

Tar Heels, Wolverines ready to tangle for championship

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — It's the pin-stripe suits against the warmups, IBM versus L.L. Cool J, the star program meeting the program of stars.

All these matchups will be under one roof — one very big dome — Monday night when North Carolina and Michigan meet for the national championship. It should be a great game played by two groups of players as different on every level as can be, except talent.

Sunday's Final Four news conferences were perfect examples.

North Carolina went first and coach Dean Smith went beyond the rules and brought eight players with him instead of the requested five starters.

"We have eight starters, but the rules say three have to be on the bench," Smith said. That was about it for laughs as Smith and the players tended to business, always talking the team line and straying from the form answers.

Then came Michigan.

Coach Steve Fisher started the 45-minute mass interview alone because the five sophomore starters arrived late.

As Fisher was answering his third

question, the five sophomores walked into the large ballroom yelling hello and waving to their coach. The rest of the interview was as relaxed as a team has been on the eve of the NCAA title game since Duke in 1986.

The topics ranged from Fisher's personality away from the court to shaved heads to imaginary conversations. The laughs were plenty and the answers off the cuff.

"Coach Fisher said he would shave his head if we win the national championship," Chris Webber said, drawing a quick spin of the coach's head.

"Yeah, right," Jalen Rose chipped in sarcastically. "He's already bald."

The style difference is shown before the game as well when Michigan arrives with plain dark blue warmup shirts while the Tar Heels start to get ready wearing an entire uniform set designed by Alexander Julian.

Even off the court, Michigan players are always seen in baggy warmup suits or T-shirts, but North Carolina players have the tie knot pulled tight and the top button buttoned.

"I think I'll get in trouble for anything I say about this, you know, the squeaky clean against the bad guys, if you want to call it that," North Carolina's Eric Montross said after the mass interview. "... At Carolina, a lot of people have thought that we've always done just the right thing at the right time, and we're perfect and we do everything just right. I think that coach Smith is just that type of person that he doesn't settle for anything but the image that he has.

"He always makes us shave. We're always clean-shaven. We're always dressed in a suit and tie wherever we go, whether it's going to the airport, on a bus, going out to eat. I think it's just an image that he has because he's a very classy person.

"And not that Michigan isn't — I'm not saying that at all. I think it's just different personalities that a team has and different things they allow them to do."

Michigan was granted a national image as they grew up in front of our eyes. Five kids just out of high school went all the way to the championship game, losing 71-51 as Duke repeated. The love affair

turned sour quickly as the trash-talking became a negative and the playground look a detriment.

Fisher always maintained the characterizations were unfair.

"This is the smartest group of kids I have ever been associated with as a coach," he said. "It's also the most talented."

This game is loaded with talent on both sides, and we've seen it before. Michigan beat North Carolina 79-78 in Hawaii in late December on a last-second rebound basket by Rose.

Webber had 27 points, eight rebounds and five blocked shots in that game, three of the rejections against Montross.

"Blocking shots is going to happen," Montross said. "He got me. I got him. It's playing well as a team, not individual matchups, that counts."

Webber-Montross should be the best of some great defensive assignments.

"We'll have all of our big men on Montross at some time," Fisher said. "We have been playing good defense all season. We're feeling pretty good about ourselves right now."

**What do you use when it's
2 hours 'til your interview and 2 years
since you tried on your suit?**



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