

# Blue Devils take ACC title

By David Droschak  
The Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — No. 2 Duke hasn't dominated the ACC the past five seasons by backing down from a challenge. The Blue Devils were determined not to give ground against their biggest rival Sunday.

Duke (26-4, 13-3), playing at a breakneck offensive pace without their top inside threat, made Atlantic Coast Conference history by winning or tying for their fifth straight regular-season title with a 95-81 victory over No. 4 North Carolina.

"This is the result of coming to work every single day with the dedication needed to be a champion," said Duke's Shane Battier, who was spectacular in his final regular-season ACC game. "Not once, but five times. That will be something to look back on."

Duke lost by two points to the Tar Heels (23-5, 13-3) in Durham a month ago, missing 14 of 27 free throws, but remained alive for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament with a dominating offensive show in the Smith Center.

"We're Duke, this is a championship program," freshman Chris Duhon said. "We're not going to lay down and lose for anybody. We just came together as a team and showed why we are still pretty good."

"We came into this game not worrying about Xs and Os," added Duhon, who scored 15 points and had four assists in his first career start. "This game was more about heart and desire and a will to win. We knew we were outsized, we knew we were going against the world, but we had a bigger heart, a bigger will to come out and quiet all the critics."

Duke's two stars were the heroes in the Tobacco Road rematch as the Blue Devils were 14-for-38 from 3-point range without center Carlos Boozer, who watched from

the bench with a broken bone in his right foot.

Jason Williams scored 33 points and Battier added 25 points, 11 rebounds and five blocks as Duke won its third straight in Chapel Hill for the first time since the early 1960s.

Many counted the Blue Devils out of this one as soon as Boozer went down in Tuesday's loss to Maryland. Everyone but Duke.

"Nobody expected us to win," Battier said. "Everybody was ready to party on Franklin Street. I think they've got the kegs lined up, but we wanted to compete and play hard and we knew if we did that we would have a good shot at winning this game."

ACC scoring leader Joseph Forte led the Tar Heels with 21 points.

"The way they played broke our rhythm," UNC coach Matt Doherty said. "I don't think we were real sharp handling the basketball. You've got to give them a lot of credit because they came into a tough situation being a man down."

Williams came into the game shooting 36 percent against the Tar Heels in his career, but the point guard was money in this one, going 7-for-13 from 3-point range while Battier was 4-for-10.

The 38 3-point attempts tied a school record set earlier this season against North Carolina A&T.

"Growing up and playing on the playground that's the way you play all day in the summer," Battier said of Duke's racehorse style that wore out the taller Tar Heels. "To come to Duke and be able to play like that it's like a dream come true."

Duke led by two at halftime, but gradually pulled away midway through the second half. The Blue Devils went up 72-57 with 11:55 left on a layup by Mike Dunleavy, who along with the rest of his teammates looked twice as quick

as the Tar Heels, who were repeatedly beaten down the floor.

Doherty tried to fire his team up by getting a technical two minutes later, but his team could only pull within 10 as he was forced to bench big men Brendan Haywood and Kris Lang for much of the second half to try to match up with Duke.

"We made them think about us instead of focusing on them," Battier said.

The Tar Heels were shooting for their first outright ACC regular-season title in eight seasons, but the Smith Center crowd instead exited early on Senior Day as Duke improved to 19-0 this season when scoring 90 or more points.

"They took something away from us — definitely," North Carolina's Jason Capel said.

The victory also gave Duke an ACC-record 124 wins over a four-year period, breaking the mark of the Duke teams from 1989-92.

North Carolina failed to take advantage of the absence of Boozer on the inside as Haywood had two shots blocked by Casey Sanders early and wasn't much of a factor in the opening 20 minutes. Sanders ended up fouling out in only 11 minutes, but Duke really didn't need his inside game.

Part of the problem for the Tar Heels was Duke's trapping zone defense, which confused North Carolina and bogged down its offense until late in the half.

Meanwhile, Duke, which averaged 27.4 3-point attempts over the last seven games, took 22 from beyond the arc in the first half, getting two over the final 1:20 from Williams to forge to take the two-point lead at halftime.

Williams and Battier had 32 of Duke's 42 first-half points, taking over on the offensive end with Boozer watching from the bench on crutches.

must have been killing them.

The loss to UCLA put the Ducks in a unique situation. Had they beat the Bruins but lost to Arizona, ASU or Oregon State, they'd probably be tournament-bound. But UCLA is awful this season. Losing at Pauley Pavilion, even if Oregon wins out, could be the nail in the coffin.

Even though Oregon's tournament hopes were slim-to-none after losing at UCLA, the Ducks still had hope. More importantly, they knew that one more loss would end those hopes.

And with their backs against the biggest wall one could imagine, the Ducks put their collective foot down. No more losing. Not this season.

They won't, either. They'll beat the Beavers in another physical Civil War, and their postseason will still hang in the balance.

It would be unfortunate for this team to not get into the Big Dance. Oregon is on a tear that's been unmatched this season. Under Runge, the Ducks have never made it past the second round of the NCAAs. Dare it be said? With the way the Ducks are rolling now, a Sweet 16 wouldn't be out of the question.

But any NCAA action is too uncertain to predict. Runge knows it, the Ducks know it.

What Oregon also knows is that it can end its season on a winning note. The seniors know they can

be remembered as the team that should've made it, rather than the team that almost made it.

Just one more game.

Mac Court won't get another banner to show for this season, but the Mac Court faithful will always remember watching their champions.

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## Pez Sez

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the lead.

One would have a hard time arguing that postseason play is what's inspired the Ducks. Even if they beat Oregon State this Saturday — which they should — they're still a long-shot to make the NCAA tourney. Head coach Jody Runge has publicly spurned the WNIT, and some players share their coach's opinion.

Meaning that even if the WNIT relocated its final four to The Pit, Oregon still might not take its invitation.

So there's got to be something else that's powering this team.

Really, it all comes down to one word.

Pride.

Anyone who's ever talked hoops with any of the Ducks' five seniors knows that team has pride, and lots of it.

Anyone who's ever seen the two championship banners hanging in the rafters of Mac Court must gain some understanding of what's expected from these players, right from the moment they don an Oregon jersey for the first time.

Senior forward Lindsey Dion said it best earlier this season: "We don't lose at the University of Oregon." That said, all that losing

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