear this: Michael Jordan never scored as many points in an NCAA Tournament game.

Jordan's best was 27 against Temple his final season.

"It feels good, but I'm no fool: I'm no Michael Jordan," Forte said. "Different team, different era."

Jordan averaged 13.5 points his freshman season, playing with James Worthy and Sam Perkins.

Forte averages 16.7 and is about to become the first freshman to lead North Carolina in scoring.

With quick-footed, big-hearted, but undersized Tulsa keying on 7-foot center Brendan Haywood, Forte, a 6-4 guard, scored off a variety of drives, stop-and-pop shots and mid-range jumpers.

Now he's on his way to the Final Four, where that Jordan fellow came through in 1982, if you know your history.

"Definitely. He hit the big shot," said Forte, who was born in 1981 and was known as Joe growing up but gave up his nickname when he got to college.

"I prefer to be called Joseph now, because as I get older it sounds more mature," said Forte, who didn't need to be reminded Jordan did something similar.

"Right. Smart move by Mr. Jordan."

Tulsa (32-5) wrangled with North Carolina down to the wire, defying logic early when 6-5 Eric Coley scored over the Tar Heels' 6-11 Kris Lang, and moments later when 6-2 Greg Harrington blocked a shot by 6-7 Julius Peppers.

But Tulsa's shooting deserted the Golden Hurricane as the game went on, and foul trouble by Coley and an awful spell in the second half let North Carolina pull ahead.

"Their offense didn't beat us. Not with 59 points," said Tulsa Coach Bill Self, whose team shot 37 percent. "It was our inability to get the ball in the basket that beat us today."

Tulsa was down 10 with 4:49 left

after a jump shot by Forte, but fought back at the end with rare steals off Tar Heel point guard Ed Cota.

Tony Heard's steal turned into a layup by Dante Swanson, then Swanson victimized Cota for a steal and dunk that left the lead at 55-52 with 1:03 to play.

A three-point basket with 21 seconds left by Swanson, who led Tulsa with 15 points off the bench, cut the lead to 57-55.

"It got a little shaky out there, and they were hitting some big shots, so I definitely got scared of them coming back," Forte said.

North Carolina made four of six free throws in the final 26 seconds, but had to withstand a missed three-point shot that David Shelton forced with seven seconds left before Jason Capel got the rebound and the Tar Heels finished it off at the line.

With that, North Carolina is on its way to an NCAA-record 15th Final Four, its sixth in the last 10 years, and easily its most befuddling: The Tar Heels entered the tournament with an 18-13 record and were seeded eighth in the region.

"I am so happy for our team and so proud of them," said Coach Bill Guthridge, who ended an emotional week by leaving for Kansas after the game to attend the funeral of his mother, Betty, who died Wednesday at age 96 after a long illness. He will return to North Carolina Monday night.

"The team really hung in there all year through some difficult times and helped keep me up," Guthridge said. "To be going to the Final Four is a real thrill for all of us. It's something we never get tired of."

Guthridge is in the Final Four for the second time in three years as coach. Cota is in his third in four years, and the freshmen and sophomores are in their first.

"It has been a long, strange trip," Lang said. "We have been considered underdogs in every game and we have been proving people wrong. We're in the Final Four now, but we can't be satisfied with that. We need to concentrate on a national championship."

The confident Forte is turning his eyes toward the title too, but he'll be required to carry the Tar Heels' heavy green training bag to Indianapolis.

It's part of the North Carolina tradition that freshmen should be seen and not heard, and sometimes not even seen. Jordan wasn't pictured on a preseason Sports Illustrated cover his freshman season for that reason.

This season, Forte was selected as the freshman to carry the bag by secret vote of the players.

Cota says it was Forte's cockiness

that decided it.

"I was just trying to get some attention, let the guys know I came here to play," Forte said.

"I said I would average like 12 points a game. They were like, 'Yeah, right, you're going to be passing it to the post, getting it to me.'"

Sunday afternoon, they got it to Forte, and he made 10 of 17 shots, nine of 10 inside the three-point line. He also grabbed eight rebounds and made seven of eight free throws.

The only miss made North Carolina sweat a bit, leading by three with four seconds left, but Forte made the crucial second free throw.

His only real rookie mistake came after the buzzer: He flung the game ball into the stands.

"It was just me getting caught up in the excitement and throwing it to the fans," he said. "They came all the way to Texas. I was just showing our appreciation."

On to Indianapolis, and for once, the Tar Heels can't fail to meet expectations.

"No one's expecting you to win, based on our season," Forte said. "Which I wouldn't have expected us to win, either. It's just no pressure."

No pressure, except not to forget that green trainer's bag.

Maybe the Tar Heels should lighten it a bit.

"Oh no," Guthridge said. "In fact, we may put some bricks in the bag."



TMS PHOTO

The University of North Carolina's Joseph Forte celebrates after the Tar Heels defeated Tulsa 59-55 Sunday afternoon in the South regional in Austin, Texas. With the win, North Carolina advances to the final four.

THEN THERE WERE FOUR

Florida
North Carolina



Michigan State
Wisconsin

Game time is 8:17 p.m. ET on CBS.

Saturday April 1, 2000
RCA Dome
Indianapolis, Indiana

Game Time is 5:42 p.m. ET on CBS.

Sixty-Four teams entered the tournament, all aspiring to be the next national champion. After upsets and unbelievable finishes, only four teams remain. Who will survive? Only time will tell.

North Carolina turnaround turns Guthridge from toad to prince

by Michael Wilbon
March 27, 2000
The Washington Post

Just three weeks ago, one topic dominated conversation at the ACC tournament in Charlotte: Bill Guthridge's expected departure from North Carolina. After the worst basketball season in many a year, would he be forced out or would he jump? Would Dean Smith intervene on behalf of his longtime lieutenant? Would Roy Williams leave Kansas and return to Chapel Hill where he, too, had assisted Smith? What if Williams didn't want to leave Kansas; would Larry Brown leave the 76ers to finish his distinguished career at North Carolina? Would the powers-that-be at Carolina ever look outside the family? Would they ever consider a guy such as Rick Pitino, should he want out of his Boston Celtics contract? They wouldn't ever consider a Dookie such as Tommy Amaker, even though he's one of the bright young coaches in America, would they? I mean, the Tar Heels were so uninspired, Carolina had to do something about Guthridge, right?

It's all we talked about. By we, I mean, oh, everybody: media folks, ACC officials, coaches and athletic department officials from other conference schools and, of course, the

fans who uttered some pretty brutal insults. It became all-consuming, particularly after North Carolina lost an opening-round tournament game to Wake Forest. Goodness, it didn't even look like a North Carolina team the way the players hoisted up crazy shots with no apparent fear of consequences from The Head Coach. There were editorials in state newspapers that said the Tar Heels didn't deserve an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament after that loss to Wake. And we all know who had to suffer the hit, right? Coach Gut. Uncle Bill. Nice guy, job too big.

When Smith, during one pep talk, reminded Guthridge that early-on Smith was hanged in effigy in North Carolina, Guthridge said, "Being hanged in effigy would be fine.... Just as long as they don't hang me for real."

No matter what happens this weekend in Indianapolis, Guthridge won't be hanged, he'll be serenaded, maybe given a parade. That's what four victories in March will do, change virtually everyone's perception, change a 62-year-old man's life. North Carolina and Guthridge, with 13 losses, are still vying for the national title.

This month alone is Hollywood stuff. March began for Carolina with the depressing loss to Wake Forest in

the ACC tournament. The Tar Heels beat Missouri in the first round of the NCAA tournament, then upset Stanford, the No. 1 seed in the South Region. But Guthridge had almost no time to savor making the Sweet 16 because last Wednesday his 96-year-old mother, Betty, died. She was buried Monday in Parsons, Kan. "I loved her. She was a wonderful mother," Guthridge said, "but she's really been out of it for five or six years. She went blind. She got Alzheimer's. She couldn't hear very well. So it was a real blessing she passed away. She wouldn't have wanted to live like that. I wish it could have happened sooner."

The Tar Heels already had become closer from dealing with the criticism following the 18-13 regular season. After all, one more loss and it would have been the most defeats since 1951-52. But after winning two games, then rallying around Guthridge in the wake of his mother's death, the Tar Heels found themselves on something of a crusade, and eliminated Tennessee in the regional semifinal, followed by Tulsa.

What happened? "We just became a team," point guard Ed Cota said. "We finally just got it together, and there can't be a better time for this."

Guthridge has been asked a hundred times how his team could go from performing so poorly late in the season to beating Missouri, Stanford, Tennessee and Tulsa. "I pushed the wrong buttons," he has said repeatedly. "It's my responsibility."

But the players have been quick to shoulder the blame, and they should. Cota turned into a turnover machine late in the season. Brendan Haywood and Kris Lang were loud-mouth trash-talkers who turned soft as Charmin when it came time to let their actions speak. Jason Capel was dazzling at times as a freshman, but didn't appear to get any better as a sophomore. A freshman, Joseph Forte, had to bail them out more times than a freshman should. "They don't scratch and claw like the North Carolina teams I always faced," one former ACC player said. "The only reason you know that's a Carolina team is by the uniforms. They don't play with any intensity."

Faced with such blunt criticism, the Tar Heels started some introspection. "Coach Guthridge is very kind," Haywood said. "He's taken some flak that he probably shouldn't have. The blame should have gone on us."

Even now, Guthridge protects his

players. He ripped his decision to leave Haywood in with four fouls against Tennessee. After Haywood fouled out, Guthridge said his decision "backfired."

Of course, not much is going wrong when you've won four straight in the middle of March. It has turned into the warm and fuzzy story of the biggest weekend of the season, even with the death of Betty Guthridge. Larry Brown just signed a new contract to stay in Philly. Everybody's talking about what wonderful freshmen and sophomores Roy Williams has at Kansas.

Tulsa Coach Bill Self noticed the difference between the North Carolina team he had studied on film and the one that defeated his team. "Lately, from the outside looking in," he said, "it looks like they're playing with greater passion."

Six days before the Final Four, I am again wondering about Bill Guthridge's potential departure from North Carolina basketball. I am wondering, if the Tar Heels win the national championship Monday night, whether Guthridge will call a news conference to announce he is going out on top of college basketball to provide this story with just about the only fitting ending.

Future of replay back in hands of NFL owners again

by Vito Stellino
The Baltimore Sun
March 26, 2000

With the Tampa Bay Buccaneers just 23 yards away from the winning touchdown with 47 seconds left in the National Football Conference title game in January, Coach Tony Dungy was talking on the sidelines with quarterback Shaun King while waiting for the officials to put the ball in play.

"I was thinking this is a long TV timeout," Dungy said.

What he didn't realize was that the referee Bill Carollo was in the process of reversing Bert Emanuel's diving 12-yard catch that put the Bucs in a third-and-11 situation on the St. Louis Rams' 23.

Dungy couldn't believe the catch was overturned and the Bucs were marched back to the Rams' 35 in a third-and-23 situation.

Suddenly, what shaped up as an exciting finish turned into an anticlimactic one. Instead of having two shots to get 11 yards and a first down and then possibly having four shots at the end zone in the final 47 seconds, the Bucs needed 23 yards for a first down. King threw two incomplete desperation passes and the game was over.

That reversal was the end of a rocky first year for the return of instant replay.

The league still maintains the of-

Last year, it (replay) passed 28-3...It only takes eight negative votes to kill replay, and it may be closer this time.

ficial was right in overturning the call, but the competition committee has come up with a new interpretation and determined the same play will now be a legal catch.

In the new interpretation, a catch is legal if a player maintains control after the ball touches the ground. Dungy argues that was always a catch if a player had control when his knees hit the ground and said the rule book backs him up.

"You can change the rule or write a clarification or officiate the rule the way it's written," Dungy said.

In effect, the league is conceding the referee made a mistake without admitting he did.

The league is trying to defuse the controversy in an attempt to get save replay for another year at the annual owners' meeting in Palm Beach, Fla., this week.

Last year, it passed 28-3, with the Cincinnati Bengals, Arizona Cardinals and New York Jets opposing. It takes only eight negative votes to kill replay, and it may be closer this time.

The competition committee recommended by a 6-1 vote, but that's misleading because Arizona General Manager Bob Ferguson voted for it, even though his owner, Bill Bidwill, has opposed replay.

Surprisingly enough, Dungy, who was fined \$10,000 for complaining about another replay call earlier in the season, favors continuing replay even though he's philosophically against it.

He believes that because the league spent about \$10 million implementing replay, it should try it another year instead of scrapping it.

The biggest argument for replay may be that under the current system, it's not used very often. Of the 248 regular-season games, only 95 had at least one challenge, and only 43 more than one. Only 57 calls were overturned.

The main problem with replay is that it sometimes creates controversy instead of settling it.

Regardless of whether replay survives this week, the debate about whether it's a plus for the league will probably continue.